Educators' perceptions of conflict at three Northern Area Schools in Port Elizabeth: A Case Study

Gerard Cain

2012
Educators' perceptions of conflict at three Northern Area Schools in Port Elizabeth: A Case Study

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Education to be awarded at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University

December 2012

Promoter/Supervisor: Dr André du Plessis
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December 2012
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Educators' perceptions of conflict at three Northern Area Schools in Port Elizabeth: A Case Study

SIGNED AT PORT ELIZABETH ON THIS 1st DAY OF DECEMBER 2012
ABSTRACT

The researcher, who is also an educator, a School Management Team member and a union official, observed that conflict among educators at schools was a cause of concern. This situation prompted the researcher to explore how school leaders and educators perceived conflict among educators at school in order to determine the perceived possible causes of conflict, the perceived possible consequences of conflict, how conflict was currently dealt with and the perceptions regarding appropriate measures to address the handling of conflict.

The research was underpinned by the interpretive paradigm and followed a case study approach that involved three primary schools residing in close proximity to one another in the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth, South Africa. Data was collected from educators and school leaders ranging from Post Level One educators to principals and covering educators from the Foundation Phase, Intermediate Phase and Senior Phase. Data was gathered by making use of an open-ended questionnaire, semi-structured personal interviews and semi-structured focus group interviews.

The findings revealed that the research participants mostly viewed conflict negatively and associated it (conflict) with disagreements, misunderstandings, verbal and non-verbal fighting, and diverse views or opinions. The possible causes as identified by the participants were categorised into data-based conflict, relationship conflict, structural conflict, interest-based conflict and needs-based conflict. Data-based conflict related to issues concerned with communication, a lack of transparency and consultation, and the spreading of gossip and untruths. Relationship conflict pertained to favouritism, not valuing the opinions of others, and a lack of respect or tolerance. Structural conflict, as highlighted by the participants, were linked to issues of management and leadership, workload allocations and time tabling, punctuality and time issues and the role and responsibilities of employees. Value-based conflict was ascribed to different beliefs and viewpoints of people and differences in valuing guidance from others. Interest-based conflict was closely connected to appointments and limited possibilities around promotion posts as well as to issues with resources. Needs-based conflict focused on individuals’ self-esteem needs and people’s need for power and (or) status.

Conflict was also perceived as having both positive and negative consequences. Positive aspects related to improved relationships, better understanding, change and improved attitudes and the development of personal growth. Negative aspects of conflict were
associated with the manifestation of defiant attitudes and intolerance, poor cooperation, the formation of groups and cliques, poor morale and work ethic, poor health and stress, absenteeism and negative effects on teaching and the learners. Regarding the handling of conflict, the findings highlighted the perception that conflict is mostly avoided and (or) inadequately handled and when it was dealt with, it was done unprofessionally and inappropriately.

The findings also pertained to suggestions in dealing with conflict in an appropriate manner. Here, the following important practical ways or aspects of handling conflict were suggested, namely ensuring that aggrieved parties were provided with opportunities to raise their issues, listening with serious intent, applying confidentiality and professionalism, openness and transparency, provision of fair hearings and treatment, the utilisation of policies and procedures, the value of conflict management training and the inclusion of external intervention in resolving conflict. Various outcomes were suggested by the findings. These were linked to striving towards a win-win situation, respect and understanding for all, compromise and agreement and satisfying all parties with agreements reached. The promotion of third party intervention was emphasised, with participants highlighting the characteristics that these third parties had to reflect and the procedures which they had to follow when attempting to resolve conflicts.

Recommendations are also provided. In terms of these recommendations drafted, this study concludes that the recommendations can be grouped related to professional development opportunities and policies and procedures.

Finally, in exploring educators’ perceptions of conflict in three Northern Areas primary schools in Port Elizabeth, the researcher gained valuable insights into conflict among educators at schools, which could benefit educators (teachers, SMT’s and principals) and education in general.

Keywords: Conflict, Consequences, Dysfunctional, Educators, Functional, Intervention, Perceptions, Outcomes, School leaders, Strategies, Suggestions, Third parties
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to the Almighty Father, for granting me the grace to achieve this milestone in my life.

My deepest thanks and appreciation go to my wife, Rashida, who encouraged me to embark on this course and supported me unfailingly in my quest to reach success.

My heartfelt gratitude is extended to my daughter, Roxaan, and son, Mikhael, who assisted me greatly and who patiently accepted the many hours that I could not spend with them.

Sincere thanks and appreciation to Dr A du Plessis, for all the advice, guidance, motivation and support in ensuring that I could achieve success. It has been a remarkable journey with a dedicated supervisor.

This study would not have been possible had it not been for the generosity of the Ford Foundation International Fellowships Programme that on behalf of the Africa-America Institute, ensured that I could complete this project.

Thanks also to my colleagues at school and to the School Governing Body for granting me special consideration during the period of my studies.

Lastly, thanks to all other colleagues, friends and family, whose deeds and words kept me inspired throughout this time.
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my late father, Wallace Raymond Cain, and late mother, Gladys Eileen Cain, who instilled in me the values and principles upon which I strive to lead my life.
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<td>DoBE</td>
<td>Department of Basic Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOD</td>
<td>Head of Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SADTU</td>
<td>South African Democratic Teachers’ Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>SGB</td>
<td>School Governing Body</td>
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Conflict in society cannot be avoided and impacts hugely on all societal levels and life, whether at home, in communities, institutions and countries (Haraway & Haraway, 2005:11). Conflict can arise between persons, parties and nations; it can be underlying or overt, explosive or mild (Roth, 2007:300). Roth further indicates that conflict can occur between friends and strangers and can even take place knowingly or unknowingly. In addition, Hendel, Fish and Galon (2005:137) postulate that conflict is an integral part of humanity, while Kohlrieser (2006:101) states that conflict plays an innate role in the lives of all human beings and that it cannot be averted.

The above sentiments are supported by Ahuja (2006:58) and Cowan (2003:25), who contend that it is difficult to separate conflict from human nature and that people simply have to live with it. Bearing these views in mind, it seems apparent that “the potential for conflict exists in every organization” (Ikeda, Veludo-de-Oliveira & Campomar, 2005:22). By implication, all educational institutions will also be affected by conflict “because the very nature of education and schooling generates conflict” (Ngcobo, 2003:187). The reality of dealing with conflict has to be confronted as:

“Conflict has to be dealt with. One cannot avoid it by running away from it, ignoring, or denying it. One cannot even make quick apologies to pre-empt it. However, these actions do not resolve conflict successfully, nor does accepting conflict without doing anything about it.”

(Du Plessis, Eloff & Bouwer, 2002:225)

The perception that individuals have of conflict largely determines how they deal with it. People’s perceptions of conflict differ; some believe that conflict is beneficial, while others view it as harmful (Stanley & Algert, 2007:49). According to Samantara (2004:298), “Conflict is usually viewed as a negative phenomenon within organizations and is often sought to be avoided or eliminated”. Another view is that conflict could have positive and beneficial influences (Guttman, 2009:33; Rahim, 2011:7), especially when linked to how conflict is managed (Okotoni & Okotoni, 2003:28). Steyn and Van Niekerk (2002:69), who support
these contentions, indicate that the features of the settlement reached (of the conflict), will establish whether the conflict has beneficial or detrimental outcomes.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The researcher has been teaching since 1987. Through years of experience as a branch official of the South African Democratic Teachers’ Union (SADTU), he has observed and addressed many instances of educator conflict at schools. Educators and principals seem to be aware that conflict is a phenomenon that cannot be ‘wished’ away. However, in many of those cases, the conflict could have been avoided or resolved in an amicable manner if educators, including principals, deputy principals, Heads of Departments (HODs) and School Management Teams (SMTs), were more aware of the perceived causes or sources of conflict and if they were aware of the factors to be taken into consideration when dealing with conflict. There seemed to be a need to determine to what extent educators and school leaders are aware of the perceived causes of conflict, the perceived consequences and the possible ways of dealing with conflict among educators. This knowledge and awareness could potentially enable educators and principals to become more ‘sensitive’ or to be sensitised about the factors that cause conflict and the perceived consequences or outcomes. In addition, it seemed that it would be useful if educators and principals reflected upon suggestions pertaining to dealing with conflict for possible implementation when dealing with conflict.

The importance of identifying the perceived causes of educator conflict at schools was substantiated by the information obtained from the then SADTU’s Regional Secretary, who is currently (2012) serving as a school principal (to be referred to in Chapter Two), which indicated a high level of educator conflict at schools and the necessity of ascertaining the perceived causes thereof. The researcher was also continually exposed to issues of educator conflict, not only at his own school, but at other schools within the branch in which he was located as a union official. All the aforementioned factors prompted the researcher to explore the issue of conflict among educators at schools.

The problem perceived, based on personal experience, was that a high level of conflict among educators persisted at schools. This and the above, together with the researcher’s own personal interest in the well-being of educators, led the researcher to question the possible perceived reasons behind the undue levels of conflict, which culminated in the following topic: Educators’ perceptions of conflict at three Northern Area Schools in Port Elizabeth: A case study. In order to be able to understand educator conflict, it was deemed necessary to ascertain not only how educators perceive conflict, but also the perceived
causes and sources of conflict, the perceived outcomes, and what suggestions educators propose to deal with conflict amicably. As a result of the above, research questions emerged, as indicated in the following section.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given the background and problem statement, the researcher was prompted to ask the following: How do educators (referring to the principals, deputy principals, HODs, SMTs and Post Level One teachers) at three Northern Area Schools in Port Elizabeth perceive conflict in schools among themselves, understand its perceived causes and perceived consequences, and what suggestions do they have for dealing with conflict in an appropriate (apposite) manner? These questions formed the basis of this study. From the above-stated main question, the following secondary research questions emerged:

- What are the educators' impressions of conflict?
- What are the perceived causes or sources of conflict among educators at their schools?
- What are the perceived consequences or results of conflict among educators at their schools?
- Who is currently responsible for dealing with conflict among educators at their schools, and how is it being handled?
- What suggestions and outcomes do educators propose in order to deal with conflict in an appropriate manner at their schools?

1.4 AIMS OF STUDY

The primary objective of the research was to explore conflict as perceived through the eyes of educators and school leaders in three Northern Area Primary Schools in Port Elizabeth (South Africa) in order to ascertain the perceived causes of conflict, the perceived consequences of conflict, the handling of conflict and the perceptions regarding what could be done – referring to suggestions – to address the handling of or dealing with conflict. The aims of this study were therefore as follows:

- To determine the impressions of conflict amongst educators [principals, deputy principals, HODs, SMTs and teachers];
- To explore the perceived causes or sources of conflict affecting educators;
• To ascertain the perceived consequences of conflict;
• To determine who is responsible for dealing with conflict at school and how it is being dealt with; and
• To ascertain what educators suggest can be done to address the handling or dealing with educator conflict in an appropriate manner.

1.5 RELEVANCE OF STUDY

This study is particularly relevant, since conflict is part of people’s lives wherever they may find themselves (Kohlrieser, 2006:101; Lang, 2009:240) and conflict will remain a feature of organisational life (Haraway & Haraway, 2005:11). In the South African context, the South African educational system had been vastly overhauled which, according to Calitz (2002:16), “calls for different mindset and set of leadership skills”. If educators, including principal(s), deputy principals, HODs, SMTs and Post Level One teachers, were aware of the perceived causes and sources of conflict, they might be more sensitised to the issue.

In addition, it is important to ascertain whether educators experience conflict as functional or dysfunctional; therefore their perceptions related to the possible consequences of conflict could render a clearer picture of conflict from their perspective. Deutsch (1969:10), Rahim (2011:7) and Tillet and French (2006:16) argue that the possible dysfunctional consequences of conflict could have negative consequences on organisations and that it is therefore important to find effective ways of addressing conflict (Cowan, 2003:25). At the same time, it is important to note that conflict could serve a functional role or purpose (Mullins, 1999:818; Cowan, 2003:44; Rahim, 2011:6). Therefore, the perceived dysfunctional and functional consequences of conflict that could negatively affect organisations, including schools as educational institutions in particular, were strong motivators for conducting this study. The above also implies that staff needs to be enabled to resolve conflict and that there is a need for conflict management skills (Lang, 2009:240).

Since conflict is an integral feature of the school environment (Van der Merwe, 2003:26), all educators, not only school leaders, need to be made aware of ways of dealing with conflict at their schools, provide input and propose suggestions for dealing with conflict in appropriate ways.

A search of various online databases revealed that studies regarding conflict had been undertaken by researchers such as Sipamla (2001), Ngewana (2002), Snodgrass (2005) and Bradshaw (2008), but not related to perceived conflict from educators’ perspectives within
the Eastern Cape, especially the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth. Hence, this study could potentially contribute to existing research regarding conflict, since the researcher is of the opinion that educators, school leaders and District officials within the Port Elizabeth District Office could benefit from the findings and recommendations of this study through greater awareness of the perceptions related to conflict. In addition, this information could be filtered through to provincial education officials, who could also benefit from the findings and recommendations of this study, as they could ascertain whether the findings could be relevant within other schools within different or similar contexts.

1.6 PERSPECTIVES ON CONFLICT AS FRAMEWORK

With regard to this study, the following broad overview on perspectives of conflict is presented: The term conflict is not easily defined, as there seems to be a plethora of definitions. In terms of one definition, conflict arises when various individuals or groups end up in confrontation with one another due to an inability to come to terms with their goals (Van der Merwe, 2003:26) or when one party claims that its objectives are being hindered by another party (West, Tjosvold & Smith, 2005:2). In another definition, conflict is explained as being held in the mindset of individuals, who may be aware or even unaware thereof (Roth, 2007:300).

Similar to the various definitions of the concept ‘conflict’, various ways of classifying the causes or sources of conflict exist (Van Tonder, Havenga & Visagie, 2008:376). These causes will be presented in Chapter Two. However, for the purpose of this study, the classification of causes or bases of conflict by Bradshaw (2008:18) and Moore (2003:64) was preferred. These bases or causes of conflict relate to value-based conflict, interest-based conflict, needs-based conflict, data-based conflict, structural conflict and relationship conflict, which will be unpacked in Chapter Two.

There are also a vast number of theories pertaining to conflict, such as Freud’s Psychodynamic Theory, the Attribution Theory, the Uncertainty Theory, the Social Exchange Theory, the Systems Theory and the Structural Theory (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000:124-137; Abigail & Cahn, 2011:211-223). These theories will be elaborated upon in Chapter Two.

Conflict generally has negative connotations (Abigail & Cahn, 2011:13), although it holds potential for both positive and negative consequences for organisations (Okotoni & Okotoni, 2003:28). Consequently, the functional (Mullins, 1999:818; Cowan, 2003:44; Rahim, 2011:6) and dysfunctional (Deutsch, 1969:10; Zide, 2005:52; Tillet & French, 2006:16; Rahim, 2011:7) perceived outcomes of conflict were explored.
Numerous management styles or choices are available in dealing with conflict, making it difficult to select the most appropriate approach. Squelch and Lemmer (1994:151) suggest that school leaders first examine conflict scenarios thoroughly before responding. The two-dimensional taxonomy of Thomas and Kilmann, as postulated by Thomas (1976:900), proposes that avoiding, dominating, problem-solving, accommodating and compromising, are conflict handling modes.

In terms of conflict management outcomes, Carpenter and Kennedy (2001:18-25) are of the opinion that basic approaches, such as simply confronting conflict head-on, attempting instant solutions or evading conflict, are not appropriate. It seems that a win-win approach or win-win outcome is desirable in settling conflict issues among parties (Moore, 2003:107; Hitt, Miller & Colella, 2006:447). The other approaches or outcomes that are discussed, are the win-lose or lose-win approach, lose-lose approach and the lose-part, win-part approach (Schermherhorn, Hunt & Osborn 2000:383; Hitt et al., 2006:447).

Various suggestions for dealing with conflict are also explored. Some of these pertain to listening with a serious intent and reflecting adequately before responding (Purkey, Schmidt & Novak, 2010:111) and looking deeper for the unseen needs of individuals or groups (Wood, Chapman, Fromholtz, Morrison, Wallace, Zeffane, Schermherhorn, Hunt & Osborn, 2004:605). Other aspects considered, include listening for effective communication (Fisher & Ury, 1992:33-35), the emotions of parties (Moore, 2003:167); and cultural differences (Cowan, 2003:77). Further, the “Seven Elements of Negotiation”, as outlined by Patton (2005:279-285), are discussed in detail, together with the “Collaborative Conflict Resolution” strategy (Landau, Landau & Landau, 2001:41-64), the “Eight Steps to Team Mediation” (Dana, 2001:94-107) and “A Procedure for Managing Conflicts” (Folger, Poole & Stutman, 2009:241-244).

A section pertaining to establishing conditions to assist in managing conflict is also provided. This relates to the importance of policies to be in place in addressing conflict (Van Deventer, 2003:91-92) and the value of empowering educators and school leaders in handling conflict (Ngcobo, 2003:187).

Obtaining intervention by third parties in resolving conflict is another option that could be followed by parties in conflict (Lewicki, Weiss & Lewin, 1992:230). Here, the characteristics of third parties are explored (Erickson & Mc Knight, 2001:144-145), as well as issues relating to neutrality or impartiality (Bradshaw, 2008:90) and fairness (Carpenter & Kennedy, 2001:204). Third party strategies, such as mediation (Doherty & Guyler, 2008: 12), arbitration (Kriesberg, 2007:228), facilitation (Cheldelin & Lucas, 2004:21) and conciliation (Fox,
are also presented in dealing with conflict resolution. All these above aspects will be dealt with in detail in Chapter Two.

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to embark on the research journey, one has to have a clear plan of action. It is therefore important to have a research plan to guide the research (Springer, 2010:176). This research plan includes the “research questions”, “aims and objectives”, the research “paradigm, methodologies, approaches and methods”, “data gathering” and “data analysis”, as well as considerations regarding “research ethics” and “trustworthiness” (Basit, 2010:36). In the following sub-sections, the research design will be presented.

1.7.1 Interpretive paradigm

The interpretivist paradigm holds the view that reality is “socially constructed” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:184); therefore, there is not one objective reality, but multiple subjective realities (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004:14). The focus of the interpretivist paradigm is on understanding the world of the participants by capturing it (their views) in their own words (Henn, Weinstein & Foard, 2006:14).

The interpretive paradigm was deemed most appropriate for this research, because the researcher’s aim was to obtain a deeper understanding of how the research participants perceived the phenomenon of educator conflict at their schools (Henn et al., 2006:14). Also, the researcher’s interpretation of the research participants’ perspectives was pivotal in gaining the desired understanding of their (the participants’) views of conflict. Further, an interpretive paradigm was best suited for data collection that utilised qualitative procedures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:25; Mertens, 2005:9), as qualitative data seems to provide participants with an opportunity to voice their inner perspectives, perceptions and experiences or, as Patton (2002:240) states, an opportunity “to gather their stories”. Hence it seemed that conducting this research through an interpretive paradigm would be the best option.

1.7.2 Qualitative approach

Given the link with the interpretive nature of this study, a qualitative approach was considered to be suited to this project. This appeared in line with the view that “qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2009:4), which in this instance is the problem of conflict among educators. A qualitative approach was also considered to be most
appropriate, as the research was dependent on gathering “rich, thick descriptions” (Merriam, 2009:16), which could assist the researcher in exploring and interpreting the participants’ experiences of conflict at their schools (Merriam, 2009:14).

1.7.3 Case study in three multiple schools

According to Springer (2010:406), the case could be an individual or a group, an organisation, a community and event, process or even an issue within a “bounded system”. He adds that information gathering within case studies are intensive and focused and uses multiple data gathering sources (Springer, 2010:406). Case studies can be used to explore a phenomenon or, as Yin (2009:18) states, they provide the researcher with an opportunity to investigate a phenomenon “within its real-life context” (Yin, 2009:18). At the same time, much criticism has been voiced against case studies, such as that they do not allow for generalisation (Yin, 2009:14-16). However, the purpose of this study was not to generalise, but to portray a picture of the research findings related to the three Northern Areas primary schools bounded within the same context and in close proximity to one another – three schools that formed one case. Thus, the researcher believed that the best way to study the phenomenon of educator conflict at these three multiple schools would be through a case study, since these schools appeared to have many similarities regarding their staffing and structure. Although three schools within the same proximity formed the sample, this case study was not comparative in nature, as the perceptions of the participants from the three participating schools – multiple schools - were viewed as one case. The researcher included principals, deputy principals, HODs, SMTs and Post Level One teachers at these schools since the researcher regarded all of these role-players as educators collectively, who all played a part in the conflict phenomenon, and who could provide a wider perspective of conflict at their schools, thus not limiting the perceptions to one specific group. The focus was thus on conflict, being the case or issue in these three multiple schools that was viewed as one case. This flowed from the researcher’s concern for and interest in the well-being of educators. The researcher believed that the best approach to understanding the conflict phenomenon was by means of a case study, as he wanted to explore perceptions and understanding of conflict as an issue or problem using three schools forming one case. In a case study approach, specific issues within a particular context are dealt with (Struwig & Stead, 2001:8; Thomas, 2009:115). This was the case in this study, where the researcher was particularly interested in exploring the perceptions of educators at three specific schools in the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth.

Further, this case study was intrinsic in nature (Yin, 2009:47), since the researcher had an intrinsic interest in how educators at these schools perceived conflict and in finding ways of
dealing with the management of conflict in amicable ways at these and other schools. In addition, this case study was exploratory (Yin, 1994:4-6) in nature, because although the researcher had found a wide scope of research pertaining to conflict, he limited research regarding conflict among educators to schools in the Eastern Cape, and in the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth in particular. The researcher hopes to undertake more research in this field of educator conflict, which will hopefully benefit educators in particular and schools in general.

1.8 RESEARCH METHOD

In the previous section, the research design was presented. In this section, the method will be presented.

1.8.1 Research context

The research site was located in the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth, in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. This area is predominantly populated by so-called “Coloured” people, due to the fact that past Apartheid legislation enforced separate residential areas for the different race groups, hence the schools being mainly staffed by “Coloured” educators and attended by “Coloured” learners. The reason for the selection of this setting was that the researcher had been teaching in this area for the previous twenty-three years and was well acquainted with the schools and the educators of this region. The researcher also believed that the educators of these schools would be able to provide invaluable information about the conflict phenomenon.

In addition, the researcher considered contextual factors that influence how researchers interact with research participants, namely “the nature of the institutions within which research is carried out; the nature of the people with whom the research is carried out; and the socio-political contexts within which the research is carried out” (Bush, 2002:76). These unique circumstances and contextual background of the research participants’ teaching environment could influence their (the participants’) perceptions of conflict at their schools. Further, the researcher believes that the research was not restricted by any limitations placed on participants by their respective institutional managements, by the participants’ perceptions of the researcher, by laws and policies or by undue pressure from the “gatekeepers” of the research sites (Bush, 2002:76-77). Therefore, this study focused on this group of the population in this particular context (Marshall & Rossman, 1999:68-69).
1.8.2 Population and sample: Recruitment of participants

The researcher selected a “subset” of the population (Basit, 2010:49), since it was not possible for the researcher to conduct research with the whole group of the population (Basit, 2010:49). This subset is a sample of “those individuals who actually participate in the study” (Springer, 2010:100). Due to the researcher regarding the principals, deputy principals, HODs, SMTs and Post Level One teachers as educators collectively (as indicated above), the population of this study was composed of educators and school leaders of three primary schools in the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth.

Since the researcher was of the opinion that these particular research participants would be able to provide the required data for the study (Denscombe, 2003:15; 2010:35), a combination of convenience and purposive sampling was employed. Convenience sampling was used, because the researcher was stationed at one of the participatory schools, while the other two schools were in the nearby vicinity, which made it easier to engage with the research participants at these schools (Hartas, 2010:69).

In attempting to achieve a broad scope of educator perceptions of conflict, the researcher involved principals, deputy principals, HODs, SMTs and Post Level One educators in the study. The participating staff complement represented both male and female educators from the Foundation Phase, Intermediate Phase and Senior Phase. In total, School 1 had 24 educators; School 2 had 18 educators; and School 3 had 17 educators. The term educators include principals, deputy principals, HODs, SMTs and Post Level One teachers. In the ‘Data Collection Process Section’, the number of participants that participated in the semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews and who completed the open-ended questionnaire will be indicated.

1.8.3 Qualitative data gathering tools

Data was gathered through an open-ended questionnaire, semi-structured personal interviews and semi-structured focus group interviews.

The open-ended questionnaire was designed to ensure that the research participants could optimally complete the questionnaire on their own (Blaikie, 2010:205) and that the participants would be able to freely declare their personal responses (Basit, 2010:84) to the various aspects of conflict raised in the study. This questionnaire therefore enabled the researcher to obtain a deeper significant understanding of the participants’ perceptions of conflict (Denscombe, 2007:134-135) and to confirm findings gathered through the other data gathering tools utilised (Basit, 2010:67).
With regard to the interviews, the researcher determined that semi-structured interviews would be best suited to gather data through the interviewing method (Gillham, 2000:65). Semi-structured open-ended interviews allowed the researcher to obtain data in which the participants described their perceptions of conflict as they personally experienced it, thereby ensuring that the researcher would achieve a clearer understanding thereof (the participants’ experience of conflict) (Hatch, 2002:91; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007:103). These semi-structured open-ended personal interviews provided the participants with opportunities to share as much information about the topic as possible (Silverman, 2010:194). Also, researchers’ physical closeness when engaging with the participants stimulated them (the participants) to present more insightful answers during the interviews (Babbie, 2005:314; Gray, Williamson, Karp & Dalphin, 2007:43). In addition, it also allowed for the further probing of responses when the researcher wanted more clarity (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007:104-105; Merriam, 2009:100-101; Thomas, 2011:163).

Apart from the personal open-ended interviews, use was also made of focus group interviews. The researcher was of the opinion that focus group interviews would save time, since single focus group interview sessions ensured that a group of participants could be interviewed at once (Lichtman, 2010:154). Another reason why focus groups were used, is that the participants are generally more inclined to respond to the issues presented, although it could also be a restrictive factor for some participants (Thomas, 2009:169). However, focus group interviews offer the potential to generate information that would otherwise not have been revealed by participants in different settings, hence this could be useful to enhance the “validity or credibility of the data” (Hartas, 2010:234).

1.8.4 Data collection process

Data collection procedures included semi-structured personal interviews, an open-ended questionnaire, and semi-structured focus group interviews. The researcher collected data in two phases. Phase one comprised a pilot phase, during which the open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were piloted. Adjustments were then made to the data gathering tools.

Phase two entailed the formal data collection phase. Data were collected by means of an open-ended questionnaire, individual semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. The open-ended questionnaire was completed by 43 participants; semi-structured interviews were conducted with 4 participants; and 4 focus group interviews - consisting of 3 participants each - were conducted. This process will be expounded upon in Chapter Three.
1.8.5 Researcher's role

The researcher collected data from the participants, which were subsequently analysed and interpreted in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of their perceptions of conflict (Lichtman, 2010:16). Appropriate ethical codes were applied as far as possible during this research project (Mertens, 2005:33). The required approval to enable engagement with the research participants was secured from the relevant role-players (Creswell, 2009:177). Also, the researcher took steps to ensure that a sound level of trustworthiness was maintained throughout the research process (Gibson & Brown, 2009:59). This aspect will be elaborated upon in Chapter Three.

1.8.6 Ethical considerations

The researcher endeavoured to maintain appropriate ethical principles throughout the various stages of this study (Mouton, 2001:238-245). Approval to conduct the research was obtained from the University’s Ethics Committee, as well as from Provincial and District Education officials. Informed consent was also obtained from principals, who ensured entry to the educational institutions and access to the participants (Creswell, 1994:148). The research participants were assured of aspects of confidentiality (Silverman, 2010:155) and anonymity (Christians, 2011:66), and informed consent was also obtained from the participants.

1.8.7 Data analysis and interpretation

Within a qualitative approach, data analysis and interpretation are mostly done simultaneously (Basit, 2010:200). In analysing the data, emphasis was placed on “a heightened awareness of the data” (De Vos, 2002:344), which implies having to read thoroughly through the data to achieve optimal clarity, while “interpretation involves making sense of the data” (De Vos, 2002:344). Data were analysed and coded according to the steps suggested by Creswell (2009:184-186). The coding was applied as the data emerged (Creswell, 2009:187); a process referred to as data-driven coding by Gibbs (2007:45). In interpreting the data, the researcher drew on his own experiences and background, as well as findings from literature (Creswell, 2009:189) in “giving meaning to the raw data” (Struwig & Stead, 2001:172). This process is elaborated upon in Chapter Three.

1.8.8 Ensuring credibility and trustworthiness

The researcher strived to ensure that the research met the requirements of “quality – criteria against which the trustworthiness of the project (could) be evaluated” (Lankshear & Knobel,
Despite the fact that some scholars expressed reservations about determining the soundness of case study research in particular (Thomas, 2011:62-63), the researcher applied measures of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability in addressing the trustworthiness of the research (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2006:504; Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh & Sorenson, 2009:498) and also tried to provide trustworthiness by answering the seven questions that Denscombe (1998:213-214, 2003:74) has provided regarding trustworthiness in Chapter Three.

Credibility relates to whether the findings amply correspond with the reality studied (Merriam, 2009:213); how believable the findings are and whether they have been accurately reported. This was achieved through triangulation (Creswell, 2009:214), member checking (Ary et al., 2006:506), critical reflection (Merriam, 2009:219), and peer review (Denscombe, 2003:274).

Transferability or applicability refers to how the findings of the research could be applied to a different situation or environment (Denscombe, 2010:301). The researcher tried to achieve transferability “through honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, and the use of triangulation” (Basit, 2010:64). In the end, Stake (1995:86) states that readers also have the ability to make generalisations by relating the findings to their contexts.

Dependability, consistency or reliability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989:242) is associated with the aspects of trustworthiness or consistency (Ary et al., 2009:509) and is linked to whether similar conclusions and results would be achieved if another researcher employed a similar research design (Denscombe, 2010:299-300). In promoting dependability, the researcher employed data triangulation, as well as strategies that provided an audit trail data of the research, hence the researcher provided an overview of the research design and the methodology (Ary et al., 2006:509-510) within this chapter and will provide a comprehensive overview in Chapter Three.

Confirmability is linked to objectivity or neutrality (Guba & Lincoln, 1989:242; Ary et al., 2009:504) and the researcher had to substantiate that the study’s findings were correctly presented and not influenced by personal bias, and that the relevant data, findings and conclusions are verified by other individuals (Ary et al., 2006:511). Again, data triangulation and an audit trail assisted with the process of confirmability (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 1990:449).
1.8.9 Delimitations

This study focused on educators’ perceptions of conflict. The researcher limited the scope of the study to how educators perceived conflict, its perceived causes or sources, the perceived consequences, who were dealing with conflict and how, and suggestions from educators as to ways in which conflict could be dealt with in a more appropriate (apposite) manner. Hence, the researcher restricted this exploration of conflict to the aforementioned aspects only. In addition, the research was limited to educators at three specific primary schools located in a specific geographical area, namely the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth, in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. This means that the study focused on this particular group of the population to determine the perceptions of conflict among educators at their own schools. The specific limitations of the research will be discussed in Chapter Three and again indicated and reflected upon in Chapter Five.

1.9 SUMMARY AND OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS TO FOLLOW

In summary, the chapters that follow are broadly outlined as follows:

Chapter Two will provide a review of the literature pertaining to the definition and perceptions of conflict, theories of conflict, causes and sources of conflict, the role and consequences of conflict, conflict management outcomes, approaches or strategies of managing conflict and aspects of third party intervention in resolving conflict.

Chapter Three will discuss the framework of the research processes, the background to the research, the research question and subsidiary questions, as well as the research objectives. The rationale for the research design, emphasising the interpretive, qualitative nature of this case study, is also discussed. In addition, data gathering and data analysis and interpretation methods are expounded on.

Chapter Four will present the findings of the data gathered and provides an interpretation thereof. The findings will also be linked to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

Chapter Five will discuss the rationale and design of the research, the summary of the main findings, and present recommendations of the findings. This chapter will also include reflections and recommendations for researchers wanting to conduct a similar study, reflections on the aims and research questions, and suggestions for further research.

In summarising this chapter, the researcher endeavoured to provide an introduction to the research topic, together with presenting the problem statement, the aims of the study, the
research questions and the relevance of the study. General perspectives covering the main aspects of the conflict phenomenon were presented and a broad outline of the research design and methodology was provided.

The next chapter will present a detailed discussion of the literature relevant to this research project.
2.1 INTRODUCTION

Conflict plays a pivotal role in the lives of all individuals and institutions and cannot be averted (Lang, 2009:240) or, as Abigail and Cahn (2011:15) state, “… the fact of the matter is that conflict is here to stay.” De Dreu and Beersma (2005:105) are of the opinion that very little is known about the impact of conflict in the workplace, contending that more research is required about the management of conflict amongst personnel in organisations. Further, in ensuring the effective functioning of organisations, which include schools, appropriate skills in managing conflict need to be provided for all personnel in averting issues leading to conflict and in dealing more effectively with conflicts arising (Ngcobo, 2003:187). In supporting these views, Schuck, Brady and Griffin (2005:45) emphasise that it is essential for all personnel at educational institutions especially, to engage with one another in ways that will enhance the working climate at their institutions. To this end, literature suggests that more research is required to better comprehend conflict and the management thereof (Tillet & French, 2006:3).

The establishment of a new post-apartheid educational system in South Africa has impacted hugely on schools, especially with regard to management and teacher perceptions pertaining to management (Ngcobo, 2003:189). Prior to the new democratic dispensation introduced in 1994, school principals exercised an authoritarian style of management: orders had to be carried out. However, principals and teachers have now been allocated new roles and responsibilities (Mc Lennan & Thurlow, 2003:5). South African employees and educators have been imbued by a progressive Constitution to fervently challenge issues pertaining to their employment and work conditions (De Wet, 2010:1450). As a result of the democratic dispensation, it not only seems that principals and staff at schools are having to deal with escalating conflict, but it also seems according to Loock, Grobler and Mestry (2006:48) that, school leaders have to take steps to ensure that conflict does not severely hamper the effective management and smooth running of their institutions.

The past decade has seen the birth of many programmes emphasising the need for conflict management and conflict resolution. However, according to the then Regional Secretary of the Western Region of the South African Democratic Teachers’ Union (SADTU), Mr S. Zamisa (personal communication, April 24, 2010), there still appears to be high levels of
conflict amongst staff at many schools. Furthermore, with the prevailing high level of staff conflict, as documented at the Union’s branch and regional offices, the impression is gained that many principals and teachers have not been appropriately trained to adequately manage staff conflict at their schools. In managing conflict, Björnstedt (2006:10) focuses on the need for individuals and groups to find ways of “learning to live with” conflict; therefore it is important to be aware of the causes or sources of conflict, as well as its consequences, as being aware could assist one to ‘live with’ it.

Snodgrass and Blunt (2009:54) emphasise the importance of empowering school leaders, educators, learners and parents with the necessary values, attitudes, knowledge and skills to manage conflict in an appropriate manner. This view is supported by Plocharczyk (2007:98), who states that sound abilities in managing conflict promote the effective functioning of various institutions (Plocharczyk, 2007:98). I can therefore concur with Bush (2003:17) that school leaders need to be better equipped to deal with the challenges in managing conflict at their institutions. In addition to this, it is essential that all other role-players on the staff be drawn in to seek ways of dealing more appropriately with conflict issues, since “leaders and managers need to recognise that skills and talents can be found throughout schools and colleges and are not only located in the upper echelons of the hierarchy”, (Bush & Middlewood, 2005:71). At the same time, the question that arises is whether educators, including principals, are aware of what causes conflict, what the consequences are, what their perceptions are regarding conflict (for example positive or negative or a combination of both) and whether they have suggestions of how conflict may be handled in more appropriate ways. As the above question formed the basis of this study, this chapter will review literature that:

- defines the term “conflict”, including how conflict is viewed and perceived, as well as theoretical perspectives and theories related to conflict;
- highlights different views of conflict;
- categorises conflict and its causes or sources;
- examines the role and consequences of conflict;
- discusses conflict management styles or choice;
- explains the different conflict management outcomes;
- provides general suggestions when trying to resolve conflict;
- indicates aspects to consider when dealing with conflict;
• explains negotiations and the seven elements to consider when dealing with conflict;
• discusses approaches or strategies to deal appropriately with conflict;
• establishes conditions that assist in managing conflict;
• examines third party intervention in conflict situations;
• provides third party strategies in dealing with conflict;
• presents a structural framework or heuristic of the literature reviewed in order not only to indicate the interrelatedness of conflict, but also to provide a heuristic that serves as a guide for looking at the research in an integrative manner.

The above aspects will be defined in each section and sub-sections of this chapter in order to provide a deeper understanding thereof. The literature study will first deal with conflict in general, after which the focus will become narrower, as examples of how the different types of conflict manifest in schools will be provided under the various sub-sections. The sources referenced in this literature review should assist in determining a sound basis for the research, as well as the subsequent findings and recommendations. Punch (2009:84) states that within qualitative research, conceptual frameworks “have been generally less common”. However, for the purpose of this qualitative study, the literature review will provide an overview to indicate what has been written about the aspects indicated in the bulleted points above, as these aspects could be connected to the subsidiary research questions of this study.

2.2 CONFLICT: OVERVIEW OF PERCEPTIONS, THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE AND CONFLICT THEORIES

In this section, an overview of perceptions of conflict, theoretical perspectives, as well as conflict theories, will be presented.

2.2.1 Overview of people’s perception of conflict

People all over the world are exposed to conflicts in many ways, impacting on various aspects of their lives (Furlong, 2005:3). This worldwide phenomenon is too complex to define easily and literature provides a wide array of interpretations. Merriam-Webster’s online Encyclopedia Britannica Concise Encyclopedia (Britannica, 2009:online) describes the term “conflict” in the following manner, “competitive or opposing action of incompatibles:
antagonistic state or action (as of divergent ideas, interests or persons)” (Britannica, 2009:online). In their definition, Tillet and French (2006:6) present the version offered by the Oxford English Dictionary which states, “An encounter with arms; a fight, battle”, “A prolonged struggle”, “Fighting, contending with arms, martial strife”, “The clashing or variance of opposed principles, statements, arguments”.

According to Purkey et al. (2010:99), conflict covers a huge plethora of differing human beliefs, attitudes, objectives and mannerisms. Nelson and Quick (2008:302) indicate that conflict occurs when people who are unable to agree due to divergent ideals, sentiment and conduct. In the opinion of Doherty and Guyler (2008:47), no definition of conflict may be regarded as absolute. They further add that conflict essentially entails striving to transform any given situation.

Another definition of conflict, advanced by Aquinas (2006:275) and Robbins and Judge (2009:519), is that conflict arises when the objectives of one party are intentionally opposed by another party. The implication is that one group is consciously determined to prevent the other from achieving a specific ideal. Moore (2003:xi) concurs that conflict results when individuals perceive that others are contesting their attempts at realising certain goals; a view that is also supported by Mc Shane and Von Glinow (2005:388), West et al. (2005:2), Fox (2006:128), Longaretti and Wilson (2006:4) and Loock et al. (2006:43).

In defining conflict further, Hitt et al. (2006:435) state that conflict appears when one group believes that its concerns are being threatened by another. Greenberg and Baron (2003:416) describe this as a situation in which one group is convinced that the intentions of another group are contradictory to their own, to which Huczynski and Buchanan (2007:764) concur.

Another dimension to defining conflict is postulated by Barsky and Wood (2005:249), who argue that the acts of withholding, disregard, rejection and retraction in avoiding conflict are part of the definition hereof. This view is supported by Eisenhardt, Kahwajy and Bourgeois, as well as Maslow in Whetten and Cameron (2002:351), who postulate that people tend to evade and withdraw from handling issues of conflict.

Kriesberg in Anstey (2006:6) contends that conflict is based in people’s own mindsets. Agreeing with Kriesberg, Roth (2007:300) states that conflict may be rooted either knowingly or unknowingly in people’s consciousness. In addition to this, Robbins, Odendaal and Roodt (2003:290) suggest that conflict prevails only when it is conceptualised by individuals or groups. Further, Kolb and Putnam (1992:312) believe that “conflict may be said to exist when there are real or perceived differences that arise in specific organizational circumstances and
that engender emotion as a consequence” (Kolb & Putnam, 1992:312). These readings imply that conflict is all in the “eye of the beholder”.

In my synopsis of all these definitions, it would seem that there is no clear definitive answer, since individualised perception plays a huge role in defining conflict. However, having considered all the aforementioned definitions, I tend to agree with the view presented by Kohlrieser (2006:102), who describes conflict as a breakdown of relations between various people, which could result in anxiety, discontent and division.

In attempting to define conflict further, a model or theoretical perspective of conflict will be discussed in the section below.

2.2.2 Theoretical perspective of conflict as a process: A framework or heuristic

Rahim (2011:89) states that various models illustrating organisational conflict exist, such as those presented by Pondy (1967:298-306), Walton and Dutton (1969:73-84) and Thomas (1976:894-912), as well as Rahim’s (2011:89-92) “Antecedent Conditions Model” (2011:89-92). In relation to these models of conflict, Carter (2005:4) points out that although much of this conflict research “appears to be dated” (2005:4), “the most significant research strides on conflict resolution were made between 1960 and 1990” (2005:4), and that the “principles of conflict resolution represented in them are still valid” (2005:4).

Given the wide variety of conflict models available, for the purpose of this study, the model of conflict dynamics as postulated by Pondy (1967:298-306) will be discussed (see Figure 2.1) as a starting point, after which the adapted version will be presented. Pondy (1967:299) describes conflict as a “dynamic process” wherein an individual or a group in an organisation relates to one another in a “sequence of conflict episodes” (Pondy, 1967:299), which are listed in the following stages: latent conflict; perceived conflict; felt conflict; manifest conflict; and conflict aftermath (Pondy, 1967:298-306).
Latent conflict refers to a number of basic “sources of organizational conflict” (Pondy, 1967:300), which “creates opportunities for conflict to arise” (Aquinas, 2006:285). Perceived conflict arises without the “conditions of latent conflict” (Pondy, 1967:301) being present. According to Aquinas (2006:286), in the latent stage, conflict issues become specific, diverse views and opposing goals are raised and adverse behaviour from persons become apparent.

In the felt conflict stage, individuals personalise conflict and their emotional levels become raised. This stage is further defined by Aquinas (2006:286) as when, “intentions intervene between people’s perceptions and emotions and their overt behavior” (2006:286). In the manifest conflict stage, Pondy (1967:303) refers to a wide array of “conflict behavior” that could be expressed by individuals or groups. These behaviours are described as “open aggression and withdrawal of support” by Aquinas (2006:287). The fifth stage, conflict aftermath, is related to the consequences flowing from how the conflict was resolved (Pondy, 1967:305) and whether the resolution thereof is perceived by the individual or group as being satisfactory or cause for further conflict to arise (Aquinas, 2006:287). Appelbaum, Abdallah and Shapiro (1999:65) and Kushner (2005:8) have reported on a revised and adapted version of Pondy’s model, as indicated in Figure 2.2.
It seems that Appelbaum *et al.* (1999:65) and Kushner (2005:8) have based their conflict model on the fundamental features of Pondy’s (1967:306) model without having deviated a great deal. Instead of five stages of conflict, this model highlights four stages, which are interwoven with Pondy’s (1967:306) model. In the first stage of this model, Appelbaum *et al.* (1999:64) and Kushner (2005:7) agree that there is potential for conflict due to the existence of antecedent conditions, similar to Pondy’s (1967:306) model. The second stage features perceived and felt conflict, which again relates to Pondy’s (1967:306) model. Kushner (2005:9-11) refers to this stage as “awareness and emotion”, while Appelbaum *et al.* (1999:66) calls it “cognition and personalization”. These authors also agree that in the third stage of conflict there is “behavior manifestation” (Appelbaum *et al.*, 1999:66), which expresses itself in “overt conflict” (Kushner, 2005:11). In the fourth stage, the outcomes of conflict play a role as to whether an organisation’s effectiveness is improved or lowered (Appelbaum *et al.*, 1999:67). In addition, the outcomes of conflict could also lead to an organisation’s performance remaining unchanged (Kushner, 2005:18). As performance is currently pivotal, this revised or adapted model presented by Appelbaum *et al.* (1999:65) and Kushner (2005:8), and which is rooted in Pondy’s (1967:306) conflict model, still seems relevant in today’s world.

Both these conflict models or frameworks suggest that conflict has certain causes and sources, that conflict has certain outcomes, consequences or aftermaths, and that conflict can be dealt with in certain ways or manners or in terms of certain approaches. Hence, Pondy’s (1967:306) framework suggests that it is important to take note of the causes (or...
triggers) and consequences, and how conflict should be dealt with. This framework became a road map for considering the research questions of this study. This framework has been adapted and will be presented in Section 2.15. In the following sub-section, theories pertaining to conflict will be explored briefly.

2.2.3 Theories related to conflict: Brief overview

According to McCorkle and Reese (2010:16), “… theories are not facts but rather tentative explanations for observed behaviors”; therefore, theories could assist in the analysis of conflict. Abigail and Cahn (2011:211) add that theories are ways “of explaining how something works”. The authors contend that the manner in which conflict is described, relates to how it is understood by people and how people elect to react to conflict.

There is a wide variety of theoretical perspectives pertaining to conflict, some indicated by Davies (2004:14-15) as “Attribution theory”, “Equity theory”, “Field theory”, “Interactionist theory”, “Psychodynamic theory”, “Social exchange theory”, “Phase theory”, “Systems theory”, “Transformational theory” and “Complexity showdown theory” (Davies, 2004:14-15). However, for the purpose of this study, some of the more general conflict theories, as determined by Abigail and Cahn (2011:212-215), will be discussed in the subsequent sections. These theories have been grouped into three categories, namely intrapersonal conflict theories, relationship theories and structural theory (Abigail & Cahn, 2011:212-215). The psychodynamic, attribution and uncertainty conflict theories have been grouped as intrapersonal conflict theories, whereas the social exchange, systems and transformational theories are linked to relationship theories (Abigail & Cahn, 2011:212-215). The structural theory of conflict has been grouped as a separate grouping; here, the ideas as discussed by Lulofs and Cahn (2000:136) and Abigail and Cahn (2011:212-223) have been presented.

2.2.3.1 Intrapersonal theories

Abigail and Cahn (2011:212-213) state that intrapersonal theories of conflict are linked according to how human beings respond to others when faced with conflict in a situation. Individuals’ responses are a result of a certain dispositions, i.e. their mood(s), attitudes, perceptions and mindsets (Abigail & Cahn, 2011:212-213). Lulofs and Cahn (2000:124) refer to intrapersonal theories as theories that ask the question ‘How do people think about conflict?’ The theories that can be associated with the interpersonal are briefly summarised in the following sub-sections.
2.2.3.1.1 Psychodynamic Theory

Psychodynamic theory, which is founded in Freudian research, postulates that individuals “experience conflict because of their intrapersonal states” (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000:124), i.e. their ways of thinking influence actions; therefore, the subconscious is relied upon to explain conflict (Collins, 2005:18), in which individuals play a large role or part. This view is supported by Davies (2004:15), who indicates that individuals adopt attitudes towards dealing with conflict issues based on their own anxieties, concerns, individuality and other emotions that are rooted in their inner selves or minds (Davies, 2004:15). Collins (2005:18) adds that the unconscious strands can impact on and influence perceptions, emotions and behaviours, to the detriment of a person, as he or she could start to behave in an ineffective and self-destructive manner. Therefore, it seems that conflict is not about what it outwardly appears to be, but has deeper roots and could, for example, influence relationships and interactions at home, while conflict at home could influence or manifest itself in the work situation (Collins, 2005:18).

This theory has been summarised by Abigail and Cahn (2011:213), who state that the psychodynamic theory is most appropriate for explaining conflict that is misdirected and even wrongly attributed to other individuals. In such situations, individuals could be unfairly confronted, despite the fact that they were not involved in causing the conflict. This theory can also be related to conflict that is blown out of proportion, i.e. when too much emphasis is directed at an issue that does not merit such consideration. Therefore, it is important to determine the real issues that lie below the surface or, as Collins (2005:20) states, one has to ask, “Is there more at issue here than what there appears to be on the surface?”

2.2.3.1.2 Attribution Theory

The central feature of the attribution theory is that individuals behave in a certain way when faced with conflict scenarios, based on how they perceive the other party or parties involved in the situation; i.e. the conclusions that they have made about the party or people involved influence their behaviour (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000:126). Concurring, McCorkle and Reese (2010:21) contend that individuals “are attributing meaning” while interacting with those around them. According to Abigail and Cahn (2011:216), these attributions may be associated with the individual’s “general personality” indicated as internal attributions or “to the other person’s circumstances” (Abigail & Cahn, 2011:216). Collins (2005:15) refers to situational and dispositional attributions. Situational attributions refer to behaviour that is caused as a result of some aspect of a situation, whereas dispositional attributions refer to some aspect or aspects of the person that is performing the behaviour (Collins, 2005:15).
The implication of the above is, for example, that people could assign blame to the other party in interpreting their (the other party’s) conduct (Davies, 2004:14). Abigail and Cahn (2011:217-218) contend that when blame is attributed to other individuals (internal attributions), it usually leads to “name-calling” and blaming (Abigail & Cahn, 2011:217), whereas evading the blame for something gone awry or not granting due consideration to those who may deserve it, is an example of external attributions (Abigail & Cahn, 2011:217-218). Further, when a person does not mind acknowledging an outstanding feat, but readily assigns blame to others when something has not worked out, then this is referred to as “the attribution error” (Abigail & Cahn, 2011:218). The important questions to ask thus are “What are the inferences that we make?” and at the same time “Are we making unwarranted inferences about an individual based on his or her behavior?” (Collins, 2005:20).

2.2.3.1.3 Uncertainty theory
Uncertainty prevails when not enough is known about issues in conflict scenarios, or when there is a lack of understanding in terms of the reasons, aims and actions of those involved in the conflict (Abigail & Cahn, 2011:218). This view is also supported by Lulofs and Cahn (2000:139). Abigail and Cahn (2011:219) state that conflicts are mostly ambiguous and complex, and that the “embeddedness of conflict in our everyday lives” (Abigail & Cahn, 2011:219) influences the uncertainty referred to above. The authors contend that “uncertainty theory helps explain false conflicts” (Abigail & Cahn, 2011:219) which can be assisted when adequate knowledge is provided in resolving issues between individuals and (or) parties who are engaged in conflict (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000:139-140; Abigail & Cahn, 2011:220).

2.2.3.2 Relationship theories
Abigail and Cahn (2011:220) argue that relationship theories of conflict are determined by the “nature of the relationship” of those individuals or parties who are in conflict with one another. Lulofs and Cahn (2000:124) refer to relationship theories as theories that ask the question, “How interdependent are the people involved in conflict?” Theories related to relationship are summarised below.

2.2.3.2.1 Social exchange theory and Equity theory
The social exchange theory is based on market-related factors, wherein it is presumed that individuals will react in ways that will most likely promote their own interests (Davies, 2004:15; McCorle & Reese, 2010:22). According to Abigail and Cahn (2011:222), proponents of the social exchange theory contend that the reaction of individuals is dependent on their own “self-interest and a desire to maximize rewards while minimizing costs” (Abigail & Cahn, 2011: 222).
Another dimension of this theory is that individuals highlight the point that their reaction is a direct result of the other party’s action (Abigail & Cahn, 2011:223), which the authors refer to as “moves and countermoves” (Abigail & Cahn, 2011:223). Further, how persons respond to conflict situations is determined by the individual’s specific objectives in the conflict as well as to the effect that it (their response) may have on their relationship with the other party (Abigail & Cahn, 2011:223).

Collins (2005:17) argues that the equity theory is a form of social exchange theory, focusing on justice and fairness within an institution or organisation. Distributive justice (how awards are distributed or allocated) and procedural justice (how things are being done) form the basis of this perspective (Collins, 2005:17). Therefore, rewards have to be based on certain rules, such as equity, equality or need (Collins, 2005:17). It is therefore imperative to determine and ask “Are rewards distributed fairly in our organization? Do we show bias or favoritism when we make decisions?” (Collins, 2005:20).

### 2.2.3.2.2 Systems theory

In applying the systems theory to conflict, McCorkle and Reese (2010:24) propose that it is important to, as they put it, "looking at the interaction between the parties (in conflict) over time and in context" (McCorkle & Reese, 2010:24). In their explanation of the systems theory, Lulofs and Cahn (2000:134) refer to the views of Ruben, who postulates that conflict should not be regarded as a disruptive influence, but should be perceived as the norm within society. In illustrating this feature, the authors contend that “conflict occurs within a relationship (a system) because a person in that relationship needs to adapt to demands of the other person or to demands in the environment surrounding the relationship” (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000:134). According to Collins (2005:19), roles, norms and values are the major components of a social system, aspects that ensures the development of certain patterns and activities. It is therefore important to be able to identify the aspects or elements that are causing conflict within the system and to ascertain which aspects or elements have to be addressed and changed (Collins, 2005:20).

### 2.2.3.2.3 Transformational theory

Collins (2005:18) refers to transformational theory as a theory that values conflict as a developmental tool to assist organisations in developing relationships, the organisation itself, as well as society. She further states that conflict manifests as a result of discrepancies or disagreements between how things are and how they should actually be (Collins, 2005:18). Supporting these views, Davies (2004:15) states that “Conflict is not necessarily dysfunctional, but a vital social function where tensions are released and new communal norms are established or refined”. As a result, conflict is seen as a positive factor that can
promote improvement, growth and change – having a long-term benefit – hence the importance of determining the underlying factors and relationships to ascertain not only how they create conflict, but also how relationships are being affected as a result of the conflict (Collins, 2005:18). It is therefore imperative to determine which changes can be made to assist in improving relationships over the long run (Collins, 2005:20).

2.2.3.3 Structural theory

Lulofs and Cahn (2000:136) refer to structural theory as a theory that questions “how [can] different variables in the situation [impact on] behavior?” The authors state that structural theory relies especially on facets of “trust, uncertainty, and power” (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000:136), which assist individuals in choosing their responses to others in conflict scenarios as well as developing a deeper comprehension of “how they work together in conflict situations” (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000:137). The question that comes to the fore within structural theory is, “Who [are] involved?” In addition, the following questions arise, namely ‘Does trust exists between or among them?’, ‘Are the persons involved well-known to the other role-players and to what extent has a sense of uncertainty risen?’, ‘Who has the power and how much?’, ‘Who else may have a possible interest in the outcome(s) or result(s) of the conflict?’ and ‘What limitations or restrictions are there, if any, that could lead to certain outcomes, i.e. ignoring or disregarding other possible outcomes?’ (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000:136).

The theories that were briefly introduced above are among the theories that could assist in developing a better understanding of conflict and how it is perceived.

2.3 VIEWS OF CONFLICT

It appears that perception plays a major role in determining how organisations and individuals respond to conflict. Literature describes various perceptions or views of conflict and in this review, the traditional view, the human relations view, the interactionist view and the radical view will be discussed in the sub-sections below. There is also the view that conflict is functional and dysfunctional, which will be discussed in another section.

2.3.1 The traditional view

The traditional view, namely that conflict is an “undesirable phenomenon” (Vokic & Sontor, 2009:5) persisted into the 1940’s. Conflict was perceived as wrong and counterproductive and to be averted as far as possible (Robbins & Judge, 2009:519). According to Plocharscyk (2007:90), those who maintain a traditionalist view of conflict do not believe that conflict can be beneficial and are therefore not keen to be receptive to conflict. The above-stated views
are supported by Wilmot and Hocker (2001:11), who indicate that conflict is perceived in a negative light by many groups and individuals who hold the view that conflict is mostly negative, without any positive features. Concurring, DIPAOLA (2003:143) contends that people are generally unwilling to confront issues related to conflict because children are trained or guided from a young age to avoid disagreeing or quarrelling with others. In addition, WEST et al. (2005:1) and KOHLRIESE (2006:101) point out that images of chaos, destruction, turmoil and aggression are conjured when the term “conflict” comes to mind within the context of the traditional view. Similarly, BARSKY and WOOD (2005:249) contend that visions of physical clashes, armed combat and vicious behaviour are conceived with the term “conflict”. These views are supported by ROBBINS et al. (2003:290), who add that conflict was traditionally perceived to contribute negatively to an organisation’s functionality.

Rahim (2001:8-9) refers to various organisation theorists, such as Fayol, Gulick and Urwick, and to Taylor and Weber, who argued that conflict impacted negatively on organisations and that in order to enhance organisational efficiency, conflict had to be stifled or eradicated. According to Rahim (2001:8), these theorists made no provision for the management of conflict within organisations.

With reference to the traditional view, authors such as HUCZYNSKI and Buchanan (2007:766) prefer to use the term “The Unitarist frame of reference on conflict”. Rahim (2001:8), however, refers to all of the aforementioned as the “Classical View of Organizational conflict”.

### 2.3.2 The human relations view

Rahim (2001:10) refers to the work of Mayo in *The human problems of an industrial civilization*, whom he regarded as the forerunner to the Human Relations movement, in presenting the view that conflict needs to be accommodated to an extent in order to reduce or eliminate conflict in the advancement of organisational efficiency. This view, which was prevalent between the 1940’s and 1970’s, proclaimed that “conflict was a natural occurrence” and that it could even enhance an organisation’s productivity (Folger, Poole & Stutman, 2005:65; Robbins & Judge, 2009:520). Aquinas (2006:288) supports this view, contending that conflict is a logical outcome that has to be embraced.

In referring to the human relations view, some authors use the term “pluralist form of reference on conflict” (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2007:767). Rahim (2001:10) presents this as the “neo-classical view of organizational conflict”.
2.3.3 Interactionist view

Referring to the studies of Whyte, Robbins, Kerr and Miles, amongst others, Rahim (2001:10-12) argues that conflict could be used to positively influence efficiency within organisations in relation to the interactionist view. The interactionist view proclaims that conflict needs to be fully part of an organisation in order to stimulate creativity and enhance the overall performance and functionality of the organisation (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2007:768; Robbins & Judge, 2009:520). Concurring with these authors are Robbins et al. (2003:291), Robbins (2005:195) and Aquinas (2006:288).

In reference to the interactionist view, some authors, such as Huczynski and Buchanan (2007:768), use the term “the interactionist frame of reference on conflict”. Rahim (2001:10), however, refers to this view as the “modern view of organizational conflict”.

2.3.4 The radical view

Martin (2005:760) believes that the radicalist view implies that conflict is the logical outcome of the capitalist system, due to the exploitation of the labour force. This view is supported by Huczynski and Buchanan (2007:783), who also refer to the continual struggle between labour and management, which often leads to confrontation.

2.3.5 Concluding summary

In summarising the above views of conflict, the literature suggests that the main aspects of the traditional view of conflict is opposed to that of the human relations view, the interactionist view and the radical view. Whereas the traditional view posits that conflict needs to be averted because it is not good (Robbins & Judge, 2009:519), the other views mentioned, regard conflict as a natural outcome (Folger et al., 2005:65). The Interactionist view even goes so far as to suggest that conflict should be encouraged so that the performance of organisations could be positively influenced (Robbins, 2005:195; Huczynski & Buchanan, 2007:768). At the other end of this spectrum is the radical view, which contends that conflict will always remain present between management and labour in a capitalist system (Martin, 2005:60).

I tend to agree with the view that conflict occurs naturally and that it (conflict) should not be viewed in a negative light only since it (conflict) could have more positive effects when handled appropriately.
There seems to be many ways of defining the sources or causes of conflict when it comes to categorising conflict. Literature suggests that the sources or causes of conflict are spread over a vast field, making it difficult to classify (Van Tonder et al., 2008:376). Moore (2003:61) concurs that conflict is not logically arranged for it to be easily interpreted.

According to Rahim (2001:20-21), the sources of conflict will determine how conflict is classified. These sentiments are supported by Buelens, Van den Broeck, Vanderheyden, Kreitner and Kinicki (2005:496) and Fox (2006:130). Some authors prefer to provide a list of causes, while others try to categorise the causes in particular forms (Singleton, Toombs, Taneja, Larkin & Pryor, 2011:150). Authors such as Mullins (1999:818-820), McNamara (2008:1-2), Scott (2010:289-290) and Ageng’a and Simatwa (2011:1076) list the causes of conflict as social prejudices, insufficient resources, gossip, values or actions, leadership problems, etc. Another group of authors, such as Jehn (1995:256-278), Amason (1996:123-144), Pelled (1996:617-628) and Speakman and Ryals (2010:190), prefer to define conflict through classifying it under categories such as task and emotional conflict, affective or cognitive conflict or task, process and relationship conflict. A third group of authors such as Folger et al. (2005:6-7), Plocharczyk (2007:86-89) and Singleton et al. (2011:151-152), look at conflict as either being functional or dysfunctional or linking conflict to the level (intergroup, intragroup, interpersonal, etc.) at which it takes place. In addition to the above, conflict can also be categorised in terms of the causes or bases of conflict. These authors, such as Bradshaw (2008:18-20), Moore (2003:64) and Littlejohn and Domenici (2007:11-13), categorise the causes of conflict as value based, interest based, needs based, data based, structurally based and relationship based.

Bradshaw (2008:19) believes that an important point to consider when attempting to categorise the bases of conflict is that not all conflicts arise due to one particular cause, but rather through multi-faceted causes; for example, a structural conflict could have needs and interest based dimensions. It seems that trying to create a link between the various ways in which the above-mentioned authors view conflict would be extremely problematic due to the enumerable combinations in which causes could be categorised. Therefore, in order to understand conflict, it is important to take note of the following, i.e. that conflict occurs at a number of levels or, in the words of Korsgaard, Jeong, Mahony and Pitariu (2008:1224), “To understand conflict as a multilevel phenomenon, it is necessary to view conflict as a general process manifested at multiple levels and forms”.

2.4 CATEGORISING CONFLICT
For the purpose of this study, the categorisation of the causes or sources of conflict as presented below will first be discussed in general terms in each section, after which the educational and school context will be examined in the same section.

2.4.1 **Types and levels of organisational conflict**

The following format will be used in the sub-sections below. Firstly, the causes will be defined as related to the various levels of organisational conflict, i.e. intrapersonal, interpersonal, individual-institutional, intragroup, intergroup, inter-organisational and intra-organisational conflict. Secondly, the causes of conflict will be defined in terms of the types of conflict identified, which are task conflict, relationship conflict, and process conflict. The possible link between task, relationship and process conflict on the one hand and affective, cognitive and process conflict on the other hand will be illustrated. Thirdly, the bases or antecedents of conflict, as referred to above with regard to value based, interest based, needs based, etc. will be discussed. Finally, a list of possible general causes of organisational conflict will be highlighted with reference to the literature, without categorising the causes.

According to Speakman and Ryals (2010:187-188) and Lewicki, Saunders and Barry (2011:18), conflict may be classified into four levels, namely "intrapersonal conflict, interpersonal conflict, intragroup conflict and intergroup conflict". While concurring with these authors, Rahim (2001:23), Aquinas (2006:282) and Nelson and Quick (2008:309) add interorganisational conflict to the four previously mentioned levels of conflict. In addition, Loock, Campher, Du Preez, Grobler and Shaba (2003:21-23) indicate intra-organisational conflict, individual-institutional conflict and school-community conflict to the list. These types and levels of conflict will be discussed in the sub-sections below.

2.4.1.1 **Intrapersonal conflict**

Zide (2006:73-74) and Nelson and Quick (2008:310) assert that intrapersonal conflict develops when an individual is in conflict with him- or herself over issues. Wood *et al.* (2004:598) indicate that intrapersonal conflict could relate to “actual or perceived pressures”, which place the individual in turmoil with him or herself. While in agreement with these sentiments, Loock *et al.* (2003:21) are of the opinion that individuals are often compelled to decide on values that need to be maintained and that “Selective perception is another relevant concept: people only see what they are able to see from the perspective of their characteristic background” (Loock *et al.*, 2003:21).
According to Van der Merwe (2003:29), a person may have conflicting inner objectives that could lead to such intrapersonal conflict. Supporting these views, Parker and Stone (2003:107) refer to the term “conflict with oneself” instead of intrapersonal conflict. Lewicki et al. (2011:18), while in agreement with the aforementioned authors, use the term “intrapsychic conflict” when dealing with intrapersonal conflict.

2.4.1.2 Interpersonal conflict

Parker and Stone (2003:107) refer to interpersonal conflict as “conflict with another”. Folger et al. (2005:6) state that “interpersonal conflicts include those between husbands and wives, siblings, friends, and roommates. But interpersonal relationships are broader than this, encompassing those among co-workers, supervisors and employees, landlords and tenants, and neighbors” (Folger et al., 2005:6). Furthermore, Steyn and Van Niekerk (2002:77) argue that prejudices “based on personal background or ethnic origin can also lead to interpersonal conflict, including of course, racial and religious conflict” (Steyn & Van Niekerk, 2002:77). These authors maintain that prejudice could include, for example “the feelings of a graduate towards someone who has only a diploma” (Steyn & Van Niekerk, 2002:77), which could influence how he or she (the graduate) interacts with the other person (Steyn & Van Niekerk, 2002:77).

In addition, Ramani and Zhimin (2010:245) point out that interpersonal conflict arises when two individuals cannot come to terms with each other's objectives, actions or needs in their engagement with one another. Concurring, Wood et al. (2004:598), Zide (2006:73) and Nelson and Quick (2008:310) contend that interpersonal conflict takes place when specific individuals are unable to reach agreement around issues. Moreover, Van der Merwe (2003:29) believes that interpersonal conflict occurs most often in educational institutions, providing an example of one educator infringing on the time allotted to another educator by holding learners back during teaching periods.

2.4.1.3 Individual-institutional conflict

Individuals are all different and “conflict often erupts between the expectations of the individual and the demands of the school as a dynamic organisation (Van der Merwe, 2003:30). The aspirations of many educators in terms of their employment prospects and ideals often clash with the cumbersome stratum of the South African educational bureaucracy (Loock et al., 2003:22).

The authors further mention that the country’s educators have been largely unionised in order to have a stronger voice in demanding improved work conditions and services for
members. Under these circumstances, it seems that the incidence of conflict arising at schools will remain high.

2.4.1.4 Intragroup conflict

According to Speakman and Ryals (2010:187) and Lewicki et al. (2011:18), intragroup conflict occurs when individuals within the same group or team cannot agree on issues. In support of these views are Bradshaw (2008:21) and Nelson and Quick (2008:310). A similar view is declared by Aquinas (2006:282), who prefers to use the term “individual-group conflict” instead of intragroup conflict.

Loock et al. (2003:22-23) agree that intragroup conflict is mostly concerned with tensions among individuals in groups. They argue that since individuals all have their own “values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour” (Loock et al., 2003:22-23), the potential for interpersonal conflict within groups remains constant (Loock et al., 2003:22-23). In my experience at school, I have often seen such conflict arise when members of a group start avoiding certain individuals who also belong to the group due to those individuals’ mannerisms.

2.4.1.5 Intergroup conflict

Ramani and Zhimin (2010:245) refer to intergroup conflict as conflict that arises from differences in people’s culture, tradition or race, as well as to differences that occur when people have to take decisions in their own specific sections of an institution that affect all other employees within that institution. This view is supported by Folger et al. (2005:6), who add that the emphasis is placed “on individuals as representatives of social groups, rather than as unique and special individuals” (Folger et al., 2005:6).

While in agreement with these authors, Speakman and Ryals (2010:187) and Lewicki et al. (2011:18) state that conflict at this level is usually very difficult to resolve, since a large number of individuals are involved. In addition, Aquinas (2006:282) refers to intergroup conflict as conflict that occurs between different groups within an organisation. In support of this view is Nelson and Quick (2008:309), who emphasise that competition between various groups must be handled appropriately in order to promote positive results. Similarly, Wood et al. (2004:598) agree with the aforementioned sentiments, pointing out that intergroup conflict is a common occurrence and could negatively affect efficiency within organisations.
2.4.1.6 Inter-organisational conflict

Rahim (2001:23), Aquinas (2006:282) and Nelson and Quick (2008:309) state that inter-organisational conflict takes place when “two or more organizations” are unable to agree on issues. This belief is supported by Wood et al. (2004:599), who indicate that different union structures within organisations, for example, could lead to conflict issues. In my experience at school, I have seen this happen when educators of one union oppose the actions of those of another union due to differences in perception of strategies applied to secure specific objectives related to working conditions.

2.4.1.7 Intra-organisational conflict

Loock et al. (2003:22) believe that intra-organisational conflict may develop as a result of the existence of diverse sections or groups of employees within educational institutions. This conflict is defined further by Zuelke and Willerman in Van der Merwe (2003:30) and Wood et al. (2004:602), who list vertical conflict regarding the managerial system at school; horizontal conflict amongst the various educators; line-staff conflict relating to the school head and administration; and role conflict due to unclear or ambiguous roles perceived by staff. In the next sub-sub-sections, vertical conflict, horizontal conflict and line-staff conflict will be discussed briefly.

2.4.1.7.1 Vertical conflict

Vertical conflict often occurs between employees and their supervisors as a result of scarce resources and poorly defined objectives. In order to avoid repetition, refer to the discussion on conflict over scarce resources, section 2.4.1.2 under the heading Interest based conflict.

When individuals or groups in organisations have contrasting or unclear objectives, this could result in conflict (Aquinas, 2006:284; Nelson & Quick, 2008:305). This view is supported by Mc Shane and Von Glinow (2005:391), who further state that such goal differences tend to obstruct the objectives of other employees, thereby increasing the potential for conflict.

2.4.1.7.2 Horizontal conflict

Horizontal conflict arises when individuals or groups of employees who are all ranked in similar positions differ due to inconsistencies regarding goals, limited resources and other interpersonal aspects. An example of this conflict in school context is illustrated by Squelch and Lemmer (1994:148): some educators may view the construction of sports infrastructure
as essential, while other educators may view the establishment of activities promoting culture as more essential.

2.4.1.7.3 Line-staff conflict

Line-staff conflict takes place when employees cannot agree as to which staff members are empowered to take certain actions or to ratify specific decisions. Nelson and Quick (2008:306) agree that jurisdictional vagueness leaves employees uncertain about the roles that they have to perform in organisations. Concurring with these authors, Aquinas (2006:284) argues that employees tend to shirk their responsibilities when their tasks are not properly defined. In addition, stress could result if employees are not sure about their roles (Antonioni, 1996:288-289). Further, in the school context, Steyn and Van Niekerk (2002:190) believe that “If a teacher does not know what is expected of him or her, the result may be stress”.

According to Schmuck and Runkel (1994:332), “a common cause of conflict among educators, power struggles, typically arise when some participants attempt to gain advantage over others” (Schmuck & Runkel, 1994:332). This in turn may lead to much competition amongst the staff for power and positions. With most organisations being hierarchically structured, the rank of an individual usually determines the processes that will be followed in the organisation (Landau, et al., 2001:16). This could lead to some individuals perceiving their fellow employees as threats to their aspiration to reach top positions in the institution. In my experience, this is often the case when promotion posts become vacant.

Perceived differences in status between management and the rest of the employees also have the potential to create line-staff conflict (Nelson & Quick, 2008:306). Many institutions demonstrate a huge gulf between management and the other members of staff, with management receiving special perks with regard to working hours, lunch breaks, workload, etc. (Aquinas, 2006:284). Plocharczyk (2007:88-89) concurs, adding that there is a likelihood that conflict may arise when personnel who are working at unequal levels of authority or command, engage in contest with others in exerting influence and control over issues. Agreeing with the above authors, Tillet and French (2006:13) state that some people have a greater desire to utilise and apply power in their interaction with others.

2.4.1.7.4 Role conflict

Antonioni (1996:288) cites Schuler, Aldag and Brief (1977) in describing role conflict as a phenomenon that arises as a result of people having to perform “under incompatible policies or guidelines, or when individuals are expected to do things that clash with their own
principles or expectations” (Antonioni, 1996:288). Concurring, Bradshaw (2008:28) states that personnel within institutions have various roles to fulfill and that they may view their roles according to their own perceptions. This clash of perceptions could lead to conflict between management and the rest of the staff (Tillet & French, 2006:11).

Within the school context, the role of the educator, as perceived by other members of staff, may be in contradiction to the educator’s own views, which in turn could lead to inner tension within the educator (Coleman, 2003:177). The aforementioned suggests that role conflict usually occurs at schools, since employees generally wish to adopt a role that pleases the rest of the staff (Schmuck & Runkel, 1994:335). Citing an example of role conflict, Steyn and Van Niekerk (2002:74) indicate that “a principal may see his or her main role as that of an instructional leader, while experienced teachers may feel that the principal should recognize the professionalism of teachers”.

2.4.1.7.5 School-community conflict

From time to time, certain sectors of the community attempt to involve educational institutions to attain particular outcomes that may be related to socio-political and (or) socio-economic issues (Steyn & Van Niekerk, 2002:78). Citing an example of this type of conflict, Loock et al. (2003:23) state that “In South Africa, school boycotts, unrest and violence have repeatedly and violently disrupted and disturbed education”. Further evidence of this type of conflict in the country is apparent from reports in the media in 2012 which show the continuing tendency of communities to draw schools and learners into service-delivery protests in order to highlight their campaigns.

Various levels of conflict affecting organisations in general and schools in particular therefore exist. In defining conflict further within this study, the key types of conflict need to be reviewed.

2.4.2 Three key types of conflict

Liu, Fu and Liu (2008:230) state that many theorists of conflict are content with classifying conflict into two main types. Guetzkow and Gyr (1954:380), for example, refer to substantive and affective conflict, Cosier and Rose (1977:376) focus on goal and cognitive conflict, while Amason (1996:124-126) highlights cognitive and affective conflict.

Speakman and Ryals (2010:188-190) conclude that researchers have identified three categories of conflict. According to Reid and Kambayya (2009:1083-1088), conflict could be grouped into “task-oriented, process-oriented and emotionally-oriented conflict”. In this
literature review, three key types of conflict, namely “task, relationship, and process” conflict (Jehn & Chatman, 2000:57) will be reviewed in order to develop an understanding of the key types of conflict. It seems therefore that it would become possible to group aspects that cause conflict as being task related, relationship related and (or) process related.

2.4.2.1 Task conflict

According to Robbins and Judge (2009:520), task conflict involves “the content and goals of the work”. Hitt et al. (2006:438) agree, adding that task conflict could even be beneficial to an organisation when the conflict is managed in an effective manner, sentiments that are supported by West et al. (2005:58) and Ahuja (2006:5). Wood et al. (2004:597) express the view that such conflict arises when employees are unable to reach basic agreement regarding achieving mutual objectives (West et al., 2005:58).

Schermehorn, et al. (2000:375), Gravenhorst (2004:334) and Wood et al. (2004:597) also refer to task conflict as substantive conflict. Guetzkow and Gyr (1954:369) also advocate the use of the term substantive conflict, adding that such conflict is “rooted in the substance of the task” (Guetzkow & Gyr, 1954:369). Further, substantive conflict arises when individuals are unable to agree on matters relating to their work duties and responsibilities, “group and organizational goals, the allocation of resources, the distribution of rewards, policies and procedures, and task assignments” (Schermehorn et al., 2000:375). In providing a link between cognitive conflict and task conflict, Amason and Sapienza (1997:496) indicate that “Cognitive conflict is task-oriented disagreement arising from differences in judgement or perspective” (Amason & Sapienza, 1997:496).

2.4.2.2 Relationship conflict

Robbins and Judge (2009:520) state that relationship conflict involves “interpersonal relationships”. Similarly, Hitt et al. (2006:437-438) declare that relationship conflict is concerned with people’s interactions with one another. These sentiments are supported by Guetzkow and Gyr (1954:369) and Jehn (1995:258).

Wood et al. (2004:597) use the term “emotional conflict” to describe relationship conflict and refer to “feelings of anger, mistrust, dislike, fear, resentment,” etc. which are related to this type of conflict. Whilst agreeing with the aforementioned authors, De Dreu and Beersma (2005:106) prefer to use the term “socio-emotional and relationship issues” with reference to relationship conflict. These views are also supported by Schermehorn et al. (2000:375) and by Rahim (2001:21), who argue that this type of conflict constitutes a “clash of personalities”. Further, a link between relationship conflict and affective conflict is pointed out by Amason

In defining personality, Robbins and Judge (2009:523) state that people differ; each has his or her own peculiar preferences, approach and mannerisms. Concurring, Nelson and Quick (2008:306) add that people carry their particular personalities into their organisations, which could inevitably lead to conflict. In an example provided by Hitt et al. (2006:442), differences between the levels of work conscientiousness between individuals in terms of how they plan and manage tasks, were identified as a cause of conflict. In my experience, I have seen this happen at schools as well. Zide (2005:53) agrees with these authors, concluding that “We tend to make our early judgments about people on the basis of our perceptions of their personality”. According to Steyn and Van Niekerk (2002:74), “some people enjoy being argumentative and combative” and this could easily relate to clashes amongst educators at schools.

### 2.4.2.3 Process conflict

Process conflict is concerned with the manner in which tasks are performed in the workplace (Jehn, 1997:552; Robbins & Judge, 2009:520). Hitt et al. (2006:438) support the above, simultaneously also emphasising the role of employees in the performance of their duties, which could promote conflict. According to the aforementioned authors, previous studies have shown that process conflict impacts adversely on how tasks are carried out, especially when there is no clear direction as to which staff members are responsible for specific activities.

According to Plocharczyk (2007:87), role ambiguity could lead to conflict when personnel have not been issued with clear instructions regarding their tasks and duties; a view that is supported by Antonioni (1996:288). An educator may be “expected to devout a significant amount time to preparing lessons, while at the same time, the principal expects him to coach the soccer team” (Steyn & Van Niekerk, 2002:190). Whilst agreeing with the above sentiments, West et al. (2005:58) prefer to use the term “task-process conflicts” instead of process conflict.

Another factor related to process conflict is poor management. According to Bradshaw (2008:29), poor management is evident when management either steers away from trying to resolve the above issues or purposefully decides not to handle conflict issues at all. The author also indicates that management’s approach to the delegation of tasks and the unreasonable or unfair distribution of resources could cause an escalation of conflict.
amongst the staff. Inequitable treatment by management could be another factor leading to conflict (Mullins, 1999:819). Van der Merwe (2003:31) states that conflict could occur when people perceive that they are being treated unfairly as a result of “the implementation of personnel policies and practices, or in reward and punishment systems” (Van der Merwe, 2003:31). The author cites an example of this in school context: one educator is allowed to leave the school to attend to personal issues while another educator is not permitted to do the same on the grounds that this would violate the school’s policy. Zide (2005:53) agrees that “disputes about procedures and methods are due to weak management”.

The link between task, relationship and process conflict and affective, cognitive and process conflict is illustrated in Table 2.1 below, presented by Speakman and Ryals (2010:190).

**TABLE 2.1: Linking task, relationship and process conflict to affective, cognitive and process conflict (Speakman & Ryals, 2010:190).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict type</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Conflicts are concerned with what people think and feel about the relationships with other individuals or groups [relationship related]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Conflicts concerned with what people know and understand about their task [task related]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Conflicts arising from the situational context, the organisation structure, strategy or culture [process related]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.4.3 **Bases or causes of social conflict**

Another way in which to categorise conflict is according to its bases or causes (Moore, 2003:64; Bradshaw, 2008:18). Rahim (2001:21) refers to the “antecedent conditions that lead to conflict”, whereas Bradshaw (2008:18) uses the term “the bases of social conflict” to interpret the root causes of conflict. In the view of Littlejohn and Domenici (2007:11-13), the causes of conflict, outlined by Moore (2003:64) should be preferred. Moore lists the causes of conflict as “relationship conflicts”, “value conflicts”, “data conflicts”, “structural conflicts” and “interest conflicts” (Moore, 2003:64). To this list, Bradshaw (2008:18-19) adds “needs-based conflict”. For the purpose of this study, the categories of the root causes of conflict, as determined by Moore (2003:64) and Bradshaw (2008:18-19), will be defined below, as these seem to be in agreement with the bases of social conflict. Furthermore, the illustration of Bradshaw, alluded to earlier, is provided in Figure 2.3 to show the multilevel view of conflict. It needs to be reiterated that one particular base or cause of conflict may also apply to other categories or levels of conflict.
2.4.3.1 Value-based conflict

According to Mayer (2000:11), “values are the beliefs we have about what is important, what distinguishes right from wrong and good from evil, and what principles should govern how we lead our lives”. Conflict that is based on values is rooted in the varying lifestyles and beliefs of individuals and groups (Bradshaw, 2008:18; Nelson & Quick, 2008:307), for example religious, political and even ideological (Bradshaw, 2008:18). This view is supported by Fisher (2000:2), who states that the “principles and practices that people believe in”, underlie their values. Carpenter and Kennedy (2001:197-198), who concur with the aforementioned authors, point out that values are the norms or criteria that people use to evaluate things that occur around them, as well as the conduct of others. Concurring, Tillet and French (2006:11) state that conflict related to values “can arise because of mutually incompatible values, the application of particular values, or individuals being expected to act based on values that they do not hold (and that may be in conflict with the values they do hold)”. In addition, matters concerned with conflict may be influenced and are often determined by divergent values (Carpenter & Kennedy, 2001:198). Further, Bush and Anderson (2003:89) contend that “these values underpin the behaviour and attitude of individuals at schools and colleges but they may not always be explicit”. These views are supported by Mayer and Louw (2009:3), who state that “values are often un-reflected and unconscious until conflict occur and the conflicting parties realise that their conflict derives from differences in patterns of thought and action”.

Rahim (2001:22) refers to this conflict as “ideological” conflict. Providing an example of this type of conflict, the author uses the abortion issue to illustrate how people divide themselves into different camps, in either opposing or promoting abortion. An example of value-based
conflict in the school context is provided by Steyn and Van Niekerk (2002:23), who refer to
conflict between a headmaster and an educator when they do not equally perceive the
submission of written reports as essential.

2.4.3.2 Interest-based conflict

Rahim (2001:21) and Hitt et al. (2006:393) concur that interest-based conflict arises when
different individuals or groups cannot agree over the distribution of limited resources. In
addition, Moore (2003:64) refers to “perceived or actual competition over substantive
(content) interests, procedural interests and psychological interests”, in defining interest-
based conflict, a view which is also supported by Littlejohn and Domenici (2007:12).

Nelson and Quick (2008:305) and Mc Shane and Von Glinow (2005:393) agree with the
above authors, stating that the division of already limited resources is a huge source of
conflict amongst employees. Landau et al. (2001:15) support the aforementioned authors,
pointing out that the scarcity of resources leads to people believing “that their personal and
professional objectives will be thwarted because other people will be given their resources”
(Landau et al., 2001:15).

In defining interest-based conflict further, Champoux (2006:264) states that staff have to
utilise the same resources available at their workplaces, while Plocharczyk (2007:89) adds
that many institutions do not have sufficient resources for all the staff to access when
required. Zide (2005:53) agrees with the above authors emphasising that the scarcity of
resources could intensify rivalry amongst staff and lead to bitter conflict in the workplace.
According to Schmuck and Runkel (1994:340-341), many schools and colleges have to find
ways of resolving the issue of scarce resources, such as recruiting parental assistance for
certain tasks to ease the burden on the staff. In addition, Prinsloo (2003:197) believes that
schools are capable of sharing limited resources successfully amongst staff when staff
members accept that they all share common objectives in leading their school.

Promotion posts could also cause interest-based conflict. Ngcobo (2003:189) points out that
much resentment follows when educators are unable to access promotion posts at schools.
Further, this issue of competition over posts is linked to power struggles between individuals,
as indicated by Schmuck and Runkel (1994:332), who contend that “… when adversaries
compete for a commonly desired reward such as a promotion or merit pay for good
教学 …”. In addition, in referring to Eastern Cape specifically, a bulletin was last
published two years ago to advertise promotion posts, especially those of Head of
Departments, which has resulted in many vacancies not being filled (SADTU Korsten Branch
Chairperson, Mr C Serfontein, personal interview, 31 May 2012). Mr Serfontein stated further that when posts do happen to be advertised, a flurry of disputes is forwarded to the unions from applicants contesting the positions.

The occurrence of conflict over the appointment of educators to posts is further exacerbated by School Governing Bodies (SGBs) which are not adequately skilled in the professional handling of such staffing processes (Ngcobo & Ngwenya, 2005:187-188). These views are supported by Adams and Waghid (2003), who highlight the negative practices of SGBs in considering staff appointments. Concurring with the above, Mr Serfontein highlighted the fact that most disputes from applicants for promotion posts centre around procedures followed by SGB Selection Panels when posts have to be filled.

### 2.4.3.3 Needs-based conflict

Needs-based conflict is determined by the drive for mankind to fulfill fundamental needs (Bradshaw, 2008:18-19). The author classifies these needs as physical, such as the need for food and a home, and psychological, such as the need for “identity, security and control”. He bases his beliefs on the research undertaken by Maslow (Maslow, 1948:402-413, cited by Bradshaw, 2008:18-19) and Maslow (Maslow, 1954:326-345, cited by Bradshaw, 2008:18-19) on the basic needs of humankind and the fulfillment thereof. According to Maslow (Maslow, 1948:402-404; 326-345, cited by Bradshaw, 2008:18-19), mankind is driven by an integrated system of fundamental desires or needs, which are arranged or classified in a specific manner.

Supporting these views is John (2000:419-432), who refers to especially the influence of psychology to conflict in the workplace and in groups. Furthermore, Du Preez, Campher, Grobler, Loock & Shaba (2003:21-22) emphasise the fact that school leaders should use Maslow’s above-mentioned theories to develop their staff optimally.

Citing an example of such conflict, Steyn and Van Niekerk (2002:73) refer to a school system in which classrooms are shared by educators due to spatial limitations. Under these circumstances, the potential for conflict is enhanced when one educator has left a classroom in a mess, which the next educator who has to use the classroom finds unacceptable. Other examples of needs-based conflict are outlined by Du Preez et al. (2003:21):

- **Physiological needs**: When educators do not receive their salaries.
• **Safety needs**: When adequate security measures so that staff will feel secure are not provided.

• **Job security**: When staff is not adequately covered by medical aids or pension benefits.

• **Love needs**: When opportunities for healthy social relations are not promoted at school, which could lead to staff not interacting soundly with one another.

• **Self-esteem needs**: When staff is not provided with self-enriching tasks or are not given adequate recognition for the value that they add to the institution.

• **Self-actualisation needs**: When staff is not presented with appropriate motivation and encouragement to develop to their optimal capacity.

In addition, the psychological and physiological aspects mentioned above appear to be closely connected to the morale of educators at their institutions (Bush & Middlewood, 2005:78).

The link between the individual’s self-esteem and how he or she copes with conflict is highlighted by Bradshaw (2008:24). This is supported by Du Preez *et al.* (2003:20) who, in reference to Maslow’s work, point out that “When educators do not feel that their needs for esteem are met through the job, they become discouraged. People want to be recognised for their accomplishments”.

In further examining needs-based conflict, the issue of power plays a major role. According to Corbett (1991:74), “… power is the ability to get others to behave in ways that they ordinarily would not”. In addition, people’s lifestyles are determined by the power that they have, and individuals are driven by a need to “influence events that matter to us” (Wilmot & Hocker, 2001:96).

These views are supported by Bradshaw (2008:18-19), as indicated above, together with Tillet and French (2006:13) who add that individuals have a fundamental desire to exert authority, and that “some individuals need (sometimes to a pathological degree) to exercise, maintain, and gain power frequently, even in situations in which ‘winning’ is largely meaningless, [this] may provoke further conflict, or even have destructive long-term effects” (Tillet & French, 2006:13).
Conflict with regard to the need for power comes especially to the fore in organisations (including educational institutions) that are hierarchically structured (Landau, et al., 2001:16). Examples of such conflict are mentioned by Schermerhorn, et al. (2000:380) who argue that when an individual who holds a higher position or post in an institution has to rely on other individuals in positions below him or her, conflict could arise, sentiments that are also supported by Mc Shane and Von Glinow (2005:358-359).

### 2.4.3.4 Data-based conflict

Data-based conflict arises due to “lack of information, misinformation, different views on and interpretations of data and different assessment procedures” (Moore, 2003:64; Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007:11). Bradshaw (2008:19) agrees with the above statements, adding that people’s own perception of that which is being communicated influences their interpretation thereof, which could lead to conflict. Data-based conflict, according to Bradshaw (2008:19), is a result of misperception, misunderstanding and (or) miscommunication, as people’s reality is perceived in different ways by them, or as he puts it, “seeing only one side of the picture’ (Bradshaw, 2008:19), i.e. their side and not from another side’s perspective.

Mc Shane and Von Glinow (2005:394) believe that conflict in the workplace is heightened when very little chances are provided for adequate communication to take place or when communication is not sufficiently promoted. Champoux (2006:264) agrees with these sentiments, adding that tension between employees can increase as a result of misconceptions when they do not communicate regularly with one another. In addition, Bradshaw (2008:28) indicates that “frequently, information does not reach the decision makers, or decisions are not communicated effectively throughout the organisation, leading to unnecessary conflict behaviour”. It is therefore vital that effective communication among employees in institutions be fostered. However, Wilmot and Hocker (2001:21) point out that:

> “many times people communicate clearly in conflict interactions – only to find out that they are in an intractable conflict. Clarity of communication usually improves the process of conflict management greatly, but it is a mistake to assume that clarity removes conflict.”

(Wilmot & Hocker, 2001:21)

In addition, gossip and untruths are linked to data-based conflict. Scott (2010:289) contends that conflict may be heightened when gossip is disseminated amongst staff. The author points out that a clear distinction should be made between remarks that may be perceived as
acceptable and those that may be perceived as harmful to others and (or) to the institution. These views are supported by Ngcobo (2003:189), who argues that at schools where educators are obliged to use staff rooms during their non-contact times with learners, the opportunity for spreading untruths or inappropriate comment about others are greatly increased.

2.4.3.5 Structural conflict

According to Aquinas (2006:283), structural factors are concerned with the manner in which an organisation arranges the work to be done. Bradshaw (2008:19) indicates that structural conflict encompasses "social, political and economic structures", which are largely found within organisations. In further defining structural conflict, three facets of structural conflict will be broadly outlined below from an educational perspective, namely increased specialisation, interdependence and physical layout.

2.4.3.5.1 Increased specialisation

Increased specialisation is when various groups within the same organisation differ in respect of time-schedules and work objectives, which could lead to conflict between these groups (Hitt et al., 2006:433; Nelson & Quick, 2008:305). According to Van der Merwe (2003:31), many educational institutions are grouped into various sections, each with its own functions. This could lead to reduced collaboration amongst the educators working in the different departments, which could lead to conflict.

2.4.3.5.2 Interdependence

Interdependence refers to when personnel have to rely on each other either individually or in groups to perform tasks for the organisation (Champoux, 2006:264). According to Aquinas (2006:283) and Nelson and Quick (2008:305), it appears that this interdependence could lead to conflict when members of staff are not able to handle the workplace tasks as required. While agreeing with the above sentiments, Landau et al. (2001:24) add that as employees have increasingly grouped together to carry out their job-related activities, the individual differences amongst them may increase the incidence of conflict. In further illustrating this type of conflict, Steyn and Van Niekerk (2002:74) refer to a sports convenor that has finalised a sports gathering without consulting with the school’s Catering Committee, thereby creating an opportunity for conflict between the two parties.
2.4.3.5.3 Physical layout

Physical layout refers to the proximity between personnel and other employees inside the workplace (Hitt et al., 2006:439-440). The authors state that ineffective communication could occur between various individuals or groups when they are placed far apart from one another in the work environment. Prinsloo (2003:197) is of the opinion that relationships between educators will improve when their classrooms are closer to one another. However, Hitt et al. (2006:439-440) caution that staff sharing confined spaces with others may feel stressed due to the lack of privacy. The authors conclude that under these circumstances, the incidence of conflict amongst staff may be heightened.

2.4.3.6 Relationship conflict

Relationship conflicts, as defined by Moore (2003:64) and Littlejohn and Domenici (2007:12), refer to conflicts caused by “strong emotions, misperceptions or stereotypes, poor communication or miscommunication and repetitive negative behavior”.

Relationship conflicts, as defined by Moore (2003:64), refer to conflicts caused by intense feelings, inaccurate perceptions and stereotyping. Littlejohn and Domenici (2007:12) add that “poor communication or miscommunication and repetitive negative behavior” could also have an influence on relationships among people (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007:12), suggesting thus that these mentioned aspects could influence feelings, perceptions and even behaviour. Bradshaw (2008:19) is of the opinion that relationship conflict may arise based on how people engaged with one another previously. The author believes that people may be subconsciously drawn into conflict based on past experiences with others and that this could result in drawn-out friction between staff, due to lack of trust. These sentiments are supported by Dipaola (2003:153), who states that “there is a tendency for the parties to engage in stereo-type driven thinking”. Linked to the issue of misperception and lack of trust as mentioned above, “A person’s perception of unjust treatment, such as in the implementation of personnel policies and practices, or in reward and punishment systems, can lead to tension and conflict” (Van der Merwe, 2003:31).

In relation to the above, it appears that culture and diversity will influence relationships between employees. According to Mc Shane and Von Glinow (2005:394) and Nelson and Quick (2008:308), individuals who are from diverse cultures tend to limit their engagement with one another due to a lack of understanding of each other’s background. Supporting these views, Schermerhorn et al. (2000:377) add that racial, gender and homophobic perceptions increase the potential for conflict.
2.4.3.7 Concluding remarks

Apart from the above-mentioned bases of social conflict, literature identifies general causes of conflict related to organisations in particular. Many of these causes may be linked to various categories mentioned above, but due to the previous problem related by Bradshaw, it may prove too intricate to do so. These causes are outlined below. At the same time, it is important to note that categorising conflict and its causes seems to be quite challenging, as there are various ways of categorising, as evident from the literature presented.

2.4.4 General causes of organisational conflict from literature and research

Bradshaw (2008:28) states that, “Organisational conflicts arise from the same sources as other conflicts,” and that there are “a number of causes of conflict frequently cited within organisational context”. Since many of these causes were already alluded to previously under the various categories described in the above sub-section, and in trying to avoid a repetition thereof, the general causes of organisational conflict, will only be listed below:

- Poor communication – Conflict could arise in organisations where all role-players have not been adequately informed of or consulted with about relevant information (Bradshaw, 2008:28).
- Insufficient resources – As resources are limited (Bradshaw, 2008:18), staff have to share them, which could lead to much tension (Nelson & Quick, 2008:305).
- Values and beliefs – The diverse values and beliefs that people have, influence their conduct and cause people not being able to agree on many issues (Cowan, 2003:15).
- Poor management – This is when management is perceived as not being able to handle contentious issues adequately or dealing with matters subjectively, leading to unnecessary conflict (Bradshaw, 2008:29).
- Change – Change is often viewed as stressful, since people are generally reluctant to venture into the unknown, which could lead to conflict between people (Tillet & French, 2006:15).
- Dissatisfaction with roles – This conflict could occur as a result of individuals having different perceptions of the roles that they have to perform (Bradshaw, 2008:28) and could also be ascribed to “inadequate or inappropriate role definition” (Mullins, 1999:819).
Personality – Conflict could arise between staff as a result of diverse personalities; for example, those with a higher “conscientiousness” (work ethic) differ with those of a lower “conscientiousness” (Hitt et al., 2006:442).

Gossip – According to Scott (2010:289), significant conflict could develop as a result of personnel “who spread rumors”.

Honesty – A lack of honesty could lead to heightened tensions amongst employees (Scott, 2010:290).

Authority relationships – According to Nelson and Quick (2008:305-306), the hierarchical structure of organisations often leads to conflict between personnel due to diverse perceptions of authority, especially from individuals who “resent authority more than others” (Nelson & Quick, 2008:306).

Difference in perception – Since individuals perceive the world differently, ascribing their own views to phenomena, these different perceptions could lead to conflict (Mullins, 1999:818).

Distrust – In defining distrust as a cause of conflict, Greenberg and Baron (2003:416) indicate that distrust develops when individuals or groups perceive that others appear to be a threat to them and that there is difficulty in maintaining mutual trust.

Inequitable treatment – When an individual perceives that unfair treatment is being meted out in relation to the implementation of rules and procedures, or benefits and penalties, this could lead to heightened tensions (Mullins, 1999:819).

Similarities and differences – According to Cowan (2003:18), human beings have numerous similarities and differences in regard to their “belief systems, human traits, and conditioned responses” (Cowan, 2003:18), which inevitably results in conflict.

Violation of territory – There is a tendency for people to attach much value to material things and their space or “territory” (Cowan, 2003:19). Thus, tensions could arise when people feel that their personal space at work has been violated or that their roles and functions or even resources may be threatened by others (Tillet & French, 2006:14).

Departmentalisation and specialisation – Organisations are often structured in various departments with their own particular aims and objectives and these differences could come the fore when the departments have to engage with one another (Mullins, 1999:819).
• Stress-related – Conflict is associated with stress, since “a high level of stress in an individual or a group increases the risk of conflict” (Tillet & French, 2006:15).

• Environmental change – Tensions arise in an institution as a result of changes made to the working situation, such as those brought on by state “intervention, new technology or changing social values” (Mullins, 1999:820).

In reviewing the literature around conflict further, it is necessary to examine the role that conflict plays in organisations, hence the following section will elaborate on this.

2.5 ROLE AND CONSEQUENCES OF CONFLICT

According to Abigail and Cahn (2011:13), “Conflict is almost always associated with negative feelings”. Conflict is often viewed by many people as a phenomenon that is unwanted; hence it seems that organisations need to engage with conflict in order to curtail or dismiss it (Andrade, Plowman & Duchon, 2008:35). However, Okotoni and Okotoni (2003:28) contend that “Conflict [could] have both positive and negative effects on an organization depending on the management and its final outcome”. This view is supported by Rahim (2011:7) who in addition, indicates that “if a social system is to benefit from conflict, the negative effects of conflict must be reduced, and positive effects must be enhanced”.

Guttman (2009:33) believes that there exists a mistaken view that conflict cannot be good. He concedes that “While conflict can cause great harm, it has another side – one that is often overlooked”. Concurring, Pondy (1969:319) indicates that “Conflict is not necessarily bad or good, but must be evaluated in terms of its individual and organizational functions and dysfunctions”.

The sub-section below will examine the functional and dysfunctional role of conflict in organisations, as well as the possible outcomes of each.

2.5.1 Functional conflict

In literature, different terms are used to describe functional conflict. Deutsch (1969:10) refers to functional conflict as “constructive” conflict. This term is also utilised by Schermerhorn et al. (2000:376), Buelens et al. (2005:496) and Zide (2005:52). Wood (2003:71), however, uses the term “integrative” conflict when referring to functional conflict.
According to Deutsch (1969:10), conflict may be good when all the interacting parties have reached consensus around the conflicting issues involved and when they perceive that, as individuals, they have all developed positively through dealing with their differences. In agreement, Bacal (2004:21) adds that “The functional view of organizational conflict sees conflict as a productive force, one that can stimulate members of the organization to increase their knowledge and skills, as well as their contributions to organizational innovation and productivity”. This view is supported by Plocharczyk (2007:98), who states that conflict, when appropriately addressed, could be of much benefit to assist institutions in accomplishing their goals effectively. Concurring with the above authors are Ivancevich, Konopaske and Matteson (2005:357), who point out that functional conflict can “generally facilitate positive change”.

Bearing the sentiments expressed above in mind, functional conflict is viewed as positive, since it could assist an institution in enhancing its operational activities (Wood et al., 2004:599; Nelson & Quick, 2008:303; Robbins & Judge, 2009:520). The authors further indicate that through sound engagement in resolving conflict, people tend to gain a deeper understanding of their issues. This may help in building closer ties between staff which, in turn, may also enrich their work ethic, sentiments that are also shared by De Dreu, Van Dierendonck and De Best-Waldhober (2003:501), Cheldelin and Lucas (2004:7), Robbins (2005:195), Anstey (2006:7) and Hitt et al. (2006:437-438). In addition, it seems that appropriately handled conflict could promote “new ideas, improved teamwork and commitment, and can help the leader to better understand the people with whom he or she works”, (Bipath, 2008:87) – views that are also supported by De Dreu, et al. (2003:501).

In further support of the sentiments expressed above, Van der Merwe (2003:26-27) postulates that conflict is regarded as functional when individuals or groups have to take decisions in respect of options that are already available. Individuals will be able to make better choices when they have properly engaged with one another over issues. This type of conflict is concerned only with the manner in which individuals or groups wish to achieve their outcomes. According to Mullins (1999:817-818) and Cowan (2003:44), this form of functional conflict could lead to the development of more proficient solutions, the resolve of outstanding disagreements, and clearing up personal perceptions. In addition, Erickson and McNight (2001:148) contend that “If managed constructively, conflict presents opportunities for positive outcomes”. De Dreu et al. (2003:501) are also in agreement with these sentiments.
2.5.1.1 Results and/or outcomes of functional conflict

Functional conflict seems to have several outcomes. Rahim (2011:6) presents various functional outcomes of organisational conflict. The author indicates that conflict stimulates ingenuity and inventiveness, promotes problem-solving and could generate “synergistic solutions to common problems” (Rahim, 2011:6). In addition, conflict positively influences how organisations take decisions, assists persons in adopting innovative strategies and enhances the performance of people (Rahim, 2011:6). Further, the author points out that conflict encourage people to express their issues and concerns.

Zide (2005:52) is of the opinion that constructive conflict should generally be promoted, adding that conflict could be advantageous in assisting to resolve disagreements, enhancing goods produced, as well as the provision of services and assisting individuals in confronting challenges of transformation. Conflict could also advance and broaden inclusion and helping to create a collaborative culture among individuals and groups (Zide, 2005:52).

Further, Cowan (2003:44) believes that conflict that is handled well could produce the following positive outcomes:

- Stimulating a yeaming for knowledge and development.
- Promoting proficiency and competency.
- Helping to develop sound interaction among people.
- Encouraging and strengthening a cooperative spirit.
- Generating a climate of trust as well as open communication.
- Stimulating people to be creative and open to change.
- Enhancing a safe environment and mutual dependence among individuals.
- Building transparency and honesty.
- Advancing effectiveness.
- Encouraging people to be more responsible.
- Diverting actions to realise positive goals.
- Enhancing a tranquil and harmonious climate.

In addition, Mullins (1999:818) states that conflict could ensure that improved concepts could be developed, lingering issues could be confronted and settled and it (conflict) could allow
people to clarify their perceptions. The author also highlights that conflict presents opportunities for individuals to examine own capabilities.

Finally, Squelch and Lemmer (1994:150), in focusing on the school context, indicate that conflict may positively influence schools by leading to essential changes within educational institutions, renewal of programmes and generating a greater bond of closeness among school staff. The authors also believe that conflict promotes the adoption of respectful and admirable qualities between parties engaged in settling their differences.

In view of this literature, it would seem that functional conflict could be extremely helpful to an institution in enhancing for example its creativity, functioning and problem-solving capacity (Buelens et al., 2005:497).

### 2.5.2 Dysfunctional conflict

Dysfunctional conflict is referred to under different terms by various authors. Some authors, such as Schermerhorn et al. (2000:377), Parker and Stone (2003:107), Wood et al. (2004:600) and Plocharczyk (2007:88) use the term “destructive conflict” in reference to dysfunctional conflict. However, Wood (2003:71) favours the term “distributive” or “disruptive” conflict in relation to dysfunctional conflict.

Dysfunctional (destructive, distributive or disruptive) conflict is in contrast to functional and constructive conflict. Buelens et al. (2005:496) and Champoux (2006:256) state that dysfunctional conflict prejudices the aims of an organisation. Deutsch (1969:10) regards conflict as dysfunctional when the parties locked in conflict are not satisfied with how the conflict has been resolved and when they (the parties) perceive that their issues and concerns have not been adequately resolved. In addition, Ivancevich et al. (2005:357) contend that conflict is dysfunctional when the people who are engaged therein obstruct or negatively affect an institution from achieving its objectives. Concurring with these authors, Nelson and Quick (2008:303) and Robbins and Judge (2009:520) point out that dysfunctional conflict tends to break down relations between staff, hampers the ability to isolate key issues and has the potential to drive individuals and (or) groups against one another. The aforementioned authors also agree that dysfunctional conflict draws on people’s feelings rather than on the core issues, and that this could further alienate those in conflict, resulting in much discontent and estrangement. These views are supported by Robbins (2005:195), Anstey (2006:7) and Hitt et al. (2006:437-438).
2.5.2.1 Results and (or) outcomes of dysfunctional conflict

Zide (2005:52) and Plocharczyk (2007:88) indicate that when management is reluctant to deal with conflict, or handles conflict inappropriately, conflict tends to produce negative outcomes for institutions. This view of the negative impact of dysfunctional conflict is supported by Cowan (2003:44) and Hitt et al. (2006:436).

Rahim (2011:7) contends that the dysfunctional outcomes of organisational conflict often result in staff feeling stressed, overburdened and unhappy. The author adds that conflict causes employees to communicate less with one another, that it stimulates an environment lacking trust and sowing doubt, and that it negatively impacts on how people relate to one another. Conflict also lowers proficiency at work, causes individuals to increasingly oppose transformation, and adversely affects those who are dedicated, loyal and faithful to an institution (Rahim, 2011:7).

Linking up with these outcomes, Scott (2010:81) contends that conflict impacts negatively on the morale of individuals and not only affects those who are personally implicated in conflict, but also those who are inadvertently exposed to it. The author indicates that people’s health may be affected by stress-related factors as a result of being trapped in a conflict-laden work environment (Scott, 2010:80). Further, there seems to be a definite link between workplace conflict and “reduced well-being and deteriorating health” (De Dreu et al., 2003:510). These authors argue that conflict in the work environment also impacts on the “individual well-being” (De Dreu et al., 2003:503) of people since conflict could be highly emotive “and elicits anger, disgust and fear” (De Dreu et al., 2003:503).

In addition, Tillet and French (2006:16), while in support of the above views, indicate that conflict could provoke anger, anxiety, distress, fear and aggression. These authors also argue that conflict creates dysfunctional patterns of interaction, obstructs problem-solving and hinders self-development. Other dysfunctional outcomes of conflict mentioned by the authors are that conflict breaks down group cohesion or identity, encourages entrenched position-taking, and may provoke self-destructive behaviour, including verbal, psychological or physical violence.

Further, Cowan (2003:44) indicates that when conflict is not well managed, people may not be motivated to cooperate with one another; the ability to learn and grow is stifled; and enthusiasm and innovativeness may be dampened. Also, a sense of lethargy may be generated, individuals may adopt a defensive attitude, and blame and mistakes may be shifted onto others (Cowan, 2003:44). The author points out that conflict could stir underlying motives and create the potential for explosive behaviour.
Further emphasising the dysfunctional outcomes of conflict, Bipath (2008:87) refer to lowered productivity, antagonistic and indignant staff, added expenditure, high levels of staff remaining absent, and employees who are continually changing jobs. Haraway and Haraway (2005:11) concur with the aforementioned authors, adding that conflict that is not managed appropriately, could result in death.

These all relate to the potential impact that dysfunctional conflict have on people, the way they act and their interpersonal relations. In view of the outcomes of dysfunctional conflict, Buelens et al. (2005:496) indicate that management needs to find ways of stamping out potential negative conflict in the workplace. Champoux (2006:256) believes that it is incumbent on management to ensure that conflict does not degenerate into its dysfunctional form. To this end, Plocharczyk (2007:88) declares that constructive conflict can be promoted by management through the provision of incentives and praise to those staff who display appropriate attitudes and conduct when interacting with others in dealing with issues of conflict. In conclusion, Singleton et al. (2011:156) state that the level of functionality or dysfunctionality of conflict relies on “(1) the intentions, and perceived intentions, of the actors in conflict scenarios; (2) whether the actors and others are knowledgeable about and capable of using conflict management and resolution theories and tools; and (3) the extent to which an organisation’s leaders and culture support functional conflict as a normal part of creativity and innovation”.

From the views expressed above, it seems that the management of conflict plays a pivotal role in whether conflict ends up being functional or dysfunctional. It would therefore seem plausible that management had to ensure that conflict needs to be engaged with in a manner that could lead to positive outcomes.

2.6 CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES OR CHOICES WHEN DEALING WITH CONFLICT

Acting intuitively when dealing with conflict may not be the most appropriate manner of handling it (Squelch & Lemmer, 1994:151). The authors point out that “there is no single best conflict style, [and] managers should analyse each situation carefully and then react appropriately” (Squelch & Lemmer, 1994:151). The management and end-result of conflict are greatly influenced by the individuals and groups engaged in conflict (Ngcobo, 2003:197). This means that the manner in which parties “approach the conflict and manage their differences is critical” in determining the outcomes thereof (De Dreu et al., 2003:501). Ultimately, however, the head of the school needs to establish an atmosphere wherein “people in conflict remain willing to discuss and listen to each other”, (Dipaola, 2003:152) and
action needs to be taken the moment that conflict rears its head between personnel (Loock et al., 2006:43).

There are a wide variety of conflict management techniques or strategies available for conflict to be managed at organisations in general and at schools in particular. In the subsections that follow, the various strategies or techniques of conflict management, as determined by Thomas (1976:894-912), will be discussed. This model of handling conflict is founded on the work of Blake and Mouton (1964:8-15), which has subsequently been adapted by Thomas and Kilmann, who classify conflict handling “By the two underlying dimensions of assertiveness and cooperativeness” (Thomas, 1992:266). In addition, Rahim (1983:368-369) also drew on the work of the aforementioned authors in designing a similar model for the management of interpersonal conflict. This process of resolving conflict as per the styles of “avoiding, competing (dominating), accommodating (obliging), collaborating (integrating) and compromising”, is also recognised by Vokic and Sontor (2009:6) as an invaluable model of dealing with conflict. At the same time, it is important to note that it is not just managers that have to deal with conflict; teachers, too, must handle conflict within the school context. Hence, it is not only management that uses the following styles: Post level 1 teachers could also deal with conflict by embracing the subsequent styles. Figure 2.4 presents an overview of the different styles.

**FIGURE 2.4: Thomas Kilmann’s two-dimensional model of conflict handling (Thomas, 1976: 900, redrawn)**

![Diagram showing Thomas Kilmann's two-dimensional model of conflict handling.](image-url)
2.6.1 Avoiding

According to Aquinas (2006:288) and Huczynski and Buchanan (2007:778), avoidance is when no attempts are made at responding to conflict situations and issues are side-stepped. In defining this avoidance strategy, Loock et al. (2003:29) point out that individuals who adopt this strategy do not attach any sense in being drawn into conflict with others. McNamara (2008:3) concurs with this sentiment, adding that some people simply act as if there is no conflict, or disregard whatever conflict may arise.

Fox (2006:132) agrees with these views, further stating that individuals at times choose to shirk away from controversial issues that could lead to conflict. Similarly, Plocharczyk (2007:92) indicates that individuals who are fearful of dealing with conflict will try to evade conflict at all cost, so that they can maintain their neutrality. This strategy is also described as “unassertive, uncooperative” by Steyn and Van Niekerk (2002:81). In addition, Rahim (2002:220) believes that persons who choose to adopt this strategy generally have a low concern for self and others. Folger et al. (2005:66) agree with these authors, referring to these individuals who use an avoidance strategy as “apathetic, isolated, or evasive”. This strategy leads to a lose-lose outcome, as further clarified in section 2.8.1.2 below. An example of the avoiding strategy is provided by Steyn and Van Niekerk (2002:80), who state that “when a principal gets involved in an argument with (the) district manager over a policy for the school that he believes is not in the interest of either the learners or the teachers. Rather than continue the argument, the principal withdraws from the conflict and accepts the policy”.

However, there are circumstances in which this strategy could be appropriate, such as when the issue is trivial or where the potential dysfunctional effect of confronting the other party outweighs the benefits of the resolution of conflict (Rahim, Garrett & Buntzman, 1992:425). Loock et al. (2003:28-29) and Bipath (2008:89) concur, adding that this strategy should be used when there is a possibility that the issues giving rise to the conflict could be handled better by other individuals or parties. In addition, Cloke and Goldsmith (2000:40) recommend that this strategy be used when time is required for relevant data to be collected and a time-out period is necessary for people’s emotions to calm down.

2.6.2 Dominating or forcing

This strategy allows one party to overpower the other in striving to achieve its own agenda, without regard to the other party’s interests (Mc Shane & Von Glinow, 2005:396; Aquinas, 2006:290; Brown & Harvey, 2006:325; Huczynski & Buchanan, 2007:778). Gross and
Guerrero (2000:206) point out that “The dominating style relies on the use of position, power, aggression, verbal dominance, and perseverance”.

According to Rahim (2002:220), people who follow such a forceful approach will do everything possible to achieve their goals without due consideration of the concerns of others. Concurring, Lussier (2005:213) states that this strategy is forceful and intimidating and could leave aggrieved individuals with much bitterness.

The dominating strategy is characterised by a “high concern for self and low concern for others” (Rahim et al., 1992:425). In addition, Ngcobo (2003:191) indicates that this strategy displays “high assertiveness but low cooperativeness”. This strategy could end up in disputing parties achieving either a win-lose or lose-win result (this win-lose or lose-win outcome is discussed further in Section 2.7.1). Steyn and Van Niekerk (2002:79), in illustrating an example of the dominating strategy, refer to a principal who warns an educator that should he or she be late again, such lack of punctuality will be recorded as evidence.

There are times, however, when it may be conducive to apply this strategy. Cloke and Goldsmith (2000:41) believe that the dominating style of handling conflict may be applied when an immediate or definite response is required, when there is a crisis situation, and when disliked policies need to be adhered to. These authors further state that this style could be utilised when a strong stance has to be taken in defending a position or belief and when there are attempts to undermine people’s cooperative nature.

2.6.3 Problem solving

The problem solving strategy is referred to as an “integrating style” by Rahim (2002:218). This strategy also encompasses a “collaborative” tendency when applied to conflicting situations (Gross & Guerrero, 2000:205). The term collaborating instead of problem solving is also favoured by Folger et al. (2005:66).

When adopting this strategy, people involved in conflict should be granted a reasonable opportunity to state their issues and give the other party a hearing (Landau et al., 2001:38; Stepsis, 2003:19; Roulis, 2004:120). According to Deutsch and Coleman (2000:187-188) and Steyn and Van Niekerk (2002:81), the problem-solving strategy entails first defining the issue and then determining ways of resolving it, to the satisfaction of all parties concerned.

The problem solving strategy ensures that there is a “high concern for self and others”, (Rahim, 2002:218). This strategy also reflects a large tendency towards “assertiveness and
cooperation" (Ngcobo, 2003:192). When this strategy is applied by those involved in conflict, it may lead to a win-win situation for all concerned (the win-win approach is discussed in section 2.7.3). In an example of the problem solving strategy, Maurer in Steyn and Van Niekerk (2002:81) refers to a principal who consults with educators in regard to achieving better results in the following way:

“As you can see from the handout I gave you, our test results show some good news and some bad news. We need to improve student writing abilities in this building. That is evident. I am open to any ideas that can lead to this result. In the next few weeks I will be meeting with you in small groups to discuss your ideas. I am open to any idea, so please give it some thought.”

(Maurer, cited by Steyn and Van Niekerk, 2002:81)

There are situations in which the problem solving strategy may be appropriate to use. When using the problem solving strategy, Van der Merwe (2003:34) indicates that the conflict needs to be clearly recognised and delineated; alternative options or solutions need to be called for; and every alternative must be assessed. The author further states that the most suitable option must be chosen and that the accepted option or alternative must be applied. Also, the implementation and success of the selected process should be maintained and reviewed periodically (Van der Merwe, 2003:34).

Loock et al. (2003:29) contend that the problem solving strategy is appropriate to apply when immediate decisions are required due to the limited time available; when the well-being of the school is essential; and when there is a need for confronting individuals who are intent on taking advantage of those who display a cooperative spirit. In addition to the above, Squelch and Lemmer (1994:151) point out that the problem solving strategy can be used when the issues at stake are vital, when developing a deeper understanding of issues is essential, and when innovative ways of resolving problems are required.

2.6.4 Accommodating

According to Robbins and Judge (2009:524), this strategy is used when the one conflicting individual or group rather accedes to the other individual or group in order to maintain the peace. This understanding is also accepted by Mc Shane and Von Glinow (2005:396), Aquinas (2006:289), Brown and Harvey (2006:325), Hitt et al. (2006:448) and Huczynski and Buchanan (2007:778). Lussier (2005:214) argues that this strategy is able to satisfy one of the conflicting parties only, while Landau et al. (2001:36) suggest that “Accommodating
means putting other people’s needs ahead of our own, that is, being prepared to forego meeting our substantive interests in order to build a good relationship with other people”. However, Ngcobo (2003:192), whilst in agreement with these authors, cautions that this strategy could hamper valuable input from being utilised by institutions and “may result in a loss of influence, respect and recognition of individuals’ strengths and capabilities”.

Ngcobo (2003:192) states that this strategy would be preferred by people who are “unassertive but cooperative”. These sentiments are supported by Folger et al. (2005:66) and Aquinas (2006:289). In this situation, the accommodating strategy lends itself to a win-lose outcome, which is discussed in section 2.7.1. At my school, I have experienced numerous examples of the accommodating strategy being applied. An example where this occurred, is when the Deputy Principal allowed a grade head to implement a cultural programme in a manner that was not in keeping with the Deputy Principal’s ideas. This was based on the Deputy Principal’s acceptance of the fact that the cultural programme should go ahead, albeit in a different way, since it was in the best interests of the school.

Cloke and Goldsmith (2000:41) contend that the accommodating strategy can be applied when there is acknowledgement that individuals have attached enormous value to the issues at stake. The authors also believe that this strategy can be used when one’s own case is not strong enough and when by accommodating the other party, further potential negative effects may be curtailed. Further, use of this strategy is justified when harmonious relationships need to be maintained and when there is a chance to assist others in gaining experience due to faults or errors committed (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2000:41).

2.6.5 Compromising

Compromising is involved when people in conflict decide to forego some of their concerns in order to achieve a settlement for the sake of their working relationships (Mc Shane & Von Glinow, 2005:396; Aquinas, 2006:289; Brown & Harvey, 2006:325; Hitt et al. 2006:448; Huczynski & Buchanan, 2007:778; Robbins & Judge, 2009:524). Fox (2006:132) explains that compromising involves differing parties agreeing to some form of resolution, despite not being able to agree on all the issues at stake.

Rahim (2011:29) states that compromising is about “give-and-take or sharing whereby both parties give up something to make a mutually acceptable decision”. These sentiments are supported by Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001:46), who add that the aim of this strategy is to arrive at a central position where consensus can be achieved. In concurring, Plocharczyk (2007:92) emphasises that this strategy is advantageous to all, since the parties involved in
conflict are prepared to drop some of their concerns in order to achieve an amicable resolution that could be beneficial to all concerned. However, Squelch and Lemmer (1994:151) caution that “Compromising behavior can lead to wheeling and dealing, at the expense of principles and values”.

The compromising strategy is characterised by individuals who display assertiveness and cooperation in a moderate manner (Rahim et al., 1992:425; Ngcobo, 2003:192). This strategy lends itself to a win-win situation and (or) a win-part, lose-part situation. Both of these approaches are discussed in sections 2.7.3 and 2.7.4. Ngcobo (2003:192) provides the following example of the compromising strategy: Some teachers may be of the opinion that too much time is dedicated to assemblies every morning and a compromise is reached in terms of which assembly is held on two days in a week.

There are times when this strategy may be appropriately applied. Cloke and Goldsmith (2000:41) believe that the compromising strategy may be used in a positive manner when one party is willing to forsake goals that are not highly valued and when differing parties are equally powerful and highly value shared objectives. The authors are also of the opinion that the compromising strategy could be beneficial when interim measures are required to resolve issues; when a speedy resolution to issues are important; and when collaborating and competitive strategies have not delivered the desired effect.

These five strategies, as outlined by Thomas (1976:894-912), form the cornerstone of the handling of conflict as per this study. The following section covers the outcomes of conflict management.

### 2.7 CONFLICT MANAGEMENT OUTCOMES

According to Fisher (2000:4), the way in which conflict is approached, could determine whether conflict could end up being dysfunctional or negative or could lead to positive or functional outcomes. Concurring, Loock et al. (2003:20) state that individuals or parties who are embroiled in conflict all have unique attitudes towards resolving conflict. In addition, Van der Merwe (2003:32) points out that this is “Because of personality and perception differences”. This implies that the approach adopted by various individuals towards conflict results in different outcomes. In addition, numerous “conflict management strategies” are linked to “different types of conflict”, which could influence the outcomes of conflict (De Dreu et al., 2003:502). In looking at ways of dealing with conflict, Carpenter and Kennedy (2001:18-25) state that conventional approaches to manage conflict are, for example “avoiding it, leaping into battle and trying to find a quick fix,” (2001:18). However, other
options, such as a win-win situation, is also possible and it is therefore suggested that alternative ways be found to deal with conflict; for example, problem solving. Van der Merwe (2003:32) indicates that the most prevalent conflict management approaches within educational institutions are the win-lose approach, the win-win approach, and the lose-lose approach. Another approach added to this list is a win-part, lose-part or compromise approach (Hitt et al., 2006:446). These approaches will be discussed in the sub-sections below.

2.7.1 The Win-Lose or Lose-Win approach or outcome

In this situation, only one group or person’s issues are satisfactorily dealt with (Schermrhorn et al., 2000:383). Loock et al. (2003:20) concur that in this scenario, “the person’s own interests are of vital concern and no compromise will be considered”. In addition, Van der Merwe (2003:32) indicates that “a person with this approach to conflict is prepared to endanger personal relationships and even to sacrifice others for the sake of his personal views and convictions”.

According to Fisher (2000:5), the win-lose or lose-win approach becomes evident when voting has to be done over issues or through authoritarian leadership and hidden motives: “threat, innuendo – whatever works is acceptable, i.e. the end justifies the means” (Fisher, 2000:5). This approach comes to the fore when the dominating and accommodating strategies of resolving conflict is used in organisations, as mentioned above.

2.7.2 The Lose-Lose approach or outcome

In the lose-lose approach, neither individual or party is satisfied with the outcome of the issues involved in the conflict (Schermrhorn et al., 2000:383; Hitt et al., 2006:446). Van der Merwe (2003:32) is of the opinion that the opposing sides are not open to accommodate one another. In addition, Schermrhorn et al. (2000:383) indicate that the basic causes of the conflict is never dealt with and that the same conflict may therefore reoccur at a later stage.

The lose-lose approach to confronting conflict is usually evident when the avoiding strategy of handling conflict is used, as discussed above. In this type of approach, all parties stand to lose, because the conflict is never effectively resolved.

2.7.3 The Win-Win approach or outcome

According to Fisher (2000:5), the win-win strategy is a concerted effort made by all parties involved in conflict to achieve most of their objectives “through collaborative problem solving”
(Fisher, 2000:5). In this approach, the concerns of all individuals or groups are settled (Moore, 2003:107) and all interested groups are able to achieve their objectives (Hitt et al., 2006:447).

The win-win approach promotes transparent discussion and the candid expression of emotions in achieving mutual agreement between differing parties (Schermhoorn et al., 2000:383). In addition, the authors indicate that this approach is characterised by a large measure of assertive and cooperative behaviour that assists all individuals and groups in reaching agreement. Further, the focus is directed at the “quality of the long term relationships between the parties, rather than short term accommodations”, (Fisher, 2000:5).

The win-win approach is most evident when conflict is managed through the problem solving strategy, as mentioned in Section 2.6.3 above.

2.7.4 Lose-part, Win-part (Compromise) approach

In the lose-part, win-part approach, “both parties give up something in order to receive something else”, (Hitt et al., 2006:447). According to Steyn and Van Niekerk (2002:80), “Compromising is used when there is a balance of power between the parties, or when resources have to be shared, for example when there is limited stock of school stationery”. This approach or outcome is evident when the compromising strategy is applied in resolving conflict (refer to section 2.6.5 above).

It seems that the approach that one has towards dealing with conflict is indicative of the outcome that will be achieved. In the next section, general suggestions when trying to resolve conflict are presented.

2.8 GENERAL SUGGESTIONS WHEN TRYING TO RESOLVE CONFLICT

Purkey et al. (2010:111) list the following practical suggestions when facing persons around issues of conflict:

- Be mindful of physical (bodily) signs that may indicate the level of a person’s emotional state.
- Ensure that you have given much thought to your response before engaging with the other party.
Maintain a total awareness of the issues at stake and avoid being side-tracked by petty, irrelevant matters.

Focus on listening actively to be able to respond openly and in a credible manner.

Always try to gain an awareness of the “concerns and beliefs of all involved” in trying to develop a deeper understanding of other people’s “feelings and perceptions” (Purkey et al., 2010:111).

Wood et al. (2004:605) provide the following pointers to improving one’s proficiency in dealing with conflict:

- Uncover the causes of the conflict, as well the underlying meaning thereof.
- Have an open and active mind when listening to all parties.
- Be frank and open when expressing feelings.
- Explore underlying concerns, needs, feelings, aspirations and motives of those involved in conflict.
- Refrain from judging in favour of any party; rather develop sound communication between the disputants.
- Strive to build an inner sense of compassion and resolve.
- Be creative when solving issues and ensure implementation of resolutions.

In the section that follows, the various approaches and outcomes in regard to the handling of conflict are discussed.

2.9 SPECIFIC ASPECTS TO CONSIDER WHEN HANDLING CONFLICT

In the previous section, general suggestions for dealing with conflict were provided. In this section, specific aspects are highlighted, such as the importance of effective communication, emotions and cultural differences.

2.9.1 Active listening for effective communication

Communication is an essential aspect of resolving conflict; listening actively plays a pivotal role herein (Fisher & Ury, 1992:33-35). According to Abigail and Cahn (2011:73), listening involves making enough time available to listen attentively to the speaker, being receptive to
alternate viewpoints and acting in a non-judgmental manner. Scott (2010:275) mentions a number of points to show participants that there is active listening by all participants. The author indicates that there needs to be an openness in how one’s physical presence is presented, and that the listener has to look at the speaker. Also, the listener should pause before attempting to rectify or clarify issues with the speaker and ensure that all relevant information has been recorded. Lastly, the listener has to strive towards responding in a positive manner to what the other party (or parties) have said, and determine strategies of reducing or softening harsh words that may have been spoken by the parties concerned.

With regard to speaking for effective communication, Cloke and Goldsmith (2000:65-66) list the following additional points:

- Consider and determine what the other party expects of you.
- Decide on a suitable or fitting manner of speaking.
- Speak firmly, with respect and acknowledgement.
- Ensure that those listening are comfortable.
- Acknowledge that you share the inner concerns of others.
- Express your deep concerns instead of making demands.
- Look ahead for possible questions that may require responses.
- Admit to divergent interests and reframe the problem without negativity.
- Explain and reiterate matters agreed on.
- Look at finding ways of generating amicable resolutions.
- Ensure that issues are cleared up by questioning individuals for clarity.
- Commend those involved for giving a hearing and being receptive to the views of others.

Lastly, Cowan (2003:167) suggests that the management of conflict could be improved through “communicating strategically”. The author highlights the importance of speaking in an audible tone, the expression of points of view in a precise or unambiguous manner, and ensuring that the words used clearly illustrate meanings and intentions. Also, one’s choice of words and vocabulary should allow the listener to clearly understand to what you are alluding (Cowan, 2003:167).
2.9.2 Emotions

Moore (2003:167) believes that emotion is an important factor when dealing with conflict. The author indicates that the intense expression of negative emotions could hinder finding acceptable solutions and could lead to a rift between individuals and groups in conflict. While in agreement with the above, Fisher and Ury (1992:30-33) present various suggestions with regard to the handling of emotions in conflict situations. The authors state that parties in conflict need to admit their feelings around issues and seek to gain insight into their emotions and that these emotions need to be unequivocally stated and recognised as being justified. Also, the parties in the conflict need to be provided with the opportunity to express their emotions in order to “let off steam” (Fisher & Ury, 1992:31), although, they (the parties) need to contain heightened emotional expressions (Fisher & Ury, 1992:32). Parties can display positive emotions by using “symbolic gestures” such as offering an “apology” or a “handshake” (Fisher & Ury, 1992:33).

2.9.3 Cultural differences

Cowan (2003:77) states that “Everyone walks to different drumbeat, hears through a different filter, and sees through a different lense”. Culture is defined as the manner in which people conduct themselves and interact with others (Schuck et al., 2005:45). The authors indicate that “culture applies as much to aspects of professional policy and practice as it does to personal interactions and protocols, and extra-professional activities among staff” (Cowan, 2003:77), in relation to the school situation.

According to Marriner-Tomey (2000:144), different “attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviors” are as a result of diverse cultures. Due to the diverse nature of different cultures, Schermerhorn et al. (2000:377) state that “racial tensions, homophobia, gender gaps, and more” (Schermerhorn et al., 2000:377) confront people in their daily lives and thus cultural differences may be regarded as an important dimension of conflict (Nelson & Quick, 2008:308). In addition, the way in which people manage conflict is also influenced by their “cultural background” (Mc Shane & Von Glinow, 2005:397). These authors highlight research that indicates that “people with (a) high (sense of) collectivism” (Mc Shane & Von Glinow, 2005:397) strive to uphold sound personal interactions with others, and prefer to handle conflict with “avoidance or problem solving” (Mc Shane & Von Glinow, 2005:397) styles or strategies. They (the authors) point out that individuals with a sense of “low collectivism” (Mc Shane & Von Glinow, 2005:397) tend to use a “compromising or forcing style” (Mc Shane & Von Glinow, 2005:397) in their approach to dealing with conflict.
In analysing cultural diversity further, Doherty and Guyler (2008:93) contend that Asian cultures such as those in China and Japan prefer harmonious models of resolving conflict whereas English-speaking cultures such as those in the United States and the United Kingdom, prefer a “more confrontational” approach. The authors point out that in Spain and France, as well as certain South American states a “more regulative” (Doherty & Guyler, 2008:93) approach apply via arbitrative and judicial measures when dealing with conflict.

2.10 NEGOTIATION AND ITS SEVEN ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER WHEN DEALING WITH CONFLICT

Cheldelin and Lucas (2004:82) state that “Negotiation is an attempt to find some settlement by a process of giving and taking”. In addition, there is continuous engagement between conflicting parties regarding concerns that are common and those that are contrary in striving to resolve issues (Fisher & Ury, 1992:xii). At the same time, negotiation can also occur between two persons when they are dealing with conflict between them; hence, a third party is not necessarily required to assist. These seven elements also provide useful insight that persons can take note of when talking about conflict. Therefore, this section is included here, as some of the general aspects highlighted in Section 2.8, as well as aspects in Section 2.9, will also come to the fore in this section.

Since there is a wide variety of approaches and strategies of negotiations, Patton (2005:280) has suggested a negotiation approach that was designed at the Harvard Negotiation Project which involves seven key criteria of negotiation. Figure 2.5 provide a pictorial overview of these steps.

**FIGURE 2.5: Seven Elements of Negotiation (Patton, 2005:295) (Re-drawn)**
These Seven Elements of Negotiation, as depicted in Figure 2.3, are interests, options, legitimacy, relationships, communication, alternatives and commitment (Patton, 2005:280-285; Alfredson & Cungu, 2008:18-25). Each step is elaborated upon below (Patton, 2005:280-285; Alfredson & Cungu, 2008:18-25).

2.10.1 Interests

Interests relate to a “party’s basic needs, wants, and motivations” (Patton, 2005:280-281). Individuals all have different interests that drive them to take up specific positions or viewpoints around issues. These interests may be broad and could also in many instances be contradictory and (or) complex. This could require individuals to restructure their interests in “order of importance” (Fisher, Ury & Patton, 1981:51). The interests of the persons involved in conflict could be similar to all, different or opposing (Fisher & Ury, 1992:43); this will inevitably become the focal point of negotiation. Therefore, one has to consider all the different interests, i.e. the ‘why’ something is important to a person.

2.10.2 Legitimacy or standards of fairness

Legitimacy is concerned with rightfulness and fair treatment. Parties involved in conflict place enormous emphasis on accepting settlements that are fair and just. For negotiations to succeed, it is imperative for the participants to perceive that the solutions offered are not unfairly structured at the expense of their interests. Therefore, one has to ensure that one is reasonable, as interests, not positions, are important (Fisher & Ury, 1992:11; Patton, 2005:281-282).

2.10.3 Relationship

The negotiator needs to establish a sound relationship with all the participants involved in conflict, as well as with any other role-players who may affect the negotiation process. Also, the negotiator has to reflect on his/her own relationship in terms of his/her inner conscience in steadfastly maintaining fair, just and principled values throughout the negotiation process (Fisher, et al., 1981:86-87). Therefore, the person should be separated from the “problem” (Fisher & Ury, 1992:11), i.e. the focus should be on confronting the problem and not the people involved. Therefore, relationships should be enhanced and not be allowed to deteriorate (Fisher, et al., 1981:57).
2.10.4 Alternatives and BATNA

Should negotiations reach a stalemate, the negotiator needs to make the participants in the conflict aware of possible scenarios that may unfold as a consequence thereof. The negotiator has to present these options, “commonly referred to as the negotiator’s Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement or BATNA” (Patton, 2005:283) to the parties for selection. These alternatives or BATNA may often not appear too agreeable to the parties concerned, which could result in them agreeing to further negotiations to reach a settlement.

2.10.5 Options

In defining “options”, Patton (2005:283) states that “Options are possible agreements or pieces of a potential agreement upon which negotiators might possibly agree” (Patton, 2005:283). There are various ways of presenting options to make them more agreeable to the parties involved. The most common approach here is for the parties to trade off (exchange) elements related to the conflict issues (Cheldelin & Lucas, 2004:82) in attempting to create more acceptable options.

2.10.6 Commitments

Patton (2005:284) contends that “A commitment is an agreement, demand, offer, or promise by one or more parties, and any formalization of that agreement” (Patton, 2005:284). Commitments in various forms may emerge during any stage of negotiation and may relate to negligible or more complex procedures or conditions in developing a settlement. The author posits that agreements should be realistic, acceptable and workable.

2.10.7 Communication

The seventh element is the “communication process by which parties discuss and deal with the preceding six elements of negotiation” (Patton, 2005:284). This relates to how the parties interact with one another and deal with the processes of negotiation.

The author concludes that these seven elements may be the most appropriate approach to resolve conflict through negotiation. However, he (the author) concedes that a myriad of other factors may influence the negotiation process and that there are many other ways of handling negotiations.

At the same time, Fisher and Ury (1992:42-43) state that when dealing with conflict, the interests are at the core, not the positions. They further suggest that one has to try and
understand one another's perceptions of the issues at hand (Fisher & Ury, 1992:23). The authors further suggest that the people involved should be separated from the problem, but Patton (2005:298-299) indicated that sometimes the person cannot be separated from the problem, as the person is the problem.

Communication should be effective and efficient, i.e. it should bring about not only a clear understanding, but it should be done in such a manner that understanding is reached within a reasonable amount of time (Bradshaw, 2008:91).

2.11 APPROACHES, STRATEGIES OR STAGES OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

There are a plethora of other strategies/techniques/approaches available to deal with conflict in organisations when people or groups are involved in conflict. Some of these techniques are based on the suggested three-stage-seven-step procedure of Landau et al. (2001:41-64). Landau et al. (2001:41-64) suggest a collaborative conflict resolution strategy. Folger et al. (2009:241-244) on the other hand provide a five step process for conflict resolution. Dana (2001:94-107) suggests eight steps for team mediation and Cloke and Goldsmith (2000:210-212) provide a five step creative problem-solving approach to assist with conflict resolution. The underpinned principles of these approaches could also be useful when two or more individuals are involved in conflict; therefore, these principles could be useful when trying to solve conflict.

In the sub-sections below, the collaborative conflict resolution strategy of Landau et al. (2001:41-64) is discussed, while a broad overview of the strategies of Folger et al. (2009:241-244), Dana (2001:94-107) and Cloke and Goldsmith (2000:210-212) is presented in another sub-section. These strategies share similarities, also with the strategy of Landau et al. (2001:41-64), regarding steps and procedures that should be followed in resolving and managing conflict.

2.11.1 Collaborative conflict resolution

Landau et al. (2001:41-64) propose a three stage collaborative strategy in working towards resolving conflict. This is set out as follows:

Stage 1: This involves establishing the root causes of the conflict, as well as determining the role that interpersonal factors may have in escalating the tension. It is then important to check whether the conflict has arisen as a result of the issues being of an interpersonal or a substantive nature. This is because individuals are often engaged in conflict due to
interpersonal differences, which may at times escalate minor problems into huge complexities.

In establishing the root causes of conflict, it is essential to communicate with the persons concerned through individual interviews instead of group interviews. The authors are of the opinion that this can assist individuals in expressing themselves more openly and freely about issues. In addition, the authors point out that individuals are more likely to respond positively through such interviews when they are assured that their information will be treated in confidence and when the interviewer has a measure of credibility.

The naming and classifying of issues can be undertaken after examining the data. In this way, the central issues of the conflict, as perceived by the parties engaged, can be determined. According to the authors, “people need to trust one another and communicate respectfully” (Landau et al., 2001:47), as this is an important feature of trying to resolve issues of conflict.

Stage 2: This stage concerns the handling of essential interpersonal matters. The authors indicate that the task of resolving “substantive issues” (Landau et al., 2001:44) is less difficult when “interpersonal issues” have already been dealt with.

Stage 3: The focus here is on resolving the “substantive issues” (Landau et al., 2001:44) through “a problem-solving process to arrive at solutions that takes everyone’s needs and ideas into account” (Landau et al., 2001:44). The authors suggest using an “interest-based approach” (Landau et al., 2001:55), which is founded on the Principled Negotiation Model designed by the Harvard Law School Program on Negotiation, as presented by Fisher and Ury (1991:10-14) in the following way:

Step 1: “Introduce the Process and Define the Issue”
In this step, the aims of the approach, the measures to be conducted and the underlying principles to be adhered to are outlined by the internal/external third party/mediator/facilitator. In addition, Fisher and Ury in Landau et al. (2001:57) believe that the parties in the conflict need to be made aware of other options that could be determined when a resolution is not found. This is referred to as BATNA, meaning “The best, worst, and most likely alternatives to a negotiated agreement” (2001:57). When there is an impasse in negotiations and the parties involved are presented with a BATNA that appears to be extremely negative, the chances improve that the parties may become more open to finding a better solution.
Step 2: “Exchange Stories”
In this step, the individuals are given a chance to present their sides of the issues, from their perspectives. This will assist in placing the emphasis on “interests” rather than “positions” (Landau et al., 2001:59).

Step 3: “Explore Underlying Interests”
Here, the individuals have the opportunity of expressing their essential “needs, concerns, values, fears, and other interests underlying their positions” (Landau et al., 2001:59).

Step 4: “Agree on a Mutual Problem Statement”
During this step, differing parties develop a joint statement encompassing all their essential interests. In this way, the parties attempt to work together in resolving the issues.

Step 5: “Brainstorm Options for Solving the Mutual Problem Statement”
The aim of this step is to ensure that none of the parties “lose face” (Landau et al., 2001:62) in trying to find an agreement. The process of “brainstorming” (Landau et al., 2001:62) seeks to encourage more innovative ways of reaching a settlement.

Step 6: “Evaluate Options”
In this step, individuals and (or) groups can embark on examining, assessing and discussing all the options presented in the previous step. The options may then be adapted and/or restructured in order to make them more readily acceptable to all the parties concerned.

Step 7: “Reach Agreement”
Here, the individuals and (or) groups choose a solution that is acceptable to all involved in the conflict. The terms of the undertaking should be accepted in writing by all parties.

Landau et al. (2001:64) are of the view that the interest-based approach, as described above, compares well with the transformational approach of Bush and Folger (Bush & Folger, 1994, cited by Landau et al., 2001:64) in resolving conflict. The authors conclude that these approaches are based on developing “creative”, “acceptable solutions to complex organizational conflicts and to transform relationships” (Landau et al., 2001:65).

2.11.2 Overview of conflict resolution or management procedures
The other conflict resolution or management procedures interlinked with that of Landau et al. (2001:41-64) is the five step process of Folger et al. (2009:241-244), the eight steps to team

Most conflict resolution or management procedures commence with the establishment and definition of the issues or causes of the conflict (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2000:210-212; Dana, 2001:94-107; Landau et al., 2001:41-64; Folger et al., 2009:241-244). Hereafter, the authors suggest that the essential or fundamental concerns of all the parties involved in the conflict should be explored. Another similar stage mentioned by the aforementioned authors is the generation or development of possible solutions or alternatives to resolve the issues of all parties concerned involved in the conflict. The authors further postulate a stage wherein the proposed options or solutions are assessed or appraised and modifications or alterations are made to accommodate all parties, where necessary. Also, in a final stage of similarity, among the aforementioned strategies, the authors propose that all disputing parties acknowledge acceptance of a settlement or agreement and pledge to strive to uphold the terms agreed to in resolving the conflict.

2.11.3 Summary of the above

In summary, it is important to take note that the above discussed approaches can be viewed as alternative approaches to the traditional leap into battle and avoiding approaches referred to previously. These alternative approaches focus on co-operation in order to obtain a solution that all parties can live with. Parties meet facing each other personally in attempting to work out their issues through problem solving (Carpenter & Kennedy, 2001:26). Furthermore, these alternative approaches have as foci that decisions are being made through consensus, a process that is shaped by all involved (Carpenter & Kennedy, 2001:29).

2.12 ESTABLISHING CONDITIONS TO ASSIST WITH DEALING WITH CONFLICT

In the section below, conditions that assist in dealing with conflict are discussed. These conditions pertain to the importance that policies be in place and the value of training and support in dealing with conflict.

2.12.1 Importance of policies to be in place

In the researcher’s experience, policies, rules and procedures are invaluable aspects required by all institutions. Policies are defined as broad declarations and understandings which assists the leadership of organisations with decision-making (Van Deventer, 2003:92).
Also, policies guide how organisations can reach their intended “goals and objectives” (Du Preez et al., 2003:82). According to Van Deventer (2003:93), procedures are designed to determine the way in which institutions need to handle matters that regularly occur at institutions. In addition, the author states that “They [policies and procedures] are guides to action, rather than to thinking, and they detail the exact manner in which certain activities must be accomplished” (Van Deventer, 2003:93). Further, the author states that, on the other hand, rules tend to be very prescriptive and do not offer any leeway when decisions have to be made.

Coleman (2003:173), in reference to the Government Notice of the Department of Education of 1999, points out that an important role of principals is to ensure that legislation, regulations and personnel administration measures are appropriately implemented to provide satisfactory school management. This implies that all schools are empowered to generate policies, procedures (and rules) that will assist in the smooth running of these institutions, as long as it is done within the framework of the legislated policy of the state (Du Preez et al., 2003:82-83). In the school scenario, policy refers to “general statements or interpretations that guide” how persons should exercise their powers and make decisions (Van Deventer, 2003:92).

An important aspect of policies is that values are considered when decisions have to be determined (Van Deventer, 2003:91), since this plays a major role when confronting educator conflict. Schools then need to ensure that disciplinary measures for personnel be incorporated into their policies (Du Preez et al., 2003:83).

Bearing the above in mind, the researcher believes that policies and procedures related to the handling of conflict at school is a valuable feature of effectively managing conflict amongst educators. However, Bush and Middlewood (2005:100) caution that “A policy is only as effective as its implementation … ”, suggesting that policy implementation is imperative, as effectiveness will be hampered without implementation.

2.12.2 Importance of training and support in dealing with conflict

Lang (2009:240) states that “Conflict and controversy in organizations are an inevitable part of the decision-making and problem-solving processes”, and that staff need to acquire appropriate capabilities with regard to decision-making and performing within groups in modern institutions. Heaney (2001:203) and Haraway and Haraway (2005:11) support these ideas and with reference to previous research, emphasise the fact that management must be equipped with the necessary expertise to handle conflict. These sentiments are also echoed
by Ngcobo (2003:187) and Snodgrass and Blunt (2009:54), who express the view that all role-players at educational institutions must be empowered in conflict management.

When conflict is not managed effectively due to a lack of skill or expertise, this could lead to many negative or dysfunctional consequences of conflict for organisations (Haraway & Haraway, 2005:11). The authors further highlight the need for management at institutions to have “conflict-management resolution knowledge, skills and abilities” (Haraway & Haraway, 2005:17). Hence the importance of conflict management training for all staff in organisations.

2.13 THIRD PARTY INTERVENTION

Fisher (2001:1) states that “Third-party intervention in situations of human conflict has a long history and a wide variety of forms and functions”. The author adds that people at all spheres of society are at liberty to approach third parties in assisting them to solve disagreements that they cannot handle themselves. Various institutions or groups may call on third parties to intervene either officially or unofficially in providing counsel or instruction to those involved in conflict in attempting to resolve differences (Lewicki et al., 1992:230).

Robbins and Judge (2009:537) concur with Aquinas (2006:292) that individuals could agree to the intercession of intermediaries should their attempts at resolving their conflict become deadlocked. Robbins et al., (2003:301), Cummings and Worley (2005:227) and Brown and Harvey (2006:326) support the aforementioned authors and further indicate that intermediaries could be persons from within or outside an organisation. They add that such representatives could be persons in authority, or colleagues at the same level, or persons from another section or department. In the following sub-sections, an overview is provided related to what is expected from third parties when being involved in dealing with conflict, including characteristics or attributes.

2.13.2.1 Proposed characteristics and roles of a mediator or third party

The characteristics of a mediator or third party are outlined by Erickson and Mc Knight (2001:144-145) below. Mediators or third parties should (Erickson & Mc Knight, 2001:144-145):

- not act in a judgmental manner;
- have the capacity to listen carefully to all concerns revealed;
- have the ability to remain at ease while engaging with the disputing parties and to maintain control over the process;
• ensure that all details revealed are adequately interpreted by all and that there is a sound understanding of all that is communicated;
• be prepared to follow his or her instincts;
• be imaginative and motivate the disputing parties to engage in creative thought processes;
• allow parties to choose their own solutions and not be prescriptive;
• zealously perform the role that he or she has undertaken;
• be mindful of the fact that instead of battling one’s opponent, one should rather find ways of drawing him or her closer.

In addition, Cowan (2003:179-180) points out that mediators should use questioning to seek clarity in assisting parties to fully understand the issues raised, strive towards maintaining neutrality, handle all matters confidentially and assist all parties in determining how to resolve their differences.

Further, Carpenter and Kennedy (2001:195) believe that mediators or third parties should possess attributes with regard to “Personal credibility”, “Institutional credibility”, “Procedural credibility”, “Cost” and “Availability” (2001:195). “Personal credibility” relates to factors where the mediator’s relevant experience in dealing with the type of conflict envisaged, applicable references required and issues of confidentiality need to be assured (Carpenter & Kennedy, 2001:195). The authors indicate that “Institutional credibility” concerns the credibility of the organisation to which the third party is attached, how the organisation has handled previous conflict matters, and whether any “conflict of interest” (Carpenter & Kennedy, 2001:195) exists. Another attribute regarding the mediator’s strategy in handling the conflict process is connected with “Procedural credibility” (Carpenter & Kennedy, 2001:195). Other attributes pointed out by the authors relate to possible financial remuneration for services provided by the mediator and whether the mediator or third party will be able to schedule adequate time for all those involved to formally engage with one another in settling their differences.

2.13.2.2 Expectations from third parties

In the following sub-section, an overview of what the expectations are from third parties, are presented.
2.13.2.2.1 Assisting to determine the underlying causes

In defining third party assistance further, Giebels and Janssen (2005:141) indicate that third parties could offer much assistance in defining the underlying causes and meanings of the conflict, ensuring that correct data are communicated, and determining criteria or processes through which the conflict is handled. Carpenter and Kennedy (2001:187), who also refer to third parties as mediators, further describe a third party as “any disinterested person brought in by agreement of the disputing parties to help them resolve their differences.”

2.13.2.2 Lowering discomfort and possible negative outcomes

According to Kozan, Ergin and Varoglu (2007:142), the intervention of third parties may assist in carrying over perplexing information that may lower possible discomfort to the parties involved in conflict. Another advantage of third party intervention is that interaction between those in conflict may be enhanced together with “their own conflict management, communications and problem-solving skills” (Nugent & Broedling, 2002:140). In addition, Giebels and Janssen (2005:141) believe that “third party help appears a successful conflict management strategy to prevent negative outcomes of interpersonal conflict in organizations”. In addition, Scott (2010:225-228) argues that outside intervention should be called for when management does not believe that it is capable of dealing with conflict, or when issues of objectivity may lead to distrust, or when it (management) believes that a resolute stand needs to be adopted in handling the relevant issues.

Further, Carpenter and Kennedy (2001:187) are of the opinion that organisations or parties who intend to use the services of third parties should take cognisance of essential capabilities, which include “impartiality, process skills, and ability to handle sensitive information”, that are required by such third parties to effectively resolve conflicts. These aspects are discussed below.

2.13.2.2.3 Skills and knowledge related to resolution

In effectively resolving conflict within institutions, third parties require a variety of skills. Some of these skills are outlined by West et al. (2005:16), who state that the third party has to develop an appropriate association with individuals and groups in order to achieve their trust and they (third parties) have to ensure that the differing individuals or groups accept a “cooperative problem-solving attitude” (West et al., 2005:16). Also, the third party has to develop innovative ways of creating an environment in which decisions could be made by all role-players in their groups (West et al., 2005:16). Lastly, the third-party requires “substantive knowledge” (West et al., 2005:16) regarding the key matters that need to be dealt with. In
addition, Fisher (1983:302) emphasises that “Third-party identity requires that the consultant be a skilled scholar/practitioner whose background, attitudes and behavior engender impartiality and whose professional knowledge and expertise enable the facilitation of productive confrontation”.

2.13.2.2.4 Neutrality and impartiality

Aspects regarding neutrality and/or impartiality, as well as the issue of fairness, are important when dealing with conflict. Defining neutrality in relation to third party practitioners is very difficult, since neutrality may be negatively perceived in some cultures while other cultures may find neutrality more acceptable (Mayer, 2004:83). According to Tillet and French (2006:158), third party scholars are all influenced by the same phenomena that affect the lives of other individuals, which questions their capacity to adopt a neutral position. In further support hereof, Erickson and Mc Knight (2001:68) state that “… as human beings, we are rarely neutral about anything. We believe that this is the same in mediation. We all bring our opinions, ideas, and biases to the mediation table”. The authors thus argue that mediators or third parties should be extremely mindful of their own perceptions and acknowledge that allowing their personal beliefs to influence the mediation proceedings, may negatively affect the intended outcomes. Bradshaw (2008:90) concurs, indicating that “impartiality on the part of a mediator seems the most that can be hoped for”. The author further points out that the emphasis placed on impartiality may be lowered, since it seems that third party intervention from within institutions may be the better option, as the individuals concerned may have a deeper comprehension of the conflict issues at stake.

However, Tillet and French (2006:158) point out that third party practitioners should acknowledge “when they are unhelpful in a particular situation (which is not the same as saying they are wrong or false) – and to know when personal values and beliefs are interfering with the process or the relationship with one or both of the participants”. In addition, Van Gramberg and Teicher (2006:201) mention that the terms “neutrality and impartiality” are often confused. With reference to Boulle and Nesic (2001), van Gramberg and Teicher (2006:201) indicate that:

“The difference between impartiality and neutrality can be seen to lie in the mediator’s responsibility to ensure fairness towards the parties during the process so that each has an equal say (impartiality) and being free from bias or favouritism (neutrality) which might mean not intervening at all.”

(Van Gramberg & Teicher, 2006:202)
It appears then that literature does not easily clarify issues of neutrality and impartiality with regard to third party intervention. However, I tend to agree with the views of Bradshaw (2008:90) as indicated above that a mediator’s impartiality cannot be guaranteed.

2.13.2.2.5 Fairness

Closely linked to the issues of neutrality and impartiality is the matter of fairness. According to Carpenter and Kennedy (2001:204), “Not everyone is able to act fairly toward others, and people often doubt that they themselves will be the beneficiary of fair play, but the idea is accepted nearly universally as a moral standard and can be a useful asset in building a constructive dialogue”. Fairness is regarded by many as a basic or “implied standard of conduct” (Mayer, 2000:39). Moreover, unfair treatment could determine how people will react to similar treatment when it occurs again (Steyn & Van Niekerk, 2002:153). These sentiments seem to imply that there is an expectation from those parties involved in conflict that they will be treated with fairness by any third parties or mediators.

2.14 THIRD PARTY STRATEGIES

Tillet and French (2006:108-109) conclude that there are a myriad of definitions ascribed to third parties by various authors. This impedes a clear description of the numerous third party strategies available. For the purpose of this study, the third party strategies that will be discussed in the sub-sections below are mediation, arbitration, facilitation and conciliation.

2.14.1 Mediation

Mediation is a process through which differing individuals or groups are brought together by an impartial party in order to seek ways of resolving diverse issues (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007:19; Scott, 2010:229). Mediation is described as “an extension or elaboration of the negotiation process that involves the intervention of an acceptable third party who has limited (or no) authoritative decision-making power” (Moore, 2003:8).

Doherty and Guyler (2008:12) present a number of main principles in defining mediation. The authors state that mediation is not forced, but accepted by all those persons in dispute, and that the aim of mediation is to find an amicable resolution to the conflict. Also, the authors point out that individuals or groups are encouraged to provide their own settlements to issues and that impartiality is essential, with no individual or group shown bias. Further, confidentiality is an important feature of this process and legal, formalised processes could be followed in the event of the mediation process failing (Doherty & Guyler, 2008:12).
While concurring with some of the above principles of mediation, Mayer (2004:85) indicates that mediators should help individuals to speak out about their concerns and that they (mediators) should strive to develop an outcome that is acceptable to all the parties concerned. The author further states that mediators should focus on the manner in which differing individuals and groups interact with one another, their feelings and requirements, and on decisions that are made regarding the procedures to be followed.

Mediators should not be partial towards certain parties or promote a specific settlement, but should strive towards the adoption of a solution that is accepted by all the parties concerned (Kriesberg, 2007:228). The impartiality of a mediator is a very challenging concept to many individuals, who may doubt the mediator’s objectivity (Morel, 2005:1). However, Davies (2004:192) and Mc Shane and Von Glinow (2005:407) emphasise the fact that mediators need to be viewed as neutral by those in conflict in order to achieve some measure of success.

Bradshaw (2008:89-90) believes that mediation needs to be introduced under the following circumstances: when the conflicting parties have become too highly emotional; when they have difficulty in negotiating amongst themselves; and when the conflict issues have become too complicated and controversial. The author also refers to the work of Rubin, Pruitt and Kim in indicating how mediators could positively influence conflict, namely by altering the “physical and social structure of the dispute”; by changing the “issue structure of the dispute”; and by encouraging differing individuals or groups to “take their dispute seriously” (Bradshaw, 2008:90).

In presenting steps that mediators should follow, Cowan (2003:180-184) points out that, firstly, the basic terms of the mediation process need to be clearly explained to all the parties involved. Secondly, all individuals or groups need to be allowed a chance to state their issues of concern in order to clearly understand what the crux of the problem is about (Cowan, 2003:180-184). Thirdly, opportunities have to be provided for the participants to explore possible facets of the problem that they are willing to accede in seeking a solution (Cowan, 2003:180-184). Fourthly, the parties need to be assisted in generating possible options that may lead to a resolution of the problem (Cowan, 2003:180-184). In the next step, the pro’s and cons of the various options raised in the previous step must be weighed up and could even be further modified (Cowan, 2003:180-184). Hereafter, the parties should be assisted in selecting the most appropriate option or decide on the merging of more than one option, if necessary (Cowan, 2003:180-184). In the final step, mediators have to ensure that all the parties agree in writing to the implementation of the settlement (Cowan, 2003:180-184).
Mediation is clearly an essential tool in attempting to resolve conflict between staff in the workplace when a stalemate in negotiations has been reached. The following sub-section will discuss arbitration.

2.14.2 Arbitration

When mediation is unable to provide an acceptable solution or one that is lasting, then arbitration is another option as a third party intervention (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2007:780; Kriesberg, 2007:228). According to Cheldelin and Lucas (2004:22), “Arbitration is the settlement of a dispute by a person who is selected to hear evidence and testimony from both sides, and the makes a binding or nonbinding decision or ruling, depending on the conditions of the arbitration”.

The process of arbitration is often adopted when there are issues to resolve between an individual or group and an organisation (Scott, 2010:232). Nugent and Broedeling (2002:142) state that “Arbitration is an approach in which the third party maintains a high level of control over the final outcome and a medium to high degree of control over the resolution process”.

Arbitration can be forced on conflicting individuals or groups by organisational authorities and (or) legislation, or the conflicting parties can request arbitration to assist them (Mc Shane & Von Glinow, 2005:406; Robbins & Judge, 2009:537). In the process of arbitration, “an arbitrator hears all sides of a dispute, reviews the evidence, and issues a decision, offering a kind of private judging in specific cases” (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007:20). The arbitrator acts as a “neutral third party who acts more like a judge than a facilitator” (Scott, 2010:232). The disputants then need to convince the arbitrator of the merits of their issues in order to gain a decision in their favour (Kestner & Ray, 2002:44). Also, when choosing arbitration, the parties in conflict have to determine whether the decision reached by an arbitrator will either be enforced upon them or whether they have the option to decline such a decision (Folger et al., 2005:297; Huczynski & Buchanan, 2007:780-78).

Arbitration may be able to achieve greater success, since an arbitrator may be particularly skilled and knowledgeable regarding special aspects underpinning the conflict issues between parties (Wilmot & Hocker, 2001:274; Folger et al., 2005:297). According to Davies (2004:193), the advantages of arbitration are that the processes are fair to all, can be conducted swiftly, and assists in the closure of issues. The author also indicates that the disadvantages are that individuals or groups do not communicate with one another as the proceedings unfold and the arbitrator has the final say over all the matters as soon as one party’s issues have been clarified (Davies, 2004:193).
Should arbitration not have the desired outcome, then facilitation and conciliation may be options for the parties in conflict. These processes will be discussed in the following sections.

2.14.3 Facilitation

Facilitation is a third party strategy that is usually adopted when groups or teams within organisations find themselves in conflict with one another (Tillet & French, 2006:112; Scott, 2010:231). Bressen in ‘Group Facilitation Primer’ (n.d.) concurs, further defining facilitation as a manner in which parties are assisted in engaging with one another to establish agreements. In summary hereof, “Facilitators create conditions to enhance discussion including opportunities to hear one another” (Cheldelin & Lucas, 2004:21).

In defining facilitation, Bradshaw (2008:89) points out that the facilitator’s aim is to promote effective communication between the parties in conflict, and not to push for any particular resolution. Littlejohn and Domenici (2007:298) concur that facilitation should be used “when you want a group process that has clear communication, an effective agenda that leads to productive outcomes, a way for conflict to be managed, and an opportunity for inclusive and constructive communication in the midst of diverse views”.

According to ‘Let’s Talk: A guide to workplace conflicts’ (2007:23), facilitation may assist when issues of conflict are extremely intricate and when disputants are not open to engage one another in a face-to-face manner. In summarising the advantages of facilitation, Scott (2010:232) contends that facilitation provides highly skilled practitioners who can manage potentially explosive people and complex conflict issues. The author also indicates that facilitation provides for trained experts to arrange all particulars and to lay the foundation for discussions. Further, facilitation may present institutions with an opportunity to elicit collective ideas from the facilitator and the groups involved in the conflict (Scott, 2010:232). Lastly, the authors points out that facilitation allows for facts to be collected and to be interpreted more clearly by an impartial roleplayer, who should not side with the interests of any particular group.

The Topsfield Foundation Study Circle Resource Center (n.d.:53) provides several general suggestions for facilitators. It seems that these suggestions could also be valuable for a facilitator that has to deal with conflict. Therefore, these suggestions are indicated below (Topsfield Foundation Study Circle Resource Center, n.d.:53):

- prepare thoroughly;
- generate an easy-going, casual approach;
- ensure that the participants feel welcome and comfortable;
- use jocularity to set a good mood;
- make all participants aware of the terms and conditions applicable to the process;
- first try to gain an insight into the concerns of others before presenting a response;
- allow only one participant to express him/herself in dialogue;
- constantly check where groups may need assistance;
- take note of those who are taking part and of the matters that have been brought to the fore already;
- make use of smaller group activities to enhance the more open discussion of issues;
- try not to intervene, even when tempted;
- withhold responses and rather provide ample chance for the participants to comment;
- encourage participants not to rush their comments, but rather take some time to think about it first;
- allow all to participate meaningfully, so that certain individuals will not hog the floor;
- ensure that a wide range of viewpoints are discussed by all the groups, while at the same time looking at the positives and the negatives when considering innovative means of resolving issues.

As outlined above, facilitation as a third-party strategy can be utilised in attempting to resolve conflict issues between groups within institutions. Another third-party strategy, conciliation, may be applied in seeking consensus between disputants. This strategy is discussed below.

2.14.4 Conciliation

There are similarities between mediation and conciliation, according to Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration: Alternative Dispute Resolutions (2007:6), however, conciliation is usually employed in issues of a specific judicial nature. Fox (2006:127), states that the aim of conciliation is to guide those in dispute to find a settlement or to accept another round of bargaining in developing a resolution to the dispute. In addition, Folger et al. (2005:298-299)
refer to the work of Auvine et al. and Schwarz, who indicate that conciliators usually assist in disputes between various parties in relation to issues involving, for example, race or the environment.

In describing conciliation, Kestner and Ray (2002:41-42) point out that the disputants do not have any face-to-face interaction, but rather work through the conciliator, who acts as the carrier of the message. These authors believe that this is due to the differing individuals or groups not being willing to engage with one another or not being able to fully discern the information being discussed.

The role of the conciliator, together with the advantages of conciliation, is outlined by Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration: Alternative Dispute Resolution (2007:7) in the following way: A conciliator who is well-skilled, speaks to all parties about their concerns, clarifies judicial matters, presents settlement options for all parties and assists parties in adopting settlements to which they are lawfully bound.

In presenting the advantages of conciliation, the above authors suggest that a deeper comprehension of the problem is provided and that an agreement may be reached with no need to have a formal court sitting. Also, the parties involved are capable of working out a settlement according to their specific conditions and an agreement reached may provide other positive aspects that are not delivered by a formal court ruling “like getting a good reference” (Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration: Alternative Dispute Resolution, 2007:7)

The literature reviewed above provides a synopsis of examples of third party strategies available to parties in conflict at various organisations in general and to schools in particular. The adoption of these third-party strategies may afford resolution to conflict situations and issues when all other internal conflict methods or techniques at the various institutions have failed to deliver the successful settlement of disputes and (or) conflict.

2.15 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK TO LOOK AT CONFLICT BASED ON THE LITERATURE FOR THIS STUDY

In section 2.2.2, at the start of this chapter, it was stated that conflict models or frameworks suggest that conflict has certain causes or sources; that conflict has certain outcomes, consequences or aftermaths; and that conflict can be dealt with in certain ways, manners or approaches. It was also stated that Pondy’s framework suggests that it is important to take note of the causes and consequences and how conflict should be dealt with. Based on the work of Blake and Mouton (1964:10), Pondy (1967:306), Thomas (1976:900), Appelbaum et
al. (1999:65), Kushner (2005:8), Rahim (1983:368-369, 2011:89-92), Moore (2003:64) and Bradshaw (2008:33) the following ‘road map’ for looking at conflict is presented in Figure 2.6. This adapted framework is provided to illustrate the dynamic, recurrent nature of conflict (see Figure 2.6. Appendix K provides a larger image of Figure 2.6).


The first stage of this figure illustrates that there is a potential for conflict, which refers to antecedent conditions (Rahim, 2011:89) and latent conflict (Pondy, 1967:300). This potential for conflict covers the triggers or causes of conflict, which are categorised as interest-based, data-based, value-based, relationship-based and structural-based conflict (Bradshaw, 2008:18-20). The second stage of awareness and emotions is linked to Pondy’s (1967:301-302) perceived conflict and felt conflict stages, where there is recognition and an awareness of conflict. The third stage of behaviour is related to Pondy’s (1967:303) manifest conflict stage, where there is overt conflict in the form of specific behaviour(s) and emotions. In this stage, it is important to note that the conflict could have positive and (or) negative consequences before, during manifestation and after manifestation.
When conflict has to be dealt with, various approaches of dealing with conflict can be used, such as avoiding, accommodating, compromising, forcing and collaborating (Blake & Mouton, 1964:8-15; Thomas, 1976:894-912), as well as possible internal and (or) external third party intervention by a person or agent (Cummings & Worley, 2005:227; Brown & Harvey, 2006:326). Hereafter, depending on the decisions made in resolving the conflict, possible win-win, lose-lose, win-lose or lose-win outcomes could be achieved. In the aftermath stage, the effects of how the conflict was resolved (or not resolved), could then have an impact on whether there would be positive or negative outcomes for the educators, the learners, the school and the Department of Education. These aforementioned factors could then determine whether further potential for conflict would occur again, which in turn could start the entire cycle of stages of conflict all over again. This framework suggests that dealing with conflict (the ‘how’) or not dealing with conflict (ignoring) as possible outcomes of dealing with conflict could have an influence on the consequences of conflict: the consequences of conflict could not only lead to positive and negative perceptions, but the consequences could also feed back into the system and could therefore influence future conflict perceptions, manifestations, dealing with conflict, etc. Hence, the causes of conflict, outcomes or consequences of conflict and the manner in which conflict is dealt with could feed into the entire conflict experience and conflict as a process. This framework shows the integrative nature of conflict as a process. As the focus of this study was to ascertain how educators at three Northern Areas schools in Port Elizabeth, South Africa perceived conflict, determine what the causes or sources of conflict were, ascertain what the consequences of conflict were, what the perceptions were regarding conflict (for example positive or negative or a combination thereof) and what the suggestions were to handle conflict in a more appropriate way, this holistic and integrative framework seems to be suggesting that the aspects to which answers were elicited are indeed related to and connected.

2.16 SUMMARY

This chapter provided a review of various aspects of literature pertaining to conflict between individuals and groups at their institutions in general and to educators at their schools in particular. Section 2 of this chapter looked at the definition of conflict, which I believe is not clearly defined, due to so many varying perceptions thereof (of conflict). In this section, the range of conflict theories presented, also offer a deeper insight into the conflict phenomenon. Section 3 considered the various perceptions of conflict offered. Here, I tend to align myself with the human relations view that conflict occurred naturally and that it could even be beneficial to organisations (Folger et al., 2005:65; Robbins & Judge, 2009:520). This was followed by the categorisation of conflict and its causes, the role and consequences of conflict and conflict management styles and choices. In terms of the categorisation of
conflict, I am of the opinion that the causes or bases of conflict as determined by Moore (2003:64) and Bradshaw (2008:18) are best suited for the purpose of this study. Further, conflict need not be perceived in a negative light only (Guttman, 2009:33), but that it needs to be viewed in its functional and dysfunctional role within organisations (Pondy, 1969:319).

Conflict management outcomes were discussed in section 7, followed by general suggestions when trying to resolve conflict, aspects to consider when dealing with conflict and negotiations and its seven elements in dealing with conflict. The latter four sections covered approaches or strategies in dealing appropriately with conflict, establishing conditions to assist in managing conflict, third party intervention in conflict and third party strategies for resolving conflict. Hence, in attempting to resolve conflict, one has to seriously consider what one hopes to achieve, how one will approach the conflict situation and determine which strategy will be best suited to resolve the conflict. In the last section, a broad overview of the literature reviewed was illustrated by means of a diagram.

The researcher’s aim in this chapter was to provide the reader with a sound background of the phenomenon studied in order to gain more insight into the problem of educator conflict and to promote improved decision-making when people have to deal with conflict at their institutions. In the next chapter, the methodology and the research design of this study will be discussed.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The methodology of research suggests that the research plan and how the research is designed, are supported by principles of a philosophical nature (Gibson & Brown, 2009:48). According to Creswell (2009:3-6), the research design refers to the philosophical underpinning (philosophical worldview) or the paradigm of the study. The research design includes the particular approach to research, e.g. ethnography, phenomenology, case study, action research, etc. (Gibson & Brown, 2009:48), as well as the strategies for inquiry and the methods (Creswell, 2009:3-6). In the previous chapter, the theoretical aspects and literature related to the aspects of this study, with special reference to conflict, were dealt with. In this chapter then, based on the suggestions of Gibson and Brown (2009:48) and Creswell (2009:3-6), the research design and methods will be discussed, i.e. the paradigm underpinning this study, the type of study, the sample and its selection, ethical considerations, how the data was gathered and analysed, as well as how trustworthiness (credibility) was ensured. In addition, the main research question, as well as the subsidiary questions, is presented, including a short overview of the role of the researcher. The above is presented under seven main headings, namely, “Background, research question, subsidiary questions and objectives”, “Importance of a research design”, “Brief overview of the paradigms, “Research design”, “Methodology” (which includes the sample, ethics, role of the researcher and data gathering tools), “Data analysis” and “Trustworthiness”.

3.2 BACKGROUND, RESEARCH QUESTION, SUBSIDIARY QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

As a teacher and Head of Department who has been working in schools in the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth, the researcher noticed conflict occurring among educators on a regular basis. Sometimes, educators, including the principal, School Management Team (SMT) and its members, were aware of the conflict, and sometimes not. This prompted me to ask: How do educators [referring to the principals, deputy principals, HODs, SMTs and Post Level One teachers] at three Northern Areas schools in Port Elizabeth perceive and deal with conflict and understand its causes and consequences, and how do they feel conflict should be dealt with most appositely? This question formed the basis of the study. From this above-stated main question, the following secondary research questions emerged, namely:
What are the educators’ [principal, deputy principal, HODs, SMTs and Post Level One teachers] impressions of conflict?

What are the perceived causes or sources of conflict among educators at their schools?

What are the perceived consequences or results of conflict among educators at their schools?

Who is currently responsible for dealing with conflict among educators at their schools and how is it being handled?

What suggestions and outcomes do educators propose in order to deal with conflict in an appropriate manner at their schools?

Taking the above into consideration, the primary research objective that emerged, was to explore conflict as perceived through the eyes of educators [principals, deputy principals, HODs, SMTs and Post Level One teachers] within three Northern Areas primary schools in Port Elizabeth (South Africa) in order to ascertain the perceived causes of conflict, the perceived consequences of conflict, and the educators’ perceptions regarding the handling of conflict. In addition, it was realised that, at the same time, educators might be aware of the conflict, but it seemed that the causes or sources of conflict as well as the way in which conflict was being dealt with, were not necessarily thought about. As a result, the following research objectives emerged:

- To determine the impressions of conflict amongst educators.
- To explore the perceived causes or sources of conflict affecting educators.
- To ascertain the perceived consequences of conflict.
- To determine who is responsible for dealing with conflict at school and how it is being dealt with.
- To ascertain what educators suggest can be done to address the handling or dealing with educator conflict in an appropriate manner.

### 3.3 IMPORTANCE OF A RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Springer (2010:176), it is imperative that the researcher has a clear research design, as this assists as a plan or framework for the intended research or study. Punch (2009:47) concurs, stating that the research design refers to the various aspects related to
drafting and implementing the research to be undertaken. In further explaining the research design, Denzin and Lincoln (2011:243) cite Cheek, who lists five questions that inform the design of research:

- “How will the design connect to the paradigm or perspective being used?”
- “How will these materials allow the researcher to speak to the problems of maxis and change?”
- “Who or what will be studied?”
- “What strategies of enquiry will be used?”
- “What methods or research tools for collecting and analysing empirical materials will be utilised?”

In summarising the above, Gibson and Brown (2009:47) state that research design entails determining the type of data that is required “to answer a research question or set of questions, and specifying approaches for gathering or generating that data”. Bearing all the aforementioned in mind, the design of this research is outlined in the sub-sections below and the research design process in subsequent sections following the research design. However, a short synopsis of the various paradigms or philosophical worldviews will be presented before this study is located within the interpretive paradigm.

3.4 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF DIFFERENT PARADIGMS

The term paradigm relates to the manner in which people perceive the universe (Lichtman, 2010:245). Babbie (2005:32) contends that paradigms are the “fundamental models or frames of reference we use to organize our observations and reasoning”. In defining this term further, Punch (2009:358) states that a paradigm is “a set of assumptions about the social world, and about what constitute proper techniques and topics for inquiring into that world; a set of basic beliefs, a world view, a view of how science should be done”. While in agreement with these views, Blaikie (2010:9) adds that the research paradigm encompasses “major traditions in the natural and social sciences that incorporate particular ontological and epistemological assumptions and one or more of the research strategies”.

Using a specific viewpoint of the world, the researcher would be able to gain a deeper understanding of the information obtained (Morrison, 2007:19). Blaikie (2010:9) contends that many researchers prefer to conduct their research via a particular paradigm, while other researchers alter their paradigms to adapt to their research.
Classifying educational and psychological research under specific paradigms is extremely difficult (Mertens, 2005:7). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011:13; 2005:22), literature refers to a number of frameworks or paradigms, such as “positivist and post-positivist, constructivist-interpretive, critical (Marxist, emancipatory), and feminist-post structural” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:22). These authors are of the opinion that “all research is interpretive” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:22).

According to Scott and Morrison (2005:170), paradigms pertaining to educational research are classified as positivism (empiricism), phenomenology, critical theory and post-modernism. Blaikie (2010:97-104) lists ten research paradigms. The author classifies positivism, critical rationalism, classical hermeneutics and interpretivism under classical research paradigms, whereas critical theory, ethnomethodology, social realism, contemporary hermeneutics, structuration theory and feminism are placed under contemporary research paradigms. Henning (2004:17-23) refers to three paradigms, namely the positivist, interpretivist and critical paradigms, as theoretical frameworks. Mertens, (2005:9) on the other hand, refers to four paradigms, namely positivism (post-positivism), constructivist, transformative and pragmatic paradigms. She is extremely critical of referring to the third paradigm as critical theory, as she argues that critical theory is only one approach that, as she put it, “fits under the transformative umbrella” (Mertens, 2005:16), referring to participatory action research, Marxists, feminists, racial and ethnic minorities, etc., which can all be grouped under the transformative label (Mertens, 2005:16). Her fourth paradigm, namely the pragmatic (or pragmatism), refers to mixed methods or mixed models, i.e. “what is useful determines what is true” (Mertens, 2005:8-9).

Basit (2010:14) postulates that educational research is propelled by the positivist paradigm, as well as the interpretive paradigm. Thomas (2009:73) states that research in the social sciences has always been driven by a positivistic “way of thinking”, but that the interpretivist paradigm has been gradually evolving in this field. In the following sub-sections, four paradigms will be briefly discussed, namely positivism (post-positivism), interpretivism, critical theory and pragmatism.

### 3.4.1 Positivism and Post-Positivism

Positivism is also referred to as the “normative” paradigm (Basit, 2010:14), which largely influenced “early educational and psychological research” (Mertens, 2005:8). In this worldview, reality is perceived as comprising particular phenomena that people are capable of observing (Blaikie, 2010:97), a view with which Basit (2010:14) concurs. Further,
positivism is based on “the assumption that reality consists of facts and causal processes that are independent of observers and thus can be revealed through scientific observation”, an ultimate reality (Springer, 2010:9) and mainly uses quantitative methods (Guba & Lincoln, 2005:193-194). Also, this paradigm leads to “findings that can be statistically analysed, and are therefore believed to be generalizable” (Basit, 2010:14).

Post-positivism is a worldview that emanated from positivism and that is also referred to as “the scientific method or doing science research” (Creswell, 2009:6). Researchers who maintain a post positivistic approach emphasise the importance of identifying and assessing “the causes that influence outcomes, such as found in experiments” (Creswell, 2009:7; Mertens, 2005:8). However, proponents of post-positivism contend that “observation can contain error, stressing the need to be critical” (Hartas, 2010:38) when researchers report on social realities.

3.4.2 Interpretivism

Interpretivism, on the other hand, perceives the world as being “socially constructed” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:184), which results in the construction of subjective multiple realities (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004:14). The focus of interpretivism is on the participants providing their understanding of the world as they see it by using their own voice or words (Henn, et al., 2006:14); hence, qualitative methods are used (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:3). Basit (2010:14) concurs, stating that interpretivism is centred around “smaller numbers and the in-depth analysis of human behavior and perceptions” (Basit, 2010:14), with due consideration to contrasting and similar aspects or features of such behaviour or views.

3.4.3 Critical theory

In defining critical theory, Merriam (2009:34) refers to this as “critical social science research”, emphasising that the purpose of critical inquiry is to confront social phenomena in a critical manner in order to bring about the necessary change and empowerment to society. Proponents of the critical theory argue that, with regard to educational research, positivist and interpretivist paradigms do not comprehensively address issues of “social behavior by their neglect of the political and ideological contexts” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007:26). This view is supported by Basit (2010:15), who further contends that research should effect transformation in the upliftment of our social world, instead of simply developing an understanding and providing an account of phenomena.
3.4.4 Pragmatism and mixed methods

According to Denscombe (2010:148), pragmatism is associated with the mixed methods approach. The proponents of pragmatism argue that “truth is not absolute but relative to the time, place and purpose of an inquiry, and verifiable as discoveries are made” (Hartas, 2010:41). For researchers, this close link between pragmatism and mixed methods strategies allows the researcher to draw on various “methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions, as well as different forms of data collection and analysis” (Creswell, 2009:11). The mixed methods approach of using both qualitative and quantitative methods in research is a more current trend (Lichtman, 2010:84) and, according to Creswell (2009:4), mixed methods include “philosophical assumptions, the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches and the mixing of both approaches in a study”.

There is much for researchers to gain from using the mixed methods approach. According to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004:14-15) and Blaikie (2010:219), moving between different paradigms could improve research projects, and the effectiveness of one method could reduce the shortcomings of the other. Therefore, researchers are at liberty to choose “the methods, techniques, and procedures of research that best meet their needs and purpose” (Creswell, 2009:11).

3.5 RESEARCH DESIGN OF STUDY

The researcher took the above literature into consideration in deciding on the most appropriate paradigm from which to conduct the research. The following section deals with this study’s paradigm, the qualitative approach or nature of this study, as well as the case study approach.

3.5.1 Paradigm of this study: Interpretive Paradigm

This study was underpinned by the interpretive paradigm. Ontologically, i.e. the nature of reality (Scott & Morrison, 2005:85), interpretivism holds that reality is socially constructed (Creswell, 1994:4-5; 2009:8) or, as Guba and Lincoln (2005:193) state, interpretivism refers ontologically to “co-constructed realities”, implying that there is not a single reality, but multiple socially constructed realities (Mertens, 2005:9). Epistemologically, i.e. “how educational researchers can know the reality that they wish to describe” (Scott & Morrison, 2005:85), interpretivism holds a subjectivist view of created findings (Guba & Lincoln, 2005:193), focusing on an understanding of the participants’ world in their own words (Henn et al., 2006:14). Methodologically, it seems that interpretivism, also labeled constructivist-interpretivist by Denzin and Lincoln (2005:22), employs qualitative data gathering methods
In this research, the interpretivist paradigm was viewed as best suited for this type of study, as interpretivism is more adept to dealing with people and their particular views or perceptions of phenomena (Thomas, 2009:75). This view is also supported by Maree and Van Der Westhuizen (2009:20-21), who argue that the researcher is pivotal in interpreting how individuals perceive the world around them. Hence, the interpretivist paradigm and qualitative data gathering tools seemed to be appropriate choices, as the researcher wanted to explore the perceptions, inner experiences and inner views of the participants related to conflict, as Cohen et al. (2007:21) argue that the researcher can obtain accounts from participants through qualitative methods in order to, as they state, get “inside the person”, hence to try to understand the participants’ experiences from within. This then was what the researcher wanted to explore, i.e. the participants’ inner perspectives, perceptions and experiences related to conflict. Therefore, it seemed that the interpretive paradigm was best suited to explore the participants’ “realities” of conflict.

3.5.2 Qualitative approach and qualitative data

At the same time, it seems from the above that qualitative research was the most appropriate for the purpose of this study, since, according to Merriam (2009:8), “Interpretive research, which is where qualitative research is most often located, assumes that reality is socially constructed, that is, there is no single, observable reality. Rather, there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event” (Merriam, 2009:8). Thomas (2009:83) highlights the following, namely that “your [the researcher’s] research approach should be the servant of your [the researcher’s] research question, not its master”. The main research question and subsidiary questions therefore served as a guide to adopting a qualitative research approach, as it referred to the perceptions of educators from three primary schools located in a similar area and context.

Creswell (2009:4) states that “qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem”. This is the case in this study, as the focus was on developing an understanding of the causes of conflict amongst educators in three primary schools in order to ascertain their perceptions and experiences related to the causes (sources) of conflict, as well as to explore how the educators perceived possible suggestions for dealing or handling conflict, as well as their perceptions and requirements related to using a third party, should the need arise. Hence, as previously mentioned in this section, personal semi-structured interviews and focus group
interviews as qualitative data gathering sources, offer the possibility to explore the perceptions and inner experiences of the participants. As a result, qualitative data seems to be assisting the researcher in this study to gain what Struwig and Stead (2001:12) refer to as offering the possibility of gaining a deeper comprehension of the phenomenon being studied from the view of those participating in the project.

Another aspect of qualitative research that this study depends on is the generation of “rich, thick descriptions” (Merriam, 2009:16). These are “descriptions that outline the details of the contexts of peoples’ actions and practices so that they become intelligible in their own terms” (Gibson & Brown, 2009:8). Also, the researcher must strive to obtain a highly comprehensive view of the issues involved so that “researchers can only make sense of the data collected if they are able to understand the data in a broader educational, social and historic context” (Morrison, 2002:20), as is a feature of this study. The above seems to suggest once more that qualitative interview data, as well as qualitative focus group interviews and qualitative open-ended questionnaires, have the potential to provide not only rich data, but also the inner perspectives of the participants related to the conflict phenomenon and the related aspects explored within this study.

Further, the qualitative researcher “can achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) of mean-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience” (Merriam, 2009:14). The researcher’s main emphasis is on gaining an understanding of how educators and school leaders experience conflict, from their (the participants’) points of view (Merriam, 2009:14).

Also, as this study was not dependent on a theory or theories, it lent itself to qualitative research since the researcher strived to inductively collect data in generating the research (Merriam, 2009:15). Bearing in mind that the researcher’s aim was to gather extensive insight into the phenomenon studied, this research was also well suited for research of a qualitative nature as the researcher “is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam, 2009:15).

In addition, it is important to take note of the characteristics of qualitative research, as suggested by Rossman and Rallis in Marshall and Rossman (1999:2; 2006:2; 2011:2), Hatch (2002:6-11) and Creswell (2009:175-176). These characteristics are provided below and each of these characteristics is used to relate to this study:

Qualitative research uses various techniques that are considerate of a humanistic approach to those involved in the research (Rossman & Rallis in Marshall & Rossman, 1999:2; 2006:2; 2011:2).

Qualitative research is constantly developing and changing, or emerging (Rossman & Rallis in Marshall & Rossman, 1999:2; 2006:2; 2011:2; Hatch, 2002:9).

Qualitative research uses an interpretive approach (Rossman & Rallis in Marshall & Rossman, 1999:2; 2006:2; 2011:2; Creswell, 2009:176).

Qualitative research is a holistically perceived approach (Rossman & Rallis in Marshall & Rossman, 1999:2; 2006:2; 2011:2; Creswell, 2009:176).

Qualitative research is reflexive (Rossman & Rallis in Marshall & Rossman, 1999:2; 2006:2; 2011:2; Hatch, 2002:10).

Qualitative research considers contextual factors (Rossman & Rallis in Marshall & Rossman, 1999:2; 2006:2; 2011:2).

Qualitative research follows an inductive and deductive approach (Rossman & Rallis in Marshall & Rossman, 1999:2; 2006:2; 2011:2; Hatch, 2002:10; Creswell, 2009:175).

In elaborating further with regard to other characteristics of qualitative research, Hatch (2002:6-11) and Creswell (2009:175-176) are of the opinion that the researcher plays a pivotal role in the collection of data (Hatch, 2002:6-11; Creswell, 2009:175) and that the researcher devotes more time in the participants’ environment to acquire a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Hatch, 2002:6-11).

In conclusion, in this section, it is important to take note of the opinion of Struwig and Stead (2001:13), who state that they believe that researchers applying a qualitative approach tend to shy away from an overt reliance on theories and are open to continually develop their research as the study progresses. They contend that undue dependence on past research and theoretical studies could have an impact on how researchers understand and interpret phenomena (Struwig & Stead, 2001:13). Hence, in this study, the literature and theory related to conflict in the literature review, e.g. how humans deal with conflict, did not ‘force’ the research, but assisted the researcher in obtaining an overview of conflict and aspects related to conflict, such as their understanding of conflict, the possible causes of conflict, consequences of conflict, perceptions of how conflict is dealt with and means to deal with educator conflict.
3.5.3 Case study approach as strategy for this research: Intrinsic exploratory case study

Case study research is an approach to qualitative research (Lichtman, 2010:81). It is important to note that case study research is “not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied” (Stake, 2005:443); therefore, with reference to this study, educators from three Northern Areas schools in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, formed the ‘intrinsic and exploratory case’ to be studied. These three schools and the participants from these three schools were ‘treated’ or viewed as one case, as these three schools were within the same proximity and social context. In further defining a case study, Thomas (2009:115) and Struwig and Stead (2001:8) point out that a case study entails studying an exclusive phenomenon or a particular group of issues limited to a specific area or category. Yin (2009:18) concurs, stating that the case study investigates a present-day phenomenon “within its real-life context”.

Thomas (2009:115) states that the case may be a child, teacher(s), a class, a school(s), etc. with the aim to “gain a rich, detailed understanding of the case” (Thomas, 2009:115). In this study, the phenomenon is the perception of educator conflict at schools, including their understanding or perceptions of conflict, their perceptions of possible causes of conflict, and their perceived perceptions of the consequences of conflict, perceptions of how conflict is dealt with, and suggestions of means or ways of dealing with educator conflict.

Various types of case studies are indicated in literature. Yin (1994:4-6; 1993:3) refers to exploratory, descriptive and explanatory case studies. The exploratory case study focuses on initiating research that could lead to further research; the descriptive case study focuses on description by means of narrative accounts; while the explanatory case study, on the other hand, could assist in testing theory (Yin, 2009:47; 1993:40). Stake (2005:445; 2008:121) includes or adds three other categories of case studies, namely the intrinsic case study, instrumental case study and collective case study. An intrinsic case study may be followed when the researcher has as his aim or focus to obtain a clearer or better understanding of a particular case, as a result of an intrinsic interest in the case or phenomenon (Stake, 2005:445; 2008:121-123).

The researcher was deeply interested in how educators and school leaders at these specific schools in the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth perceived conflict amongst the staff at their schools in order to develop guidelines which could assist these schools, as well as other schools in similar situations, to deal with or handle conflict appropriately. Hence, there was an intrinsic interest.
Regarding theory and theory building, Stake (2005:445; 2008:122-123) states that theory building is not the focus or purpose, but at the same time acknowledges that theory building is possible.

An instrumental case study is undertaken when the researcher’s aim is to primarily determine an understanding of a phenomenon or when a generalisation has to be drafted (Stake, 2005:445). Collective case studies are also referred to as multiple case studies (Stake, 2005:445). When a number of other cases linked to a particular case study are studied, this is referred to as a multiple case study (Yin, 2003:46). In addition, Stake (2005:445-446) points out that a “collective case study” starts out as an instrumental case study and that by examining the other emergent cases, more in-depth knowledge can be gained of the phenomenon.

The use of case studies offers many advantages when an exceptional case is studied (Springer, 2010:407). Substantiating this, the author indicates that comprehensive and invaluable data can be gathered from research participants regarding the various aspects of their livelihoods through an appropriately structured case study. Denscombe (2007:45; 2010:62) outlines the advantages of case studies as follows:

- The case study approach enables the researcher to interact with perplexing social issues, since the researcher is engaged only with a particular case or with a limited number of issues.

- Case studies ensure that phenomenon can be studied through several methods of research.

- Case studies enhance the verification of data when triangulation is employed, due to the utilisation of several data sources.

- The researcher is not bound to alter any conditions or enforce limitations in regard to the study, since the case study approach focuses on naturalistic inquiry.

- Case studies are particularly suited to research projects that are not too broad or large in scope, but are directed at a limited sample only.

- Case studies are also adept at developing “theory-building and theory-testing research” (Denscombe, 2007:45; 2010:62).
According to Yin (2009:14-16), numerous researchers have expressed much negativity regarding certain aspects of case studies. These critics state that case studies may lead to clumsy work, with a subjective interpretation of outcomes, and that they (case studies) may not be appropriate for the generalisation of findings (Yin, 2009:14-16). The author adds that case studies may be impractical due to the lengthy time-frames within which the study has to be conducted and that the researcher could end up with an extensive amount of irrelevant information. Further, with regard to research in the educational field, case studies may not be as effective when applied to determining “causal relationships” (Yin, 2009:16).

In addition, Flyvbjerg (2011:302) highlights numerous misconceptions regarding case studies. The author states that “General, theoretical knowledge is more valuable than concrete knowledge” (2011:302). Regarding the development of hypotheses, the case study is only initially advantageous “in the first stage of a total research process, while other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building” (Flyvbjerg, 2011:302). Further, the author argues that “It is often difficult to summarise and develop general propositions and theories on the basis of specific case studies” (2011:302).

Despite the above criticism of case studies, Flyvbjerg (2011:313) points to the prevailing tendency amongst researchers to adopt “a more collaborative approach” with regard to case study research. The author further states that “scholars begin to see that different methodological approaches have different strengths and weaknesses and are essentially complementary” (Flyvbjerg, 2011:313).

Regarding the issue of generalisability, Punch (2009:121) questions whether there is a need to “generalize from a particular case study”, a view that is also supported by Blaikie (2010:192). Thomas (2009:115) concurs, concluding that a scholar is not researching “a case in order to understand others”, but that the study is being undertaken “in order to understand it in itself”. In a similar manner, Henning (2004:41) and Denscombe (2010:63) argue that case study research does not necessarily imply that the findings are neither useless nor irrelevant. Regarding the above, Wolcott’s (2005:167 cited in Merriam, 2009:228) declaration highlights that case studies do have value, as he states that “every case is, in certain aspects, like all other cases, like some other cases, and like no other case.” Regarding generalisation, Stake (1995:86) makes the point that readers in fact make generalisations when they read about a case, generalising to their contexts. Stake (1995:86) puts it like follows:
“Our readers often are more familiar with the cases than we researchers are. They can add their own parts of the story. We should allow some of this input to analysis to help from reader generalizations. The reader will take both our narrative descriptions and our assertions: narrative descriptions to form vicarious experience and naturalistic generalizations, assertions to work with existing propositional knowledge to modify existing generalizations.”

(Stake, 1995:86)

In considering the above, the researcher concluded that “The case study approach is best suited when a phenomenon has to be intensively engaged with and provide an explanation that can cope with the complexity and subtlety of real life situations” (Denscombe, 2007:38; 2010:62). Further, case studies seem to be strongly suited towards determining the cause and effect of a phenomenon and investigating and reporting “the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance” (Cohen et al., 2007:253). Hence, the case study approach allowed me as researcher to probe for a more comprehensive understanding of how the participants experienced their world (Ary et al., 1990:451-452; Mouton, 2001:149) with reference to the perceived causes and consequences of educator conflict at the three primary schools.

Another important value of the case study approach is its particularistic, descriptive and heuristic characteristics (Merriam, 2009:43). The particularistic dimension implies that the specific phenomenon, circumstance or incident forms the core of the case study, the descriptive dimension to a variety of data sources in achieving “thick description” and the heuristic feature, which assists in gaining a greater awareness of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009:43-44).

This study was linked to the three characteristics of case studies, as described by Merriam (2009:43-44). Firstly, the study was particularistic in nature, due to its focus on incidence of conflict amongst educators at schools. Secondly, the study emphasised the descriptive dimension in striving to obtain “rich, thick description” (Merriam, 2009:43) of the perception of conflict through multiple sources of data. Lastly, this study included heuristic features, in that deeper insights of conflict amongst educators were realised (Merriam, 2009:43).

For the purpose of this research, an intrinsic exploratory case study (using descriptive data to portray the educators’ perspectives or perception) appeared the most appropriate approach to develop the research. This was mainly due to the fact that the researcher had an innate
interest in the case, being the educators’ perceptions of conflict and that a study of this phenomenon would assist the researcher in achieving a deeper insight. This was based on what Thomas (2009:116; 2011:98) refers to in a similar manner as Stake (2005:445; 2008:121-123). The rationale for undertaking this study was not based on a real choice, but was borne out of a genuine interest in the phenomenon being studied.

Another reason for undertaking a case study for this research was that the researcher had an interest in how educators at three schools in similar socio-economic surroundings within the same area perceived conflict, its causes or sources as well as their perceptions of dealing with conflict in an appropriate manner.

3.6 METHODS

In this section, the researcher will discuss how the research was conducted and the procedures that were followed. The following aspects will be covered: the research context, population and sample, the researcher’s role, recruitment of participants, ethical considerations, data gathering, data analysis and interpretation, and trustworthiness.

3.6.1 Research context: Population, sample and recruitment

Population refers to all the people who are the target of the research, i.e. a section of people who have common attributes. At the same time, what is important is not how big the group is, but a “special characteristic” (Hartas, 2010:67) that is attributed to the particular population. After the population has been identified, one has to select a sample, i.e. “a section or a subgroup of the population” that is going to be studied (Hartas, 2010:67).

In this study, educators at primary schools and educators and school leaders in particular, formed the basis of the research population. However, since it is impossible for scholars to reach all individuals in the research, a smaller group of persons have to be selected which will form a sample of the whole body (Basit, 2010:49; Hartas, 2010:67). Only those persons who are identified to take part in the research project are then referred to as the sample (Hartas, 2010:67; Springer, 2010:100). For the purposes of this study, the sample was made up of staff from three selected primary schools in the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape Province, a geographical area in which mostly people from the “Coloured” section of the population had been designated to reside by the previous apartheid laws of South Africa.

The sampling approach comprised a combination of purposive and convenience sampling. Denscombe (2003:15; 2010:35) refers to purposive sampling as a sample that is “hand
picked” for the research”. Purposive sampling is sampling with a purpose (Hartas, 2010:69) or, as Punch (2009:359) states, the selected group of people is intentionally chosen in accordance with “the logic of the research” (Punch, 2009:359). In this study, the reason why these specific participants were targeted, is because the researcher was aware that these persons or people were likely to provide valuable data (Denscombe, 2003:15; 2010:35). It was also convenient, as the researcher had ready access (Hartas, 2010:69) to participants from his own school, as well as from the other two participatory schools; furthermore, these schools were in close proximity. At the same time, the researcher was aware of the dangers of convenience sampling, as the participants or volunteers’ “characteristics or attributes may not be distributed equally” (Hartas, 2010:69) and hence bias could emerge (Hartas, 2010:69).

For this study, the participants were selected to participate (purposive sampling), as the researcher has been employed in one of the three schools and have also been regularly visiting the other two schools with regard to educational, sport and union-related issues. Further, these schools were situated close to one another, making it easier for the researcher to reach. In addition, the researcher selected principals, deputy principals, HODs, SMTs and Post Level one teachers as the participants for this project, since the researcher regarded them all as educators and was of the opinion that all these persons had a role to play in the conflict at their institutions and hence would have their perceptions pertaining to conflict. The term educators, thus refers to principals, deputy principals, HODs, SMTs and Post Level One teachers. Further, through drawing in all of these aforementioned role-players, a broader perspective of the conflict phenomenon could be gained.

School 1 comprises of 24 participating educators, School 2 of 18 participating educators and School 3 of 17 participating educators. At this point, it is important to note that the open-ended questionnaire was completed by forty-three participants; semi-structured interviews were conducted with four participants; and the four focus group interviews conducted, comprised three participants each, hence 12 participants in four focus groups. The total number of participants in all data gathering tools was 59. Table 3.1 provides an overall summary of the data tools and number of participants.
A broad selection of the staff were involved in the sample, which included principals, deputy principals, HODs, SMTs and Post Level One teachers. The educator staff was drawn from the Foundation, Intermediate and Senior phases of the schools and included both male and female participants. In the ‘data gathering tools and data gathering process’ section, the process of the data collection will be examined.

The sample size was small in order to manage the comprehensive interviewing processes and to complete the study within a reasonable time-frame. These various members of staff were specifically selected, since the researcher believed that they had adequate experience in dealing with the phenomenon being studied, namely, conflict amongst educators at school, and that they would be in a position to provide the researcher with a wealth of data about the topic.

Much planning centred on the research procedures. All the necessary administrative work had to be available before the fieldwork could commence. Permission to conduct the research was received from the University’s Ethics Committee, the Provincial Department of Education, and the District Education Office. Having received the official authorisation, the principals of the schools targeted for fieldwork were approached for access to their schools and staff.

In engaging with the principals, the main aim and processes of the research project were explained. The principals then appointed liaison persons to assist the researcher in managing the required logistical and administrative functions in terms of identifying participants and drawing up time-schedules for contact sessions. Staff meetings were arranged to inform staff of the purpose of the study and the need for participants to volunteer.
The researcher worked with the appointed liaison persons to draft time-frames wherein interviews could be held and for the issuing and collection of questionnaires. Suitable interview venues at the schools were arranged with the liaison persons and the participants.

### 3.6.2 Role of researcher

Given the nature of this research, the researcher’s main aim was to develop an understanding of the research participants’ views of the world (Hatch, 2002:7) and their perceptions of conflict in particular. The researcher’s role was mainly to gather data to determine the perceptions of those involved pertaining to aspects related to conflict during the research process and to analyse and make sense of the data (Lichtman, 2010:16).

The researcher had to take relevant steps to uphold sound ethical principles throughout the research process (Mertens, 2005:33). These ethical considerations applied to measures of “informed consent”, “deception”, “privacy and confidentiality” and “accuracy” of data (Christians, 2005:144-145).

Obtaining the required authority to gain access to the research participants and the sites was essential to this study (Creswell, 2009:178). The researcher acquired the relevant permission to conduct the research from the University’s Ethics Committee, the Provincial and District Educational authorities and the principals of the three participatory schools.

The researcher had to ensure that requirements regarding the validity of the findings were adhered to (Creswell, 2009:177). Strategies such as triangulation, participant verification, reflection of possible researcher bias and the use of “rich, thick description to convey findings” were employed by the researcher (Creswell, 2009:191-192). These trustworthiness aspects, i.e. credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability, will be dealt with in more detail in another section.

Taking cognisance of the above, the researcher systematically went about planning how to engage with the research participants at the research sites. The researcher strived to establish a sound rapport with the research participants, clearly outlining the aims and objectives of the study (Thomas, 2011:69). Potential participants in the study were approached, and all agreed to participate (Thomas, 2011:69).

The aim of the researcher was to guide the process to elicit adequate and genuine responses from the participants and to strive not to influence the outcome. There were however, some challenges with regard to maintaining objectivity. The researcher’s
background and knowledge of the research topic was essential in collecting and clarifying data (Lichtman, 2010:20), but this fact could also influence his objectivity to a lesser or greater degree, as he had established a personal perspective on the topic before the research commenced. In acknowledging this, the researcher provided the research participants with the assurance that his aim was to maintain professionalism and a neutral stance in dealing with issues of educator conflict.

3.6.3 Ethical considerations

Researchers must uphold sound values and ethics during the research planning and research processes (Mouton, 2001:238-245). In the subsequent sections, the aspects related to ethical clearance (from the NMMU and Department of Education), informed consent and confidentiality and anonymity will be presented.

3.6.3.1 Ethical clearance

The researcher completed the required documentation and submitted this, together with the research proposal, to the University’s Ethics Committee. The research proposal was subsequently approved. The relevant application to engage with schools and educators in the research project was submitted to the Provincial Department of Education, as well as the Education Department’s District Office in Port Elizabeth. Upon receipt of official approval, the researcher was in a position to contact the principals of the schools earmarked in the sample to negotiate access to the schools and the educators in order to conduct the study.

3.6.3.2 Informed consent

In meetings held with the principals of the sample schools, the researcher provided them with the relevant official clearances and the project details, which ensured access to the schools and the educators (Creswell, 1994:148). All the participants were informed of the essential details of the project (Henning, 2004:73) and were assisted by the researcher and (or) the liaison person in completing the required consent forms.

3.6.3.3 Confidentiality and anonymity

The researcher provided assurances to the research participants that all information gathered from them (the participants), would not be disclosed without their permission (Silverman, 2010:155). Further, the researcher undertook to maintain the participants’ rights to privacy and anonymity (Christians, 2011:66). In this regard, no names of either the
institutions or individual participants were disclosed (Strydom, 2002:67). All participants were informed of the relevant ethical measures that were in place to allay any of their concerns.

3.6.4 Data gathering process

Blaikie (2010:205) lists the following qualitative data collection methods: “Participant observation, Observation: semi-structured and unstructured, Focused interview, In-depth interview, Oral/Life histories, Focus groups/Group interviews and Content analysis of documents”. For the purpose of this study, the researcher decided to use an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured personal interviews, as well as semi-structured focus group interviews, as data gathering tools (refer to 1.8.3).

3.6.4.1 Open-ended questionnaire

According to Thomas (2011:165), “A questionnaire is a written form of questioning and the questions may be closed … or open”. Open-ended questionnaires are designed to ensure respondents are capable of providing all the responses by themselves (Blaikie, 2010:205). For the purpose of this research, an open-ended questionnaire was designed, bearing in mind that open-ended questions provide opportunity for participants to express themselves with greater freedom and in their own particular way (Basit, 2010:84), and provide as much information as possible on their perception of the various categories covering the research topic. Further, the collection of data via an open-ended questionnaire, in addition to the interviews previously mentioned, added to the triangulation of data, which allowed the researcher to gain deeper insights into the topic of the study (Denscombe, 2007:134-135).

The researcher employed the open-ended questionnaire firstly since he was of the opinion that this data gathering tool would initially sensitise the participants around the issue of conflict and would possibly motivate some educators to participate in the planned in interviews ahead. In addition, being a novice researcher, the open-ended questionnaire would not be as challenging as the semi-structured personal interviews and semi-structured focus group interviews that were to follow thereafter. Hence it seemed logical for the researcher to conduct the questionnaire before the interviews.

The following process emerged, namely that an initial questionnaire was drafted and piloted amongst selected respondents. The questionnaire was then re-designed, since it appeared that the data gathered did not adequately cover all aspects required to reach the aims of the research. The researcher then arranged to present the reviewed open-ended questionnaire in person to the participants’ gathered in large groups at the same time and in the same venue. This meant that the questionnaire was completed anonymously by the participants,
with the researcher being present to explain any queries and to guide the participants in the completion of the questionnaire. The researcher then personally collected the questionnaires, whereupon each questionnaire was coded numerically in relation to the number of participants involved in the joint data gathering session. To illustrate how the researcher could identify the participants, the following example is presented: *Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 11*. The open-ended questionnaire was completed by nineteen participants in School 1; twelve in School 2; and twelve in School 3. It was also the first data gathering tool to be implemented. Table 3.1 portrays an overview of the different data tools and the number of participants per tool.

### 3.6.4.2 Individual semi-structured interviews

Merriam (2009:87) believes that interviews play an important role in most aspects of qualitative data collection. Lankshear and Knobel (2004:198) state that “Interviews are planned, prearranged interactions between two or more people, where one person is responsible for asking questions pertaining to a particular theme or topic of formal interest and the other (or others) are responsible for responding to these questions”. In addition, interviews can be utilised to obtain first-hand data from the research participants, which could allow the researcher to establish a deeper comprehension of their (the participants) perceptions of life experiences (Hatch, 2002:91; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007:103). Hence, researchers’ conduct interviews to delve into the research participants’ “perspectives” (Patton, 2002:341).

In deciding to make use of interviews, the researcher considered the advantages thereof. Interviews ensure that a wealth of information on a phenomenon can be extracted and that a deeper understanding of the data can be gained (Gillham, 2000:62; Denscombe, 2007:202-203; 2010:192-193). Research participants are also able to present issues that are essential to them through sharing their viewpoints (Denscombe, 2007:202-203; 2010:192-193). In addition, Bell (2005:157) points out that interviews can be easily adapted by the researcher and that they (interviews) could generate a good level of participation from those involved in the sample (Denscombe, 2007:202-203; 2010:192-193). Further, the correctness of the data can be easily validated by the participants and the opportunity granted to speak out about critical issues to the researcher could develop positive emotional feelings during the interviews among the participants (Denscombe, 2007:202-203; 2010:192-193).

The researcher also took cognisance of the disadvantages of interviews. The analysis of data gained during interviews may be more complicated (Bell, 2005:157), especially with regard to semi-structured and unstructured interviews, which usually generate responses that are not according to the norm (Denscombe, 2007:203-204; 2010:193-194). Considerable
time could also be taken up in analysing (Bell, 2005:157) and transcribing the data (Gillham, 2000:62). Other disadvantages of interviews relate to unique contextual factors that could negatively influence the reliability of the research; the researcher’s closeness and personality, which could inadvertently have either a negative or a positive effect on the participants’ responses; and the use of recording devices, which could intimidate the research participants and influence their responses (Denscombe, 2007:203-204; 2010:193-194). Further, the author contends that inappropriate interviewing techniques could adversely affect participants by creating a sense of unease amongst them, and that the interviewing process could cause a strain on the researchers’ resources and time, due to the need to travel to various locations to conduct the interviews.

Gillham (2000:65) believes that semi-structured interviews are the most appropriate type of interview for a case study. Thomas (2011:163) indicates that through semi-structured interviews, the researcher may maintain a schedule of the various aspects that need to be covered, but that the sequencing and wording of the interview questions may be altered or modified as deemed necessary by the researcher, a view supported by Lankshear and Knobel (2004:201-202) and Merriam (2009:90). In this way, the researcher may be in a position to provide the participants with more scope to engage more deeply with various related aspects that come to the fore (Denscombe, 2007:176; 2010:174; Basit, 2010:103-104).

Individual semi-structured interviews were the second data gathering tool that was employed by the researcher. Through these one on one personal interviews, the researcher believed that he would be in a more confident position to capably interact with the research participants and that the experience gained here would provide even greater advantage when the focus group interviews had to be conducted.

In addition, within this study, the use of semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to utilise more exploratory questioning to encourage participants to express their views more openly and present deeper insights into issues (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007:104-105; Merriam, 2009:100-101; Thomas, 2011:163). In this way, the researcher gathered more in-depth information regarding the topic of conflict amongst educators.

In striving to conduct the interviews successfully, the researcher followed the guidelines of Lankshear and Knobel (2004:210-211) by ensuring that adequate preparations were made for the interviews and that audio equipment was tested before the recording of the interviews. The researcher strived to develop a sound relationship with participants to make them feel comfortable and also provided participants with appropriate gestures and responses to show
that he was attentive during the interviews (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004:210-211). The researcher also considered the authors’ suggestions about according appropriate time for the interviews and expressing appreciation to the participants for their willingness to take part in the research. Further, relevant consent forms were completed and the participants were made aware of the purpose of the research (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004:210-211). Finally, the researcher made sure that participants were not mislead or deceived into taking part in the study (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004:210-211).

In addition to the above, the researcher applied the suggestions of Hatch (2002:114-115) with regard to successful interviewing. The interviews were conducted in a courteous manner and the participants were probed for deeper insights without making them feel uncomfortable (Hatch, 2002:114-115). Participants were requested to provide feedback to the researcher about the interview processes and the topic covered (Hatch, 2002:114-115). Also, the researcher transcribed the interviews as timeously as possible (Hatch, 2002:114-115).

In drawing up the questions for the semi-structured interviews, the researcher strived to ensure that questions would lead to a wide scope of responses; that they (the questions) were distinct, uncomplicated and unambiguous and that they (the questions) would suit the linguistic level of the participants (Hatch, 2002:106-107). The author also suggests that questioning should be impartial and that researchers should refrain from being judgmental regarding participants’ responses. Further, the questions posed, should value the importance of the data provided by the participants and they (the questions) should always be guided by the aims and goals of the study (Hatch, 2002:106-107).

The semi-structured individual interviews were conducted after the implementation of the open-ended questionnaire. These individual interviews were conducted with participants who had not completed the open-ended questionnaire. This saw the completion of two semi-structured individual interviews in School 1; none in School 2 (due to the educators’ time constraints); and two in School 3. Table 3.1 highlights number of participants as well as the different data tools.

3.6.4.3 Focus group interviews

Interviews in which a researcher interacts with a group of people are referred to as focus groups (Basit, 2010:104); hence the general perception of focus groups as group interviews (Punch, 2009:146; Lichtman, 2010:153). Concurring with this view, Denscombe (2007:178; 2010:177) states that focus groups are a means of exploring people’s “attitudes and perceptions, feelings and ideas about a specific topic” (Denscombe, 2010:177). This seems to be in line with what the researcher had in mind for this study, since the aim of the focus
group interviews were to elicit in-depth information from participants regarding their perceptions of conflict amongst educators at their schools.

The researcher believes that focus group interviews were another data gathering tool best suited for this study, based on the particular characteristics of focus groups, as pointed out by various authors such as Denscombe (2010:177) who states that, “There is a focus to the session” (interview session), with reference to the interaction being centred around the participants’ special exposure to and the common information shared about the phenomenon being studied, which in this case was the participants’ perception of conflict amongst educators at their schools. The author adds that the focus is also on drawing out sufficient detail from the participants through the “interaction within the group” (2010:177), a view that is supported by Cohen et al. (2007:376), Basit (2010:104) and Lichtman (2010:154). Also, when people are in groups, they tend to conduct themselves in a different manner; for example, they usually express themselves more openly about issues or, conversely, withdraw from the conversation (Thomas, 2009:169). Further, when focus group interviews are effectively managed, they have the potential to raise issues that participants may initially have been reluctant to discuss (Punch, 2009:147). Importantly, Hartas (2010:234) argues that in group interviews, participants tend to engage in a more naturalistic expression of how they perceive the world (and in this instance, the phenomenon of educator conflict) “which, in turn, might produce more legitimate claims to the validity or credibility of the data” (2010:234).

In highlighting the advantages of using focus group interviews, Denscombe (2010:177) indicates that the role of the researcher in this type of interview is to “facilitate” (2010:177) how the group of participants interact with one another, instead of taking the lead during the interview. Another advantage of using focus group interviews is saving time, since personalised individual interviews tend to take up a lot of time (Lichtman, 2010:154); less time is consumed if a group of people are interviewed altogether.

The researcher decided to use small focus groups consisting of three participants per group, which Denscombe (2007:181) refers to as mini-focus groups. This was done since it appeared that arranging an appropriate time and venue would be problematic if large numbers of participants were to be interviewed (Denscombe, 2007:181; 2010:181). Further, large focus groups could be difficult to manage effectively and could render introverted individuals feeling overwhelmed by participants with more boisterous or confident personalities (Denscombe, 2007:181; 2010:181). Also, the recording of information from large focus groups would be more cumbersome, making transcription an extremely challenging task (Denscombe, 2007:181; 2010:181; Hartas, 2010:235).
The focus group interviews were administered last, since the researcher had by then built up adequate experience to confidently conduct such interviews with research participants. In addition, the researcher had by then acquired better interviewing skills such as probing for more in-depth information, which yielded invaluable data.

The researcher arranged for four focus group interviews, which included three participants in each focus group, from the three sample schools. One focus group interview per school was conducted at two of the sample schools, while two focus group interviews were conducted at the third sample school. This was due to the fact that at two of the sample schools, follow-up personal interviews were conducted with two participants each, whereas at the third sample school, two focus group interviews were held, because there was inadequate time to conduct further follow-up personal interviews with the participants at that particular school. These four focus group interviews were then coded alphabetically (A-D) while the three participants in each focus group were numerically coded (1-3). In illustrating an example hereof, these participants could be identified by the researcher in the following manner: Focus group interview B, School 2, Participant 3.

The researcher arranged for four focus group interviews, which included three participants in each focus group, from the three sample schools. One focus group interview per school was conducted at two of the sample schools, while two focus group interviews were conducted at the third sample school. The focus group interviews were conducted after the open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured individual interviews had been completed. With reference to Table 3.1, one focus group interview with three participants at School 1 was completed; while two focus group interviews consisting of three participants each at School 2 were conducted and one focus group interview with three participants at School 3 were also completed.

3.6.5 Data collection: Pilot phase and formal collection procedure

Phase one comprised a pilot phase. The initial open-ended questionnaire was drafted and piloted amongst nine randomly selected participants (three participants per school). On receipt of the questionnaires, the researcher realised that they had not been adequately completed by the participants. The questionnaire was then re-drafted to ensure that the participants would be able to properly complete all questions/aspects of the questionnaire.

The researcher piloted the semi-structured interview with two participants at each school in order to ascertain whether the semi-structured interview questions were well phrased and whether participants would have a clear understanding of what was being asked. In addition,
this also provided an opportunity for the researcher to undertake a practice run as novice researcher. This initial round of semi-structured interviews yielded information that was not as in-depth as envisaged; hence the researcher re-drafted the semi-structured interview questions.

The questionnaire was then re-designed, since it appeared that the data gathered did not adequately cover all aspects of the research questions and it also emerged that some questions had to be rephrased in order to ensure that any ambiguity was eliminated.

During phase two, the data was collected through the following formal procedure: Firstly, the open-ended questionnaire was completed by participants. These participants included a wide range of educators from the Foundation Phase, Intermediate Phase and Senior Phase as well as the school leaders as previously stated. The researcher decided to personally oversee the completion of the open-ended questionnaire with groups of participants at the three research sites on three alternative days in order to ensure that all the open-ended questionnaires would be completed and returned and to ensure that participants could clarify any questions, as well as to ensure anonymity. Anonymity was ensured by placing each completed open-ended questionnaire in a designated box and by ensuring that no personal information had to be indicated on the open-ended questionnaire. The open-ended questionnaire took approximately 45 minutes per session to complete and was undertaken by nineteen participants in School 1, twelve in School 2 and twelve in School 3.

Secondly, the semi-structured interviews were conducted after the open-ended questionnaire had been completed. This was to ensure that most of the educators at these schools were adequately aware of the study being undertaken and that those educators who were not able to participate in the questionnaire would be possibly more readily available for participation in the interviews that were to follow. These individual semi-structured interviews, which took approximately one hour per interview session to complete, were conducted with participants that had not completed the open-ended questionnaire. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with two participants in School 1, none in School 2 (due to the educators’ time constraints) and two in School 3. Again, as mentioned above, the participants were drawn from a broad range of educators. The individual semi-structured interviews were held at times convenient to the participants and at venues of their (the participants’) choice. Therefore, the interviews were held at opportune times in more private locations within the research sites, and even at the residences of some of the participants. This process yielded the in-depth information that assisted the researcher with the study.
Then thirdly, those participants who had not participated in the semi-structured interviews were specifically approached to participate in focus-group interviews to explore aspects pertaining to conflict among educators. As stated above, participants to these interviews included teachers and school leaders from the Foundation, Intermediate and Senior Phases. Further, these interviews were again held at more convenient times and at more private venues which minimised any disturbances and/or intrusions.

Data collection proceeded through four focus group interviews; one focus group in School 1 with three participants; two focus group interviews in School 2 with three participants in each focus group; and one focus group in School 3 with three participants. At the second sample school, at which additional personal interviews could not be conducted due to time constraints, an extra focus group interview was held with three participants. Each focus group session, which ranged between 90 minutes and two hours, provided ample opportunity for probing for more comprehensive information.

3.6.6 Limitations: Problems encountered during data collection

A variety of problems were encountered in the collection of data for this study, in terms of meetings with staff, time-frames for interviewing, and the completion of questionnaires.

*Staff meetings:* At one school, arranging meetings with the staff in order to appropriately introduce the research topic and assistance required proved to be problematic. This was due to a number of factors, as indicated by the liaison person. There was reluctance among some staff members to make time for meetings after school, since they had to attend to personal matters or school administrative duties. Apathy was another reason why staff members were reluctant to avail themselves for the meeting. Due to these reasons, specific staff members were identified and personally approached by the researcher to volunteer for participation. This was extremely time consuming, but it assisted in gaining cooperation from various staff members.

*Interviews:* In general, problems were encountered in finding an appropriate time-slot and a suitable venue to interview staff. Since the fieldwork intruded into school programme, and almost all participants were willing to give of their time at school, the dates of the interviews and times allocated had to be constantly rescheduled to accommodate all participating participants.

The lack of physical and private space in terms of conducting the interview, created a few logistical problems. In most instances, interviews were conducted in the educators’
classrooms, storage or bookrooms and in shared office space of HODs. This led to many disturbances from either the learners or other staff members, who inadvertently intruded on the interview processes and high levels of noise in the background. This resulted in unforeseen stoppages in the interviews and the recordings – factors which made transcribing the data somewhat challenging. In subsequent interviews, the follow-up personal interviews and the focus group interviews were scheduled at more appropriate times and in venues that were less subject to disturbances. In relation to this rescheduling, two of the four personal interviews and two of the four focus group interviews were conducted away from the participants’ schools in order to ensure that the participants were able to provide sufficient information, with as few disturbances as possible.

**Questionnaires:** Reaching all the participants at their schools in one session was only fairly successful, for various reasons. At one school, only nineteen of the possible twenty five educator staff availed themselves, due to a learner camp held over that same period. The two other schools proved to be even more challenging, in that fewer participants were prepared to present themselves for the questionnaire sessions. This could be ascribed to individuals having insufficient time to attend the sessions, being inundated with administrative and assessment duties, and to personal factors. The result was that smaller, separate questionnaire sessions had to be held with groups of four or five participants at a time, which resulted in twelve questionnaires being completed for school two and another twelve for school three.

Some respondents did not complete their responses comprehensively, resulting in a lack of depth and quality in their open-ended questionnaire data. Such shortcomings appeared to be due to a variety of factors. It appeared that some respondents felt that more time should have been provided to complete the questionnaire, while others were reluctant to provide specific information, for personal reasons. A few of the respondents seemed to lack a sense of urgency or compulsion to complete the questionnaire and provided minimal data only.

In general, it seemed that the task of gathering data from the participants was made more daunting by constraints in contextual factors at the schools, and, to a lesser degree, the individual lack of willingness to participate.

### 3.7 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Lichtman (2010:195) states that the objective of analysing qualitative data is to reduce unnecessary bulky information in producing data that is relevant and meaningful. All data
furnished by the research participants need to be scrutinised to ensure that only that which is pertinent to the topic is identified (Basit, 2010:183).

In relation to data analysis and data interpretation, Basit (2010:199) believes that it is difficult to distinguish between analysing and interpreting data due to contextual factors involved in the collection thereof. Basit (2010:1999) states that data analysis and interpretation within qualitative studies happens in most cases at the same time. Interpretation then should enable the researcher to tell a coherent story (Basit, 2010:200). According to De Vos (2002:344), the analysis of data entails “a heightened awareness of the data, a focused attention on those data and an openness to the subtle, tacit undercurrents of social life”. With regard to the interpretation of data, the author states that “interpretation involves making sense of the data” (De Vos, 2002:344).

In addition, Marshall and Rossman (1999:151; 2006:155) argue that the gathering and analysing of data combines to develop substantive “interpretation of the data” (1999:151). This view is supported by Merriam (2009:175-176), who points out that the researcher has to continually compare and reflect over various aspects of the data, utilising deductive and inductive reasoning in developing a comprehensive understanding thereof.

For this study, the classification of data via coding was preferred. Coding is the foundation of the data analysis process (Bernard & Ryan, 2000:780; Charmaz, 2005:517) and entails using “tags, names or lables” in “labelling or categorizing” data (Punch, 2009:176). The analysis and coding processes during this study followed the procedures indicated by Creswell (2009:184-186). Figure 3.1 depicts the process on the next page.
Figure 3.1 illustrates the procedures suggested by (Creswell, 2009:185). Below, each of the steps as suggested by Creswell (2009:185-190), is described. Before any of the steps can commence, raw data are required (Creswell, 2009:185):

- **Step 1:** The data need to be arranged in a manner that will ensure that the transcription thereof is accurately captured via typing.

- **Step 2:** The data should then be read to develop an initial impression or broad overview thereof. Questions reflected on included ‘What is the participant stating?’ ‘Is there sufficient depth in the responses?’ ‘How credible is the data and to what extent is it relevant?’ Remarks were jotted down in the margins.
• **Step 3:** Next, the data have to be subjected to a coding process whereby various aspects of the text are marked. It is important to take note of the suggestions of Tesch (1990:142-145, as cited by Creswell (2009:186), before Step 4 is followed. These steps of Tesch (1990:142-145) as cited by Creswell (2009:186), are as follows, quoted verbatim from Creswell (2009:186):

  o “Get a sense of the whole. Read all the transcriptions carefully. Perhaps jot down some ideas as they come to mind.”
  o “Pick one document (i.e., one interview) – the most interesting one, the shortest, the one at the top of the pile. Go through it, asking yourself, “What is this about?” Do not think about the substance of the information but its underlying meaning. Write thoughts in the margin.”
  o “When you have completed a number of interviews, make a list of all topics. Cluster similar topics together. Form these topics into columns that might be arranged as major topics, unique topics and leftovers.”
  o “Now take this list and go back to your data. Abbreviate the topics as codes and write the codes next to the appropriate segments of the text. Try this preliminary organizing scheme to see if categories and codes emerge.”
  o “Find the most descriptive wording for your topics and turn them into categories. Look for ways of reducing your total list of categories by grouping topics that relate to each other. Perhaps draw lines between your categories to show interrelationships.”
  o “Make a final decision on the abbreviations of each category and alphabetize these codes.”
  o “Assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis.”
  o “If necessary, recode your existing data.”

In addition, codes could be considered that are, for example, based on literature read, ‘common sense’, and unanticipated aspects (Creswell, 2009:186-187). Therefore, the researcher has to consider whether codes are going to be developed or based on the emerging data collected from the participants (Creswell, 2009:187), to which Gibbs (2007:45)
refers as data-driven coding. Alternatively, the researcher could use predetermined codes and attempt to link or code the data by using these predetermined codes (Creswell, 2009:187), to which Gibbs (2007:45) refers as concept-driven coding. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006:160), the codes that researchers opt to use, may take the form of "abbreviations of key words, colored dots, numbers (and more)" (2006:160). Lastly, Creswell (2009:187) also suggests that a researcher could use a combination of the two approaches indicated above. In order to code, the researcher has to look at portions or sections of data text and indicate a code or category next to it, either by using a word that the participant used or a word that can be associated with the section of text referred to (Creswell, 2009:186). In terms of this study, the researcher used a variety of coloured symbols to identify themes and categories (Marshall & Rossman, 2011:212-213).

- **Step 4:** The various codes are then grouped or categorised into themes (Creswell, 2009:189)). Creswell also states that the researcher could either use a word category or a theme, as both has the same meaning (Creswell, 2005:239). In addition, the researcher could also decide to reduce the overlapping or redundancy of codes into a smaller group of codes before the codes are collapsed into themes (Creswell, 2005:238). These themes could be linked in order to provide a narrative account during the presentation of the findings, or be developed into a "theoretical model" (Creswell, 2009:189).

- **Step 5:** During this step, the researcher has to decide how the themes are going to be depicted in order to provide a "qualitative narrative" (Creswell, 2009:189) or story line.

- **Step 6:** During this final step, the researcher interprets the data, getting the gist thereof, for example by asking what has been learned from the data (Creswell, 2009:189). These lessons learned, could refer to linking the findings to the literature as well as the researcher’s own "personal interpretation" brought from his own "experiences" and "culture" (Creswell, 2009:189). At the same time, it is important that the process does not end with interpretation, as after the data analysis and interpretation processes, the insights gained must be linked to existing literature and recommendations must be outlined (Gray et al., 2007:49).
Patton (2002:480) summarises the concept ‘interpretation’ well, by stating:

“Interpretation, by definition, involves going beyond the descriptive data. Interpretation means attaching significance to what was found, making sense of the findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, considering meanings, and otherwise imposing order on an unruly but surely patterned world.”

(Patton, 2002:480)

Struwig and Stead (2001:172) refer to interpretation as “giving meaning to raw data”, while Mouton (2001:109) and Patton (2002:432) contend that interpretation assists in confirming findings from existing literature, highlighting important things that we were unaware of, to confirm or support existing findings or theories or to refute them.

For the purpose of this study, the suggestions and process of Creswell (2009:183-190) were followed. Figure 1 also assisted in making this process easier to understand. The following steps were followed in this research (Creswell, 2009:183-190):

- For the data to be analysed, it (the data) needs to be arranged in a structured manner (Creswell, 2009:185). Data was firstly transcribed and typed (Creswell, 2009:185) to ensure that it was accurately presented in its entire form (Denscombe, 2010:275). The researcher had to contend with some challenges in the transcription process, such as instances of audio unclarity due to background noises and participants commenting over the responses of others, participants who responded in seemingly unpunctuated, drawn-out sentences, and difficulties in depicting “intonation, emphasis and accents used in speech” (Denscombe, 2010:276-277).

- The data was read to get a general picture thereof in order to develop an initial impression (Creswell, 2009:185). Questions such as “What general ideas are participants saying? What is the tone of the ideas? What is the impression of the overall depth, credibility, and use of the information?” (Creswell, 2009:185) were considered by the researcher. In addition, the researcher familiarised himself with the data by reading through the transcriptions several times (Marshall & Rossman, 2006:158).
• The data was then subjected to a coding process, during which the data collected was classified into different sections or headings (Creswell, 2009:186). During this coding technique, the researcher designed codes as the data emerged (Creswell, 2009:187). Various aspects of the text were marked, using distinct symbols (Marshall & Rossman, 2006:160-161). The researcher specifically applied codes to data that revealed similar aspects; to data to which the research participants attached much emphasis (Gibson & Brown, 2009:134); to data that appeared to be supported by the literature; and to features of data that could be applied to one’s “common sense” (Creswell, 2009:186). The number of codes and categories was then reduced by linking similar aspects and themes (Creswell, 2009:186), while the most relevant and prominent data was determined for further analysis by the researcher (Denscombe, 2010:285). This resulted in the emergence of additional and various sub-categories (Creswell, 2009:186).

• A contextual background was developed in describing the research participants, site and the phenomenon studied, as well as the particular aspects and topics that were revealed (Creswell, 2009:189).

• A qualitative narrative was applied to represent the “description and themes” that emerged (Creswell, 2009:189). The researcher endeavoured to present data that was relevant and focused on the main theme “about the social phenomenon” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006:162).

• The data was then interpreted through either the “researcher’s personal interpretation” and/or “from a comparison of the findings with information gleaned from the literature” (Creswell, 2009:189).

To summarise interpretation with reference to this study: After analysing the data, interpretation followed when the knowledge gained from the data was linked to the literature, where possible. With regard to qualitative research, Creswell (2009:190) states that interpretation “can take many forms, be adapted for different types of designs, and be flexible to convey personal, research-based, and action meanings”.

3.8 ENSURING TRUSTWORTHINESS IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The soundness or correctness of research has always been evaluated through processes of validity and reliability, which emanate from within a quantitative approach (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004:361). According to Creswell (1994:157), there is no clear consensus among qualitative scholars regarding the applicability of the traditional approaches of validity and
reliability in qualitative research. This view is supported by Struwig and Stead (2001:143), who, in addition, point out that the rules governing the examining of validity are very obscure, or as they state, “there is no widely accepted guidelines for testing validity in qualitative research”. Further, positivists frequently question the soundness of qualitative research, “perhaps because their concepts of validity and reliability cannot be addressed in the same way in naturalistic work” (Shenton, 2004:63).

Marshall and Rossman (1999:191; 2006:200) state that “All research must respond to canons of quality—criteria against which the trustworthiness of the project can be evaluated”. Lankshear and Knobel (2004:360-361) are in agreement that research projects need to comply with the criteria of validity and reliability. These authors are supported by Merriam (2009:209) who, in addition, highlights the value of determining the level of trustworthiness of a study. The author prefers to use the terms “trustworthiness and rigor” (2009:209) as against the conventional terms of validity and reliability in establishing the quality of a study.

According to Golafshani (2003:143) and Springer (2010:10), reliability and validity play a major role in evaluating qualitative research. Reliability refers to the repetition of a research project with participants and a research setting that closely resemble the original study (Basit, 2010:69). This definition is supported by Gibbs in Creswell (2009:190), who argue that “qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher’s approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects”. In addition, Struwig and Stead, (2001:133-134) point out that qualitative reliability is the same as the term “consistency”. This refers to findings that are constantly the same, irrespective of the time-frame wherein the study had been replicated or the different researchers’ perceptions.

Validity is defined as the process in research that literally gauges or represents “the phenomena it set out to measure or describe” (Basit, 2010:63). In addition, Creswell (2009:190) contends that scholars have to ensure that specific processes have been followed in determining the correctness of the results obtained from the data; therefore, whether the findings are credible.

At the same time, it is important to note that some authors do not agree fully with the above traditional assumptions regarding the establishment of a study’s quality or soundness. Thomas (2011:62-63) is of the opinion that reliability and validity should not be regarded as an essential features of case study research with regard to issues of quality. The author qualifies this by stating that, “In a case study, where there is one case, expectations about reliability drop away. They drop away because, with just one case, there can be no assumption from the outset that, if the inquiry were to be repeated by different people at a
different time, similar findings would result” (2011:62-63), views that are supported by Shenton (2004:69). Thomas (2011:63) points out that the same view applies to validity when evaluating case studies.

Similar views are held by Gibson and Brown (2009:59). These authors contend that the qualitative researcher is engaged in a distinctive manner with the study’s participants, thereby eliciting and deriving analysis in a unique way. Although there seems to be conflicting views, the researcher deemed it appropriate to apply measures of trustworthiness to the study, as suggested by Denscombe (1998:213-214; 2003:274; 2010:297-298), Ary et al. (2009:497-505), Merriam (2009:210-228) and Basit (2010:70-71). This will be dealt with in a subsection within this section further down. These four qualitative concepts (credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability) can be associated with their counterparts in quantitative research, as well as the issues that these four terms address, as indicated in Table 3.2 below (Ary et al., 2009:498).

### TABLE 3.2: Standards of rigour for research (Ary et al., 2009:498)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
<th>Issue addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal validity</td>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>Truth value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External validity</td>
<td>Transferability</td>
<td>Generalisability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Dependability or trustworthiness</td>
<td>Consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectivity</td>
<td>Confirmability</td>
<td>Neutrality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before the four constructs (credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability) and how the researcher attended to them are discussed, it is important to take note of the seven questions that Denscombe (1998:213-214; 2003:274) proposes to address the issue of trustworthiness. These questions are (Denscombe, 1998:213-214; 2003:74):

- Do the conclusions do justice to the complexity of the phenomenon being investigated and avoid ‘oversimplifications’, while also offering internal consistency?
  - The researcher believes that the conclusions adequately justify the phenomenon studied, since they (the conclusions) were drawn from multiple sources of data.

- Has the researcher’s self been recognized as an influence in the research, but not a cause of biased and one-sided reporting?
The researcher has acknowledged that his own bias and subjectivity may have had an impact on the research project. Bearing this in mind, the researcher consciously sought to maintain a fair and neutral stance so that reporting could be as objective as possible.

- Have the instances selected for the investigation been chosen on explicit and reasonable grounds as far as the aims of the research are concerned?
  - The researcher believes that investigating educator perceptions of staff conflict at their schools is reasonable, since the ultimate aim of the study was to assist educators and schools in finding more appropriate ways of dealing with staff conflict.

- Have alternative possible explanations been explored?
  - The researcher comprehensively studied the literature pertaining to various aspects of conflict, including its causes and sources, techniques for handling conflict, as well as various strategies to manage conflict in more appropriate ways.

- Have the findings been ‘triangulated’ with alternative sources as a way of bolstering confidence in their validity?
  - The researcher made use of various data sources in promoting triangulation to enhance their validity.

- Have the research findings been fed back to informants to get their opinion on the explanation being proposed?
  - The researcher informally relayed the findings of this research project to the research participants to gauge their opinions.

- How far do the findings and conclusions fit with the existing knowledge on the area, and how far do they translate to other comparable situations?
  - The findings and conclusions of this research project are comparable to the existing knowledge related to the dimensions of the phenomenon studied and could be compared to similar situations with similar contexts.

In the following subsections, the four constructs (credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability) to ensure rigour or soundness (trustworthiness) will be outlined and discussed.
It is important to note that these four constructs of trustworthiness present aspects that are interlinked (Graneheim & Ludman, 2004:109-111).

### 3.8.1 Credibility

This term is also referred to as internal validity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989:236; Ary et al., 2006:504; Merriam, 2009:213) or truth value (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:290; Ary et al., 2009:498). This construct aims to determine the extent to which the findings compare with reality, or whether the researcher is actually measuring what he or she should be measuring (Merriam, 2009:213). Yet, this term is rather a goal than a product, as reality cannot be captured (Merriam, 2009:214, with reference to Maxwell, 2005:105). Therefore, the focus is on how people understand or experience the world or reality; their perceptions of reality (Merriam, 2009:214). One way of addressing credibility is through triangulation (Creswell, 2009:191; Merriam, 2009:216), also called crystallisation (Merriam, 2009:216, with reference to Richardson, 2000:934). This implies the use of, for example, multiple data sources, e.g. interviews, observations or even open-ended questionnaires (Ary et al., 2009:502-503; Merriam, 2009:215). Another way to establish credibility is through member checking or respondent validation (Ary et al., 2009:499-500; Creswell, 2009:191; Merriam, 2009:217). In addition, critical reflection by the researcher as well as extended fieldwork could assist (Creswell, 2009:192; Merriam, 2009:219). Peer review, i.e. peers knowledgeable about the topic, or colleagues new to the topic, could be used to ascertain whether the raw data and the findings are matching (Denscombe, 1998:213-214; 2003:274; Creswell, 2009:192; Merriam, 2009:220).

The researcher incorporated various measures to determine the internal validity or truth value of the research, as discussed above. Data was gathered and analysed in line with the research questions as guide. Use was made of triangulation (Creswell, 2009:191) in terms of data collection methods, namely individual interviews, focus group interviews and questionnaires. At least three sets of participants were involved in obtaining different viewpoints covering the same phenomenon. The researcher gathered perspectives on the phenomenon from different angles from the various participants involved, namely post level one educators, head of departments, deputy principals and principals. These participants also represented the various phases of the sample schools, namely Foundation Phase, Intermediate Phase and Senior Phase. Member checking or respondent validation (Creswell, 2009:191; Merriam, 2009:217) was utilised, in terms of which the participants involved were informally provided with the analysis of their transcripts to elicit their opinions. Peer review (Merriam, 2009:220) was also undertaken, in terms of which a colleague compared the raw data and findings of the research.
3.8.2 Transferability

This term refers to external validity or generalisability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989:241; Ary et al., 2009:501-502) and pertains to whether the findings of the study can be applied to another setting. This criterium is elaborated on by Denscombe (2007:299; 2010:301) in the form of the following question, “To what extent could the findings be transferred to other instances?” This has been a point of concern of case studies, but then it was argued that readers actually do make interpretations and generalise (see Section 3.4.3), as suggested by Stake (1995:86). Merriam’s (2009:224) words also seem important, as she contends that transferability or generalisability is possible within a single case study: “a single-case … is selected precisely because the researcher wishes to understand the particular depth, not to find out what is generally true of many” (Merriam, 2009:224). Equally important, although qualitative case studies do not provide statistical data, this does not imply that nothing can be learned from a case study; indeed, Merriam states that a great deal can be learned (Merriam, 2009:224), views which are also supported by Stake (1995:85).

The researcher applied this “through honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, and the use of triangulation” (Basit, 2010:64) and endeavoured to counter the “halo effect” in terms of not allowing “the researcher’s knowledge of the participants, or knowledge of other existing data about participants or situations (to) affect the researchers’ judgement” (Basit, 2010:64).

3.8.3 Dependability

This term refers to trustworthiness or consistency (Ary et al., 2009:502) and relates to the extent to which a different researcher would be able to obtain similar findings and outcomes through utilising the same strategy (Ary et al., 2009:502; Denscombe, 2007:298; 2010:299-300). Guba and Lincoln (1989:242) also compare dependability with reliability. According to Ary et al. (2009:502-503), the provision of an audit trail could be useful in order to establish dependability or consistency (reliability), as this audit trail highlights the decision-making process, for example, ‘what was done’, ‘why it was done’, ‘when it was done’, ‘who was studied’, ‘why they were selected’, etc. (Ary et al., 2006:509). Equally important, it also refers to being able to present the raw data as evidence of data collection and analysis. Hence, should someone else want to replicate this study, the audit trail, research design and the decision made also assist with dependability (Ary et al., 2009:502). Data triangulation also assists in this regard (Ary et al., 2009:503), as triangulation assists with the justification of the findings (Creswell, 2009:191).
With reference to the dependability of the research, the researcher again made use of triangulation by using several data gathering sources in order to support the findings (Creswell, 2009:191), as discussed previously. The researcher also ensured that all processes regarding the various phases of the research were recorded and filed and available for review by others (Ary et al., 2006:509).

### 3.8.4 Confirmability

Confirmability, also referred to as objectivity or neutrality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:299-300; Ary et al., 2009:504;), is linked to the conventional idea of objectivity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989:242), in terms of which the researcher has to ‘prove’ that the study was not influenced by the researcher’s personal biases, or put differently, whether the participants’ voices were accurately reported, and whether the data collected, the findings, interpretations and conclusions are confirmable by other persons (Ary et al., 2009:504). The findings, therefore, should be reported without bias and manipulation, i.e. “free of bias in the procedures and interpretations of results” (Ary et al., 2009:504). In order to assist with the above, an audit trail is extremely useful, as is the triangulation of data (Ary et al., 2009:504).

To ensure confirmability, the researcher declares that the data gathered and analysed is true and correct and that conscious efforts were made to maintain a professional and objective stance in relation to the participants involved and the phenomenon studied. Further, records of all the various phases of the research are available for review, as discussed above. Also, the triangulation of data, as indicated previously, was utilised in confirming the analysis and findings. This then was how the researcher strived to achieve truthfulness by employing credible procedures throughout the research process.

### 3.9 SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the framework of the research processes utilised in the development of this research project. The researcher endeavoured to provide details of all the various phases of the research, to ensure greater clarity and understanding of the research.

The background to the research, the research question and subsidiary questions, as well as the objectives of the research, were discussed. In providing the rationale for the research design, an overview of the different paradigms was presented, wherein the researcher highlighted the interpretive, qualitative nature in which this intrinsic exploratory case study was located. In terms of the methods employed in this project, the following aspects were discussed: the research context, population and sample, the researcher’s role, recruitment of participants, ethical considerations, data gathering, problems encountered in the collection of
data, and data analysis and interpretation. Lastly, the issue of ensuring the trustworthiness of this research was examined.

Through the above framework of research design and methodology, the researcher strived to employ procedures complying with the highest level of requirements, as determined by academia in social research. In the next chapter, the research findings and recommendations will be discussed.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to investigate educators’ perceptions of conflict amongst staff at their schools, with special reference to their perceptions regarding the term ‘conflict’, the causes of conflict among educators, the consequences of conflict, how conflict was being dealt with, as well as how conflict could be dealt with in an appropriate manner. In the previous chapter, the methodology applied to this study was discussed. In this chapter, the research findings will be presented and interpreted.

Data was gathered through personal semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and an open-ended questionnaire, as indicated in Chapter Three. The data is presented according to the main research questions, which sought to elicit the perceptions of the educators around issues of educator conflict. In dealing with the educators’ perceptions of conflict, the data is presented in terms of the educators’ perceived understanding of the term conflict, possible perceived causes of educator conflict, the perceived consequences of conflict, and perceptions of how conflict is usually dealt with. An appropriate manner to deal with educator conflict – including third party intervention – is presented. The above-mentioned aspects formed the themes under which the data are presented, each with categories and some with sub-categories, where applicable. Table 4.1 presents an overview of the themes, categories and sub-categories. In the following sections, the perceptions and stories emerging from the data are presented.
TABLE 4.1: Themes, categories and sub-categories

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### 4.2 Educators' Understanding of the Term Conflict

Conflict is something that one cannot wish away. It is a worldwide phenomenon (Furlong, 2005:9). It became evident from the data that the participants had different perceptions or opinions of the term ‘conflict’. This was reflected by the data gathered from the open-ended questionnaire, as well as from the semi-structured individual interviews and the focus group interviews. The data revealed that the participants were of the opinion that conflict was associated with negative connotations. Aspects of conflict relating to disagreements, misunderstandings, verbal and non-verbal fighting and different views or opinions of individuals were highlighted by the participants.
4.2.1 Disagreements

When asked about their understanding of the term “conflict”, the majority of the educators indicated that disagreements were, in their opinion, apt descriptions of conflict. These perceptions became evident from the completed open-ended questionnaire, as several participants stated that conflict is perceived as disagreement between people or among people or parties. This was well captured by one participant who wrote that conflict “… is a disagreement between two or more parties” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 2). This was also confirmed during the interviews, when one participant stated “… I see it as a disagreement … with regard to decisions that have been taken” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant G). In another focus group interview, one participant concurred, stating, “I see the situation where people don’t come to terms or agree with one another …” (Focus group interview A, School 2, Participant 1), hence, supporting the views of the other participants above.

The participants’ indication that the term ‘conflict’ is perceived as disagreement, appears to be in accordance with Nelson and Quick (2008:310) and Zide (2006:73), who argue that disagreement as a form of interpersonal conflict arises when people are unable to agree with others over their concerns. This perception is further supported by Ramani and Zhimin (2010:245), who indicate that such conflict comes to the fore when persons cannot reach agreement with others, due to divergent goals, needs and behaviour. This suggests that conflict conjures up the perception of disagreement.

4.2.2 Misunderstandings

Another dimension that arose, was the perception that conflict was a misunderstanding, as many of the participants agreed that misunderstandings played a huge role in their perceptions of conflict. This became apparent from all three data gathering tools. One participant stated in the open-ended questionnaire that “It is a misunderstanding between two or more people” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 1). This view was also highlighted during personal semi-structured interviews. One participant responded that he viewed conflict as “That’s what is conflict, mainly misunderstandings” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant R). This was further emphasised by one participant, who added “… and there is not a clear understanding of, of what message was carried through” (Focus group interview B, School 2, Participant 2). Again highlighting the issue of misunderstanding, another participant concluded that a “Lack of understanding about issues causes conflict” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 8).
The perception of misunderstanding seems to be in line with the literature, as Moore (2003: 64) and Littlejohn and Domenici (2007:11) are of the opinion that any shortcomings in terms of information not being adequately or effectively carried over and interpreted, may lead to misperception and misunderstanding. This view is supported by Bradshaw (2008:19), who adds that misunderstanding as a perception of conflict could be embedded in the individuals’ own perceptions. Further, it seems that these views are linked to some aspects of the Uncertainty Theory of Conflict which contends that conflict arises due to insufficient or inadequate information being available about “motives, goals, or behaviors or when we do not understand how another (person) is responding to us” (Abigail & Cahn, 2011:218). Hence, the participants’ view that conflict is perceived as misunderstanding seems to be validated by the above.

4.2.3 Verbal and non-verbal fighting

Conflict seems to bring up images of physical encounters and unbecoming conduct (Barsky & Wood, 2005:249). Tillet and French (2006:6), in reference to the Oxford English Dictionary, concur, stating that the term conflict is associated with words such as “... a fight, battle. ... Fighting, contending with arms, ...”. The participants in this study seemed to have similar opinions, as several shared that verbal and non-verbal fighting was an important aspect of their perception of conflict. This could be seen from their responses during the focus group interviews, when one participant mentioned that, “The conflict will be either verbal or even non-verbal communication amongst each other ...” (Focus group interview C, School 1, Participant 2). Another participant remarked that “… my understanding of the term conflict among educators at school is situations or issues that rise to people fighting with each other. Fighting in the sense that it’s verbally and not physically ...” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant 1). Data from the open-ended questionnaire confirmed this perception, as one participant wrote, “It may be verbal or in some instances it may even be physical confrontation” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 1).

The data suggests that educators’ understanding of conflict appears to be in line with the views of Barsky and Wood (2005:249) and Tillet and French (2006:6), who associate conflict with imagery of, amongst others, fighting in a verbal and non-verbal way, as well as physical confrontation and inappropriate behaviour, by those embroiled in issues of conflict.

4.2.4 Diverse views or opinions

According to Robbins (2009:523), people have their own individual personalities, which lead them to approach issues in different ways. With this in mind, many participants pointed out that diverse views and opinions were an integral part of conflict, which was evident also from
the responses provided. In a focus group interview, one participant declared, “... and also, we are different people so we all have different points of views ...” (Focus group D, School 3, Participant 2). Another participant stated in the questionnaire that, “Conflict is where two or more people get into a matter that is not perceived in the same light. These opposite ideas usually leads to conflict” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 2). In further support of these perceptions, a participant mentioned in a personal interview that “… people have a difference in opinion with regard to some issues ...” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant 1). In concluding these views, another participant stated that, “Conflict is when people have opposing views or have a difference of opinion” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 4).

The above responses in terms of diverse views or opinions appear to be substantiated in part by Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia Britannica Concise Encyclopedia (Britannica, 2009:online), which defines conflict as “competitive or opposing action of incompatibles: antagonistic state or action (as of divergent ideas, interests or persons)”. In addition, Bradshaw (2008:18) and Nelson and Quick (2008:307) contend that conflict may arise due to the different beliefs that people hold. Thus, it seems probable that people’s understanding of conflict could be greatly influenced by their diverse views or opinions, as indicated above.

4.3 POSSIBLE CAUSES OF CONFLICT AMONG EDUCATORS

As discussed in Chapter Two, the sources or causes of conflict are varied and widespread; it is therefore not an easy task to arrange conflict into specific categories (Moore, 2003:61; Van Tonder et al., 2008:376). Further, in striving to classify the causes of conflict, it is important for the reader to bear in mind that many of the causes presented may be intertwined or interlinked with other causes, thus making it difficult to interpret the causes separately (Bradshaw, 2008:19). However, in an effort to present the causes of conflict in a structured manner, the categories of Bradshaw (2008:18-19), as discussed in Chapter Two, were utilised to present the data. These categories of the causes of conflict comprise data-based conflict, relationship conflict, structural conflict, value-based conflict, interest-based conflict, and needs-based conflict.

4.3.1 Data-based conflict

The data revealed that in relation to data-based conflict, most participants identified the causes of conflict as issues around communication, a lack of transparency and consultation, and gossip and untruths. These views are indicated and discussed below.
4.3.1.1 Communication causes

A large number of participants perceived that communication was an important factor in the development of conflict. In highlighting a cause of conflict, one participant stated, “... I would say in that sense that boiling of feeling is caused by lack of communication” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant 1). Another participant mentioned during a focus group interview, “… people don't, err, see things in the same way, you know, and whoever is bringing the message across is maybe not clear enough and that brings a lot of confusion ...” (Focus group D, School 3, Participant 2). This seems to suggest that a lack of good communication appears not only to cause ill feelings, but also promotes confusion. Hence, clarity is of vital importance. Educators should therefore ensure that their colleagues have a clear understanding of what has been communicated. Further evidence of communication as a cause of conflict was provided by another participant, who contended that conflict arose due to “Information not being passed on to all” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 2), suggesting the importance of communicating to all stakeholders, not just to some, as this seems to create tension or conflict.

The participants’ sentiments are in line with the statements of Bradshaw (2008:28), who points out that conflict is inadvertently heightened in the workplace due to inefficient communication systems and when all role-players are not adequately informed of decisions. This is supported by Moore (2003:64) and Littlejohn and Domenici (2007:11), who also contend that “lack of information, misinformation, different views on interpretation of data ...” are factors that give rise to conflict. These views are further corroborated by aspects of the Uncertainty Theory of Conflict (Abigail & Cahn, 2011:218) as alluded to above in 4.2.2.

4.3.1.2 Lack of transparency and consultation

A lack of transparency and consultation from the side of the school management was viewed by many participants as an important cause of conflict. One participant, in reference to the school management, declared that “They always, they never open, when they are, when they are dealing with issues and that becomes the biggest cause of conflict in schools” (Focus group interview C, School 1, Participant 3). Another participant highlighted that “… a lack of transparency … And just the fact that educators are not brought into the whole picture (by the school management) … leads people to doubt one another and that causes conflict” (Focus group A, School 2, Participant 1). In further emphasising this aspect of transparency and consultation, a participant reflected during a semi-structured interview that “… I would think, uhm, not consulting with all role-players and in most cases, it’s not done deliberately” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant G). Another participant also alluded to this issue by indicating that this type of conflict arose due to a “Lack of transparency with regard to
decisions taken” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 10). All this suggests that conflict could arise when staff is not adequately informed or not informed at all of relevant information from the side of management.

From the above, it becomes evident that participating staff members in this study valued transparency, but not only transparency, as transparency is also linked with consultation. Equally important, it seemed that communication played a vital role in assisting with creating a transparent culture, as clear communication with all educators appeared to be a promoter of transparency. The importance attached to transparency and consultation appears to confirm a statement by Mc Shane and Von Glinow (2005:394), who indicate that the chances of conflict escalating amongst individuals are greatly increased when communication is hampered. In addition, Champoux (2006:264) contends that anxiety amongst personnel tends to become inflamed when there are inadequacies in communication. Furthermore, it is important to note that Moore (2003:64) and Littlejohn and Domenici (2007:11) are of the opinion that when information is not adequately provided and (or) the interpretation thereof varies, then the incidence of conflict could rise amongst staff. This is also corroborated by Abigail and Cahn (2011:218) as indicated in 4.2.2 and 4.3.1.1 (in reference to the Uncertainty Theory of Conflict), and Bradshaw (2008:28), who points out that conflict could arise when all employees do not receive information efficiently, due to inefficiencies within organisations. These deficiencies in communication, which imply the possible inclusion of issues related to a lack of transparency and consultation from the school management, could lead to heightened tensions amongst staff at schools.

4.3.1.3 Gossip and untruths

A number of participants felt that the spreading of gossip and untruths was a major cause of conflict. This appears to be in accordance with the views expressed by Scott (2010:289), who believes that gossip circulated amongst personnel may lead to an escalation in conflict. In addition, Ngcobo (2003:189), argues that much opportunity for spreading unsubstantiated or inappropriate comments about other staff members occur at schools where personnel are compelled to use staffrooms when they have administrative time. During a focus group interview, a participant hinted to the fact that the spreading of untruths or gossiping caused friction or conflict. She alluded to this fact when saying:
“Or if you say something about somebody that is not there. That person might be absent or just went out of the meeting to go, to attend to something somewhere and then uh, uh, the next minute, this person will be informed that, that educator said this and that and sometimes it’s not a true thing, uh, said about you and then, and then there’s also going to be conflict because not a true story went out and not the way that person said the things and, and that is where things will go wrong …” (Focus group B, School 2, Participant 2).

In further illustrating how rumour mongering could heighten tensions amongst staff, another participant indicated that the principal at her school was also guilty thereof (spreading rumours), pointing out:

“That is also a way of doing things, stopping the one. Stopping the one spreading rumours about somebody else. But now this morning at assembly I think it was for us because he (the principal) pointed at us saying ‘julle moet ophou skinner’ [Translated: “you must stop gossiping” and I almost said very loudly, but I know some of them heard me: ‘almal skinner op dié skool’ [Translated: “everybody gossips at this school”] (Focus group interview, School 2, Participant 3).

Participants concurred in the open-ended questionnaire that backstabbing and the spreading of news was a form of conflict. For example, one participant stated that, “Backstabbing by spreading news” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 8) was indeed a cause of conflict. The issue of gossiping and spreading rumours as a cause of conflict was further illustrated by participants who wrote in the questionnaires “Gossips” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 7) and “Gossiping” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 8). All the above suggests that gossip and the spreading of untruths appeared to be a factor which could lead to much tension amongst personnel at school, concurring with the views of Scott (2010:289) and Ngcobo (2003:189).

4.3.2 Relationship conflict

Another dimension or category of conflict is relationship related conflict. The data indicated that a large proportion of the participants perceived that favouritism, not valuing the opinions of others and a lack of respect or tolerance were important causes of conflict. These views are presented below.
4.3.2.1 Favouritism

Favouritism as a cause of conflict appeared to rank high amongst many educators. The participants seemed to be particularly concerned about the favouritism expressed by the principals and management in their dealings with the staff. One participant suggested during a focus group interview that favouritism from management was a cause of concern, stating that one aspect that caused conflict was “… favouritism between educators and the manager of the school” (Focus group B, School 2, Participant 1). The favouritism referred to, seemed to be that management favoured certain staff members’ or certain staff groupings” viewpoints. Another participant who supported these allegations that favouritism was a cause of conflict reported during a focus group interview:

“… that most of the time it’s usually used, it’s caused by, uhm, favouritism. Now that, that it usually comes from the management where you will see they prefer certain individuals over others and then as such, you kind of feel that certain people’s values or views are valued more than the others, that usually starts conflict” (Focus group C, School 1, Participant 3).

The issue of favouritism, especially that of principals favouring certain educators, was again emphasised by a participant, who during a focus group interview referred to the following incident:

“One incident at our school, also you know, a colleague you know, challenged the principal, you know, of favouritism, because I think the colleague wanted to leave school and he was given the ‘in and out’ Register (to sign), this colleague, but then his favourite people can just in and out (of the school without signing the register) and they just leave the school on a very, daily basis, every hourly basis you know” (Focus group C, School 1, Participant 2).

This then suggests that the school’s policy that educators should sign a register on entering and leaving the school premises was not being implemented equitably, which could lead to perceptions of favouritism and a subsequent heightening of tensions. The above appears to be in line with the conclusions of Van Der Merwe (2003:31), who contends that individuals could regard school policies as unfair when they (the policies) are not equitably implemented by the school leadership. These views are also supported by aspects of the Social Exchange or Equity Theory in which Collins (2005:20) contends that when “bias or favoritism” influences decision-making, conflict could arise in organisations (Collins, 2005:20).
In again pointing out the role of the school management in causing conflict, a participant in the questionnaire wrote “favouritism – especially from the Principal as well as HODs” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 12), thereby treating certain individuals in an unfair manner. In highlighting the favouritism issue with special reference to promotions, a participant mentioned in the questionnaire that:

“The biggest problem is favouritism, that is especially if the conflict is between educator and principal. If the principal favours certain individuals over others, it’s bound to create conflict. Among educators it may also be because one feels undermined by the other for some or another reason. Also when it comes to promotion posts, this is even more prevalent if the principal influences the SGB” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 16).

This seems to suggest that principals need to be aware of the fact that they could play a big role in how educators perceive favouritism at their schools. Hence, principals and management should be careful to not be seen favouring certain individuals or groups, but should rather make it clear why a certain person’s or group’s viewpoint was viewed as appropriate. Equally important, when promotions are being made, management should refrain from actions which could be perceived as influencing the appointment.

These sentiments seem to be aligned to those of Carpenter and Kennedy (2001:204), who argue that most people have difficulty in adopting a fair approach to all other individuals. However, Mayer (2000:39) contends that displaying fairness to others is a universally accepted ideal, which implies that individuals should strive to promote this. Also, Mullins (1999:819) believes that unfair treatment meted out to personnel by management could heighten tensions. All this seems to suggest that perceived favouritism from the principal and (or) school management towards specific educators were perceived by their peer educators as a cause of conflict at their institutions, and hence it could impinge relationships among staff.

4.3.2.2 Lack of respect for and tolerance of different opinions

A lack of respect for or tolerance of different opinions was another cause of concern for educators. One participant clearly stated that there seemed to be lack of respect and tolerance among teachers with reference to differing opinions. This was evident during a focus group interview, when the participant stated:
“Uhm, add to that also lack of respect. A lack of respect, people do not respect the other one, lack of understanding, uh, lack of tolerance, uh, people do not tolerate somebody else’s ideas … so you have that lack of respect, a lack of understanding, lack of tolerance for somebody else’s ideas and that normally causes problems when this person feels he can make a valuable contribution, but from the other side, you feel no, you can’t” (Focus group A, School 2, Participant 3).

The above was also affirmed during a personal interview, when a participant mentioned that one should never sideline the opinions of others, even if one had had differences in the past, with certain staff members. Hence, previous differences should not influence ones’ acceptance of the contributions that are put forward by those with whom one previously disagreed with, as their suggestions could be valuable. This was evident from a personal interview, when a participant responded as follows:

“… it could even be a case of underestimating input from certain, from certain members, err, because of stereotyping or past impressions that have been created, and yet I have come to realize that those very role-players can make valuable contributions if consulted timeously and also in the correct manner” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant G).

Another participant concurred that not valuing the opinions of others was indeed a potential cause of conflict. This became evident when the participant wrote “Wanneer elkeen glo sy siening of punt wat hy/sy maak is reg en weier om ander se opinies as nuttig te sien [Translated: “When everyone believes that his view or point is right and he/she refuses to accept the opinions of others as valuable”] (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 5). Another participant affirmed this by stating that an “Inability to exercise tolerance …” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 2) seemed to be causing conflict.

It was interesting to note that qualifications apparently also played a role in how opinions were valued. Some participants felt that their opinions were ignored as a result of their (lack of) qualifications. This became evident when one participant alluded to the fact that the opinions of educators with lower academic qualifications were often disregarded by senior educators, including the principal, when she asserted:
“And sometimes it’s (conflict) also caused, uh, when uh, because of your qualification, like you might be a educator that only had three years of college before you start teaching, but you have experience, and then sometimes they don’t want to acknowledge that. Although you only have three years, but you have experience because you’ve been … taught so long and then you are not recognised for uh, uh good input you can give in. Something to build the school or to build the educators, uh, and this could cause conflict between educator and manager of the school” (Focus group B, School 2, Participant 2).

Qualifications were not the only aspect that was perceived as a barrier to valuing others’ opinions. It seems that there was a perception among educators that senior management was not valuing the opinions of Post Level One educators. This seems to be causing conflict, as educators felt that all opinions should be heard and that even the opinions of educators that were not at senior level should be taken into consideration if their opinions or input were useful. This became evident during a focus group interview, when one participant said:

“… they (educators in senior posts) do not expect or see others’ ideas as being valuable, or others’ opinions as valuable. And as soon as somebody else comes with a different idea than the one you have, especially when it’s somebody who have been teaching less years than you, who are in a lower post level than what you are, and immediately you become, uhm, protective of your stance uh, how can I put it, you do not see the other person’s view and you see your view as superior to, to, to whoever else wants to come up with an idea. If he’s not at your level, his idea cannot be that good, because he is not at a senior level …” (Focus group interview A, School 2, Participant 3).

The above suggests that the participants viewed a lack of respect and tolerance for the opinions of others as a worrisome factor that could cause conflict to arise. The data suggests that this lack of respect and tolerance was caused by management not appreciating the ideas of others, especially when it seems to be different from theirs. This seems to suggest that educators in senior posts are not open to accepting the ideas and viewpoints of those educators in the lower ranks with fewer years of teaching experience. It also seems that status issues could also cause unhappiness, which could result in conflict, as educators’ self-esteem could be negatively affected if they perceive that their input is not being acknowledged, leading to them feeling that they are somehow less important. This seems to concur with comments made by Du Preez et al. (2003:21), who argue that the self-esteem needs of personnel could be negatively affected when they do not receive any and/or insufficient acknowledgement of their efforts or worth to their organisations. These views are
supported by Bradshaw (2008:24), who contends that an individual’s approach to conflict is connected to that individual’s self-esteem. The issue of self-esteem will also be dealt with in section 4.3.6.1, seeing self-esteem as a value-based aspect that causes conflict.

It is also important to take note the position of Schermerhorn et al. (2000:380), who argue that there are times when personnel who have senior position, are reluctant to accept assistance (either in kind or advice) from those educators who are at post level one, which could heighten tensions. In addition, Wood et al. (2004:597) point out that “emotional conflict” is generated from impressions of antagonism, bitterness, apprehension and distrust. Hence, the discontent among participating post level one educators, as they perceived that their views were not always considered to be of value.

It seems then that when individuals are engaged in this kind of relationship conflict, the way in which they (the individuals) handle conflict is largely determined by their personal stance and particular conduct (Robbins & Judge, 2009:523). Thus, when school personnel display a lack of respect and tolerance towards others and their viewpoints, tensions could be heightened, leading to conflict at their schools.

It seems clear from the data and the literature that conflict could escalate when people’s opinions are not adequately valued. Equally important, educators should not elevate themselves above their younger or less qualified colleagues by having the perception that their viewpoints are of greater value than those of the younger, less qualified staff members. Therefore, age or seniority and qualification should not be used as in valuing or not valuing the opinions of others. Rather, the merit of opinions should be the yardstick to determine the value of people’s opinions.

4.3.3 Structural conflict

The participants in this study placed much emphasis on aspects that could be related to structural conflict as causing conflict. These aspects, which seem to be linked, refer to issues or aspects related to workload and allocation, management and leadership issues, punctuality or time issues, and roles and responsibilities. These issues are portrayed and discussed below.

4.3.3.1 Management issues

According to the participants, the conduct and approach of the school management often led to friction and heightened tensions among personnel. This was evident when participants stated that management was causing conflict by not giving educators a platform to air their
viewpoints. It is important to note at this point that this could also be linked to possible favouritism, an aspect that has been dealt with in section 4.3.2.1. However, Bradshaw (2008:19) has argued that some aspects that cause conflict cannot easily categorised in one category only. Therefore, it is argued that aspects pertaining to favouritism could also be a cause that can be presented as a category under structural conflict, with special reference to the management related issues that may cause conflict.

One participant felt strongly that management was to blame for causing conflict, as they allowed certain teachers more opportunities to present their view on things, implying the possibility of favouritism. This was highlighted by one participant, who reported during a personal interview:

“And another example to me now, when the management team allow that one teacher so much power in terms of, they can get everything right when they say ‘this must be done, ... that must be done’. But they never give the other one a hearing, the other teacher in the staff meeting also. You find that just one teacher is able to get all the … the go-ahead… But let’s use someone else, let me suggest something, then it never materializes, or when you put down. That is cause for conflict. There’s a conflict between me and that teacher again and then I feel aggrieved at the school management team because they never give me a hearing” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant I).

This perception that management was not listening to all staff members was supported by another participant, who wrote in the questionnaire that conflict was caused “When educators are not listened to by the Principal and SMT and tension arises” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 12).

Another aspect that seemed to be causing conflict was that educators (Post Level 1 educators not in senior positions) felt that management was not decisive enough on certain issues. While transparency was important, decisions had to be made. This became apparent during a focus group interview, when one participant mentioned:
“And what I also find out what can cause conflict, it is when, when, management do not take a stance on an issue. They throw it open, sometimes everything cannot be opened up to the staff. The staff cannot make decisions for decisions that management must take sometimes. Management can sometimes say this is the chance we taking and we took it in that spirit and you have to follow. And if sometimes people believe they must be involved in every decision that the school makes. That can lead to conflict, sitting, having conflict with management” (Focus group D, School 3, Participant 1).

The above clearly suggests that educators look very critically to management, for example, that management should be fair and listen to the educators’ side of an issue. Equally important, it paints a picture that management should have the backbone to take a position on issues. These responses in relation to the role of management in causing conflict is in accordance with the views of Zide (2005:53), which argues that “disputes about procedures and methods are due to weak management.” In further support hereof, Bradshaw (2008:29) indicates that poor management may lead to indecisiveness or an aversion to dealing with issues, which could in turn escalate conflict.

4.3.3.2 Leadership issues

A high proportion of participants perceived that leadership issues played a big role in conflict amongst staff at their schools. In highlighting the role of poor leadership capabilities, one participant declared that “… especially if the person hasn’t got the ability or qualities a leader should have and he, uhm, is not in a position to deliver himself or to perform, …” (Focus group C, School 1, Participant 1). The above suggests that lack of leadership skills or qualities could lead to conflict. This point regarding a lack of leadership skills as a cause of conflict was further emphasised by another participant who, in reference to the principal, stated “He’s a very weak man, that’s the bottom line. He, I do not think he, he has, err you know those conflict management skills or like, like uh or sometimes if I may put it bluntly, he just wants to play it safe, unfortunately” (Focus group C, School 1, Participant 3). Another participant reiterated that a principal’s lack of leadership qualities, for example in setting an example, could lead to conflict when she mentioned:
I think it’s very important for the leader to actually lead by example to set an example. Uhm, the way you deal with issues and, uh, because then the others can also learn from you, your approach to your staff, uh, as they say ‘respect will gain respect’ and then automatically you will find people that will be more cooperative and you know, working in a team and so on, but if I as a leader don’t lead in that way, you will have conflict constantly" (Focus group C, School 1, Participant 1).

It is evident from the data that leadership seemed not only to be a problem at one particular school. This became evident when another participant from a different school alluded to this aspect, stating on the questionnaire that “Not always clear leadership” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 9), as a possible cause of conflict. All this implies that the poor leadership qualities displayed by principals are factors that could give rise to conflict at schools.

The views suggesting that poor leadership qualities and skills could lead to conflict, seem to be linked to the fact that the leadership of institutions are in need of training and empowerment to improve their skills, as alluded to by Snodgrass and Blunt (2009:54). Concurring with this view, Bush (2003:17) adds that school leaders should be provided with support to improve their conflict management skills. It seems that the incidence of conflict could be reduced when school leaders have been adequately trained in conflict management skills, and even leadership training and mentoring.

4.3.3.3 Workload allocation and time tabling

A number of participants indicated that workload allocation, with reference to duties and responsibilities, was a factor that gave rise to conflict at their schools. Workload refers to aspects such as the number of learning areas allocated to the educators, involvement in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, as well as sport and community activities, or any other duties or responsibilities assigned to staff. Participants felt aggrieved when they were given learning areas (subject areas) in which they were not well versed, as this could, for example, require extra preparation time. This became evident from the data when a participant stated that:
“... when an educator has been given certain learning areas he/she is not really acquainted with, and, uhm or given a grade or whatever, then you can feel the tension and conflict. And now instead of dealing with the conflict with the person who allocates these duties especially the learning areas, uhm, the next colleague is the target who now has a better or easier learning area, or an easier task to perform” (Focus group C, School 1, Participant 1).

This issue of the inequitable allocation of learning areas causing tension was confirmed by another participant, who wrote “… workload allocated, allocation, learning area allocation …” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 9). Thus, it seems apparent that the allocation of learning areas played a role in causing conflict amongst the participating educators.

Time tabling, which can also be linked to workload related aspects, was another aspect that caused tension and conflict among staff. This was highlighted by one participant, who pointed out:

“... especially first term, err, that your workload allocations, the timetabling. Everybody wants a comfortable ride on the timetable, ... wants an easy workload. And we all out watching who has more than the other, when it comes to admin time ...” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant G).

Another participant agreed that time-tabling could cause conflict:

“... it’s, uhm, usually a, a disagreement on issues pertaining to, uhm ... school matters, be that maybe err, time-tabling at the beginning of the year, that can also lead to, not a disagreement with allocations, people are unhappy about the way things are done. Sometimes timetables has to change to suit people and other people ... Sometimes ... majority of the staff is happy and timetables change” (Focus group D, School 3, Participant 1)

The above suggests that educators felt aggrieved when the school timetable was set up in a way that did not suit them or when the timetable was altered to suit the needs of others, an aspect that could be linked to the issue of favouritism (section 4.3.2.1).

In highlighting the issue of administrative workload and allocation, a participant mentioned, “At the end of the term, people are highly stressed out and, uhm, they get agitated very, very quickly by the smallest of things and, uhm, also, err, stress and, and, and a high workload, a very high workload” (Focus group D, School 3, Participant 3). In the open-ended
questionnaire, another educator concurred that workload caused conflict, as it was highlighted that “Unequal distribution of workload or extra-mural duties” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 3) was a cause of conflict. This point was also emphasised by another participant, who wrote “Staff members who feel that their workload is too much and that they have been unfairly burdened” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 7) as being a cause of conflict. This strong feeling expressed by participants that a high administrative workload caused conflict was confirmed by a participant in a personal interview:

“Uhm ... because the workload is so much. There’s so much that has to be handed in. There’s so much paperwork to be done and when, if you’re the grade head and you have to do a final analysis on anything, you have to wait for the other two teachers to bring their information; now I can sit with the whole grade thing” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant I).

This suggests that a high workload has the potential to cause conflict at the end of the school term, as educators seem to be stressed out about all the expectations from the school and from the Department of Education, such as the progress schedules that have to be completed for handing over to the Department of Education, as well as all the examination marking and reports that have to be completed within a very short space of time.

The sentiments expressed above appear to be in line with those of Aquinas (2006:283) who point out that structural conflict, and in this instance workload, is linked with how tasks are distributed and organised in institutions. In addition, Bradshaw (2008:28) argues that staff have a number of duties or roles and that these roles may be perceived differently by the various individuals, which may lead to conflict. The author also indicates that conflict could escalate when management allocates tasks unfairly; again an aspect that could be linked to the issue of favouritism (section 4.3.2.1).

### 4.3.3.4 Punctuality or time-related issues

Some participants declared that issues regarding punctuality and time were causes of conflict that concerned them. Punctuality issues that were deemed to be causing conflict were for example, when educators did not hand in their administrative tasks timeously, as well as instances where educators did not arrive on time at school for their classes and the other duties that they had to attend to. Expressing concern about the fact that some educators did not hand in administrative work on time, one participant said that, “A typical example of this is where some educators hand in exam schedules on time for reports, while others take their time to complete. This is a potential situation for conflict to arise”
(Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 4). Another participant indicated “... if you’re the grade head and you have to do a final analysis on anything, you have to wait for the other two teachers to bring their information ...” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant I), stating that some educators did not stick to deadlines.

To further emphasise how failure to adhere to time-frames may inflame tensions at school, this participant stated:

“You have to wait for analysis and I would say hopefully, with some young teachers coming in, you have to wait for everything that the management team wants to be filed and put away. You’re always waiting for this one person and after a while, it becomes too much, because now, you want your things to be right and you’re used to having your things on time. But you always find there’s one (educator) amongst the three that does not do their part, and I’m telling you, it’s stressful at the end of the year. Every end of term for me is a nightmare, because my team don’t play their part, in terms of what they need to do and it is just ... it can’t be just one person that can be a thorn in your side, and I mean it’s ... it can take on you after a while, it really does” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant I).

It seems that educators were deeply concerned about the timeous handing in of work; in this regard, another participant in the open-ended questionnaire declared that “Teachers (are) not doing or handing in work (books, DOE marksheets and schedules) on time or by due dates” (School 2, Participant 6). This all suggests that much conflict could arise when educators do not give their full cooperation in completing and handing in administrative tasks on time.

In addition, participants stated arriving late at school, late for class and reporting late for playground duty, caused conflict. This was noted in the open-ended questionnaire, when educators wrote, “Coming late of teachers to school. Not arriving at their classes in time” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 2), while another participant stated that, “Latecoming and playground duty when educators do not do their duty” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 11). This issue was further validated by a participant, who in the questionnaire identified “Punctuality” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 3) as a cause of conflict. These sentiments appear to illustrate that tensions could be increased when educators do not turn up on time for school or other duties that they had to perform.
These time and punctuality perceptions seem to be in line with those of Robbins and Judge (2009:523), who assert that due to individual differences, people perform their tasks and conduct themselves in their own particular ways. However, this does not imply that lateness or a lack of punctuality is an acceptable trait. In addition, when employees who have to depend on one another in completing their organisational tasks (senior personnel relying on Post Level one educators and/or educators having to depend on their peers), have difficulty in completing them, then such circumstances could heighten tensions amongst colleagues (Aquinas, 2006:283; Nelson & Quick, 2008:305). Hence, the data seems to be supporting the literature, as it appears that punctuality and time issues could lead to significant conflict amongst staff members.

4.3.3.5 Roles and responsibilities: Lack of consultation and uncertainty

The data suggests that some participants were of the opinion that the roles and responsibilities assigned at their schools were a cause of conflict amongst the staff. The participants felt that they had not been adequately consulted about these duties and responsibilities, or that their tasks had not been effectively conveyed to them or that they had not been fairly distributed among the staff. This was evident when one participant reported during a personal interview, “Allocations of certain err certain roles and responsibilities and err staff err, what you call it err ... school organisation. You’re supposed to do that, you are there, nutrition is your baby (the school feeding scheme is your responsibility), that is your baby, and there’s sometimes a conflict around that issue” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant R), suggesting that duties and responsibilities were unfairly allocated to certain educators by the school management. In expressing his concern that duties and responsibilities were not made clear enough, another participant indicated:

“I’m not sure they (the educators) supposed to do certain things and now they think somebody else must do those things. For example, there’s one about the staff playground duties that we have. When staff feels that they not sure if it is compulsory to do staff duty or whatever ...” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant R).

When probed further about this issue, the participant pointed out that duties and responsibilities had to be clearly outlined to the educators to avoid unnecessary conflict, stating:
“You see what can happen, err, what, ... it is just so you say the roles and responsibilities must be set out clear. Some of the issues is roles and responsibilities. And for example, if it’s clearly outlined before a conflict ever happen. If you know what is supposed, what you are supposed to do in a situ... in a ... in school, then you, then maybe it will help to solve, before it could happen, conflict happen” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant R).

The issue was further highlighted by a participant who mentioned “Latecoming and playground duty when educators do not do their duty” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 11). Taking the above into consideration, this suggests that roles and responsibilities such as playground duty and handling the school nutrition programme for example, do indeed play a big role in causing conflict at schools, when educators display a reluctance to perform such roles or handle the responsibilities. Also, it seems that much conflict arises when school management does not make the roles and responsibilities of personnel explicit, leaving educators with much uncertainty with regard to their roles and responsibilities.

These perceptions seem to be in accordance with those of Aquinas (2006:284), who contends that personnel are inclined to sidestep their duties when these are not clearly outlined by the institutions. In addition, educators could be faced with stressful situations when their roles are unclear (Steyn & Van Niekerk, 2002:190). In further support of these views, Jehn (1997:552) and Hitt et al. (2006:438) state that conflict could escalate when organisations do not provide employees with proper guidance with regard to what is expected of them.

4.3.4 Value-based conflict

According to Mayer (2000:11) and Bradshaw (2008:18), values have to do with the way in which people live their lives, together with the beliefs that they uphold. These values also pertain to “what distinguishes right from wrong and good from evil” (Mayer, 2000:11). In addition, Carpenter and Kennedy (2001:197-198) postulate that there is a tendency for individuals to judge occurrences that are experienced, as well as the behaviour of people, according to their own particular principles or beliefs. The above seems to suggest that values are interlinked with how people perceive others and the world around them (Carpenter & Kennedy, 2001:197-198). Bearing this in mind, it seems that many participants were of the opinion that values pertaining to people’s beliefs and principles were a major cause of conflict. These responses, pertaining to different beliefs, viewpoints and differences in valuing guidance, are all linked and have been indicated in the sub-categories below. It is important to note that this section and the differences in opinion included in the relationship
sections 4.3.2 and 4.3.2.2, seem to be intertwined. This again highlights Bradshaw’s (2008:19) argument that the causes of conflict are multi-faceted, as conflict does not arise as a result of one particular cause. Thus, structural conflict could have a need and an interest dimension, an aspect that was alluded to in Chapter Two, in section 2.4.

4.3.4.1 Different beliefs and viewpoints as a result of different contexts

In expressing how different beliefs could influence conflict, one participant in the open-ended questionnaire wrote “Prejudice can also contribute to conflict. Beliefs and world view, e.g. all muslims are terrorists. Diversity, race, religion, culture” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 2). This suggests that individuals all hold their own beliefs and principles, their so-called values, that they abide by which influences their perception of others. This aspect of differing beliefs which could cause tension, was supported by another participant in the questionnaire who stated “Religious conflict – not respecting the next Educator’s beliefs” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 1). This implies that different religious beliefs for example, could cause conflict among educators, as different religious beliefs could lead to differences in the interpretation and perceptions of why something has been done in a certain manner, concurring with Mayer (2000:11) and Bradshaw (2008:18).

It was interesting to note that participants highlighted the fact that people are different, unique and have different values due to the fact that people’s upbringing and contexts were different and this could lead to different viewpoints pertaining to what they see as appropriate. Hence, what one person could see as appropriate, another person could have a different viewpoint. Thus, these different viewpoints could have an influence at what a person values as important or how to conduct himself or herself. This aspect became evident when a participant stated that:

“Uhm another thing, because we, we all human we all different. We have different norms, different values, we, we brought up differently. Uhm our work ethic is different. Some people have a, a high work ethic, other people have a low work ethic. So that also comes into effect. Some people are laid back, some people are go-getters, some people want to get the thing done as quickly as possible. Other people they want to turn and turn and turn and turn so that can also lead, lead to conflict” (Focus group D, School 3, Participant 3).

In highlighting these perceptions further, a participant indicated “… and also we are different people, so we all have different points of view (regarding how we see and do things) … “ (Focus group D, School 3, Participant 2). These sentiments were also clearly expressed by
another participant, who concluded that, “Possible causes include competition, different values, perceptions that are exercised …” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 2). The above perceptions suggests that the different values and differing viewpoints that people hold as a result of being unique and from different contexts, seem to be playing a role in causing conflict at schools. Hence, educators should be sensitive to the views and beliefs of others in minimizing the incidence of conflict and reducing tensions.

4.3.4.2 Differences in valuing guidance

Another aspect that seems to be a value related cause of conflict was new or first-time teachers’ perceptions regarding valuing the guidance and advice of more experienced teachers. This suggests that more experienced educators have a yearning to be valued and to be respected by younger teachers. It seems that younger teachers or teachers new to the teaching profession have different values, regarding their perception of the role of older teachers as mentors or guides. It seems from the data that this was causing tension that escalated into conflict from the older teacher generation’s side, as they harboured the belief that the younger ones should value their experience. This became evident when one participant asserted that:

“... they can’t just willy-nilly walk in and think they know it all from University and have very little respect for a teacher that is teaching for plus minus 20 years and they don’t want to learn from you. Because that I have experienced first-hand with someone in my grade ...” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant I).

This suggests that younger, less experienced, educators had the attitude that they were qualified as educators and therefore did not have to take advice or guidance from more mature educators. This resulted in heightened tensions and could lead to conflict amongst colleagues.

In addition, the older and more experienced educators seemed to hold the view that their views should be valued above those of the younger, less experienced educators. This was evident when a participant in the questionnaire wrote, “At our school, we have educators who have been here for many years. For this reason they believe that their opinions carry more weight than the opinion of others (younger educators)” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 3). It appears that the differences attributed to age and experience are factors that could lead to conflict, as the more experienced educators in this study were of the belief that the younger ones should appreciate and value their viewpoints.
All these above stated views seem to correspond with those of Bradshaw (2008:18) and Nelson and Quick (2008:307), who indicate that the various lifestyles and beliefs of people may lead to conflict. Further, Carpenter and Kennedy (2001:198) argue that the diverse values of individuals impact greatly on how the issues in conflict are perceived and addressed by the parties involved. In addition, these values could implicitly or explicitly form the basis of people’s stance and interaction with others (Bush & Anderson, 2003:89).

4.3.5 Interest-based conflict

Some participants indicated that issues related to resources and promotion posts contributed to conflict at their schools. Promotion had also being referred to previously under ‘Favouritism’, a sub-section of ‘Relationship based conflict’ (see section 4.3.2.1). The view that promotion posts and resources are causes of conflict are examined in the sections below.

4.3.5.1 Promotion post: Appointments and limited possibilities

At the time of writing this thesis (2012), very few promotion posts, in terms of Head of Departments and Deputy Principals’ vacancies, were being advertised by the Eastern Cape Department of Education. According to the Chairperson of the SADTU Korsten Branch, Mr C Serfontein (personal communication, May 31, 2011), this scarcity of promotion posts tend to generate much tension when such positions have to be filled. Issues around promotion posts were highlighted by many participants as a cause of conflict. It is important to note that favouritism could also play a role when appointments are made. The perception that promotion posts appointments was seen as a cause of conflict was captured during a focus group interview, when one participant stated:

“… one of the major causes also in the school set-up is, is promotion posts, you know, and I think that’s the biggest one. And, and who’s getting the post, and, and all of us feel that we are worthy of it and, you know that’s where, when the conflict I think sometimes also arise because I know I’m better than you so I don’t, I won’t be able to respect you also, if you been elected or chosen to act maybe even in that position. So promotions also will be a contributing factor. Uhm, evens if you don’t have much promotion within the school set-up, that is also a major contributing factor which causes conflict” (Focus group C, School 1, Participant 2).

Another participant concurred with the above, highlighting the intense feelings that he had over this issue during an interview:
“... especially with promotion posts, also ... promotion. I'm not gonna cooperate with this person, cause I was supposed to have been promoted ... Or I was that task; it's my task. I was all the, all the years, I'm actually involved in that certain aspect and now it's taken away from me without any reasons” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant R).

Further exploring how the issue of promotion posts affected educators, a participant during a personal interview mentioned the issue of the limited promotion possibilities available:

“In the school set-up, you only have that limited possibility for promotion. And people improve their qualifications. They grow themselves, and yet they remain on post level 1 for 20 years, 25 years, and I believe that's cause for frustration, because you have developed yourself in the meantime. But now you don't get the opportunity to exercise management, to exercise your leadership on a higher level. You remain a class teacher ... and there's the financial implication that goes with it, plus the personal frustration and that pride that comes with. I've now been promoted and that you find in the, err, outside world, the opportunities are more ... available, cause if you speak to youngsters that you taught ... How they have progressed, ...” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant G).

Another participant also emphasised the issue of promotion posts in the open-ended questionnaire, stating that it was a cause of conflict, especially when the principal was involved in influencing the selection process, thus implying favouritism for certain applicants. The participant wrote, “Also when it comes to promotion posts, this is even more prevalent if the principal influences the SGB” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 16). In further affirmation hereof, a participant pronounced the issue of promotion posts as a cause of conflict during a focus group interview, “Promotion post. Promotion comes up, err, so rarely and then there's a lot of competition ...” (Focus group D, School 3, Participant 2). These views of the participants suggest that promotion posts and promotion is a very sensitive aspect and therefore should be dealt with in a professional manner by all involved, not only when shortlisting occurs, but also when the appointment has to be made.

Ngcobo (2003:189) contends that much bitterness arises amongst educators when promotion posts are not accessible to them. In addition, Landau et al. (2001:16) point out that due to the hierarchical nature of many institutions (including schools), staff members could often view their colleagues as rivals in competing for promotion posts. Further, promotion posts are included as part of limited resources by Bradshaw (2008:18), who defines these
resources as “money, land, jobs and powerful positions”, hence the competition over promotion posts, as stated previously. It seems plausible that the availability of promotion posts could lead to intense rivalry and undue conflict amongst staff.

4.3.5.2 Resources

Educators generally want the best for their learners and therefore would like to have access to the resources to be used within the teaching context. As schools in disadvantaged communities seem not to be having the financial means to purchase resources like, for example, school fee paying public schools, it is important that schools with little financial means exercise due caution when resources are purchased and allocated. Participants stated during interviews and wrote in the open-ended questionnaire that resources – and the lack of it – caused conflict among staff. This was highlighted by one a participant, who mentioned:

“Resources, sometimes when you ask for certain resources, then it’s ‘No, there’s no money available’. Because maybe there’s something for your class. All I know what happened also at the start was this, uhm, desk problem. Some teachers have not desks in their classrooms and they are … There were supposed to be 12, 13 desks, now there’s only 10. What happened to it? The conflict is about resources. That’s one example of resources that can lead to conflict ...” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant R).

Concurring with what the previous participant stated regarding how the scarcity of basic teaching and learning resources could generate conflict among staff, another participant indicated that:

“... educators became frustrated, and that caused more conflict, because if they need to receive a fax or send a fax or get information, there’s no fax machine, no telephone line, the telephone line was cut, there was no paper to roll off the machines, they were all broken, machines were not working. It was a very frustrating situation, and that caused more conflict” (Focus group interview C, School 1, Participant 1)

Taking the availability of finances into consideration, another participant indicated that the fact that money was not available to purchase much-needed school resources, often led to conflict. This problem of a lack of resources, which made it difficult for educators to provide complementary learning and teaching materials, was made clear by one participant:
“Uhm, I would say, uhm, unavailability of resources. Money has been, money has been a major problem at our school, uhm, because whatever need we have, those needs cannot be met, because there aren't, there's always the scenario that there's no money available. Uhm, people want to buy textbooks, people want to buy charts for their, to what's is name, put up in their classroom, whatever resources they can utilise in order for their lessons to be successful, cannot be, because they just feel that, uh, they're not going to buy those things out of their pockets” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant I).

Further emphasising the issue regarding resources as being a source of conflict, one participant wrote “Resources (lack or insufficient)” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 4) as a cause of conflict. These responses seem to suggest that resources, especially the lack thereof, is another aspect that is causing conflict.

The participants’ perceptions appear to be in accordance with the views expressed by Rahim (2001) and Hitt et al. (2006), who argue that disagreements amongst individuals or groups generally arise over the allocation of limited resources. Further, contestation over limited resources could inflame conflict amongst employees at institutions (Zide, 2005:53).

4.3.6 Needs-based conflict

The majority of participants indicated that intra-personal issues related to basic human needs were responsible for much conflict amongst staff. In presenting these perceptions, focus is placed on self-esteem needs and the need for power and (or) status. These views are presented in the following sections.

4.3.6.1 Self-esteem needs

Many of the participants were of the opinion that matters relating to individuals’ self-esteem often caused conflict at their institutions, as the system was breaking down their self-esteem or self-worth, due to them not being recognised or valued for their input or efforts. One participant captured the need for self-esteem succinctly, stating:
“... you don't get the opportunity to exercise management, to exercise your leadership on a higher level. You remain a class teacher ... and there's the financial implication that goes with it, plus the personal frustration and that pride that comes with. I've now been promoted and that you find in the, err, outside world, the opportunities are more ... available, cause if you speak to youngsters that you taught ... How they have progressed, within 10 years. And after 20 years, 25 years, here I am. I'm still driving my jalopy. I'm still struggling. So that also brings inner conflict ... and therefore I fight authority and whatever authority suggests. I will counter, but it's actually my inner strife that I have ...” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant G).

Also highlighting the issue of self-esteem needs, another participant, in reference to the school principal, mentioned that if a principal was insecure, it was generally as a lack of self-esteem, which seemed to be a cause of conflict, especially if someone else was perceived as being after that position. This was highlighted during a focus group interview, when one participant said:

“I see as somebody who is insecure, I see it that way, he is very much insecure. One thing in my school, there are a lot of very well educated people. I feel, ne, (yes) he is insecure; the one person that he always, who is always afraid, according to him is after his post ne (yes), is the deputy principal” (Focus group interview C, School 1, Participant 3).

That self-esteem could be a potential cause of conflict also became apparent when one participant mentioned that ..... “A low self-esteem can also be a breeding ground for conflict” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 2).

These sentiments seem to agree with the views of Nelson and Quick (2008:310) and Zide (2006:73-74), who believe that this intrapersonal conflict arises when people have to deal with issues that are a result of inner conflict within themselves. These views appear to be linked to key features of the Psychodynamic Theory of Conflict in terms of which Lulofs and Cahn (2000:124) indicate that people may perceive conflict due to their own inner (emotional) state of mind, views that are supported by Davies (2004:15) as well. In addition, Bradshaw (2008:24) emphasises the link between the individual’s self-esteem and his/her manner of coping with conflict. In further support hereof, Du Preez et al. (2003:20), in reference to the work of Maslow, declare that individuals need acknowledgement for their achievements and could become disheartened when they are not able to satisfy their need
for appreciation at work. Hence, self-esteem seems to be an aspect that plays a major role in causing conflict at schools.

4.3.6.2 Need for power

According to Wilmot and Hocker (2001:96), power plays a major role in how people lead their lives. This seems to tie in with the perception by some participants in this study that the need for power in individuals was an important cause of conflict. In reflecting on how the need for power impacts on conflict at schools, one participant alluded to the fact that the principal was eager to exert his power and authority over others, commenting as follows:

“Power, ... they’re hungry for power, I don’t know, when you, when you look at that man, his walk, his whole body language says, I’m in control, I’ve got the power. I am the boss. When you look, the way he speaks to you, everything man, it says that they’re hungry. He just, he just wants to be, like uh somebody that says something then you must do this and no, it’s fine, no it’s not, verstaan jy? [Translated: do you understand?]” (Focus group B, School 2, Participant 3).

This issue of the perceived need of principals to exert their power was further elaborated on by another participant who remarked, “The only thing for him is, he just wants to win, you see, he just see himself. I am big, I am the principal and, and power, hunger for power” (Focus Group B, School 2, Participant 2). Bearing these views in mind, it seems clear that the participating educators perceived that principals’ need for power caused much conflict.

Further, it appears that there existed a need for power not only among principals, but also among other non-senior staff, which is evident from the quotations that follow. In expressing the need of some Post Level One educators to exert power, one participant stated, “Also, I think there’s a power struggle, you know. Some people (Post Level One educators) always wanting to be in a powerful position” (Focus group D, School 3, Participant 2). The contention that Post Level One educators were engaging in power struggles, was supported by another participant, who remarked that “… I think that is one of the major problems we are also experiencing really in our institution is that, uhm, some people just want to manipulate, even if they are Post Level One educators, they want to still manipulate or dictate to their seniors and so on” (Focus group C, School 1, Participant 1). This suggests that Post Level One educators also display a need for power, and they believe that higher positions, could bring power.
In addition, it seems that the need for power not only affects principals and Post Level One educators, but also groups of educators who belong to different political parties or educator unions. This is evident when on the open-ended questionnaire, one participant said that:

“People are usually involved in conflict, because of power struggles where one person has an opposite ideology than the other. Group conflict can also occur where one group has a politically different viewpoint than the other and sometimes these undercurrents can lead to unhealthy conflict at the school” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 4).

The above perceptions appear to be in accordance with those of Landau et al. (2001:16), who contend that conflict in relation to issues of power expresses itself particularly in institutions, such as schools, with a strong hierarchical system. With regard to the need for power, it seems that the responses are also in line with the views of Tillet and French (2006:13), who are of the opinion that human beings have a huge need to exert power, which may further aggravate conflict. These are sentiments which are supported by Corbett (1991:74) as well. In addition, conflict could be heightened when one employee of a higher status has to rely on another colleague of a lower status in the accomplishment of tasks. These views seem to be in line with aspects of the Structural Theory of Conflict in terms of which “trust, uncertainty and power” could influence the outcomes of conflict (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000:136). Taking these views into account, it seems that the need for power could influence conflict in the workplace.

4.4 CONSEQUENCES OR EFFECTS OF CONFLICT

In Chapter Two, it was noted that conflict has the potential to have positive and negative outcomes. From the data, it is evident that the majority of the participants highlighted the negative consequences or effects of conflict, while a few participants also pointed out some positive aspects of conflict. The data is presented in two categories, positive and negative consequences of conflict. Under each of these categories, sub-categories pertaining to positive and negative outcomes have been identified and are presented below.

4.4.1 Positive consequences or effects of conflict

A few participants mentioned that conflict could lead to improved relationships, better understanding, change and improved attitudes and that it promotes the personal growth of individuals. These views are presented below.
4.4.1.1 Improved relationships

Some participants held the view that conflict was not just a negative phenomenon, but that it could also have positive outcomes, for example, improving relationships at their workplace. One participant mentioned that conflict could potentially restore relationships if the issue at hand had been adequately addressed, stating “... whenever relationships have been restored and people tend to work very good together the, the relationships are better” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant I). The above was also pointed out by a participant, who stated that “… whenever relationships have been restored and people tend to work very good together the, the relationships are better” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant I). The above was also pointed out by a participant, who stated that “… whenever relationships have been restored and people tend to work very good together the, the relationships are better” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant I). In addition, another participant asserted during an interview that conflict could be positive; it does not always have negative outcomes, stating, “… conflict isn’t necessarily … not a bad thing. It has to be there, because it, uhm … it builds up stronger relationships with each other …” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant I).

Another participant also mentioned that positive relationships seemed to develop when conflict was resolved between parties in such a manner that both parties were ‘happy’, stating as follows during an interview that, “… I can see there’s positive human relationships” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant R), highlighting the positive dimension if conflict is resolved amicably. Taking all of these perceptions into account, it seems that when parties engage with one another to talk about their differences, then the possibility is good that their relationships with one another could improve. This suggests that relationships between groups and individuals are enhanced when conflict is managed effectively.

The above-mentioned views seem to be in accordance with those of Schuck et al. (2005:45), who emphasise that staff at schools should strive to work with one another towards creating a sound working environment. In addition, Deutsch (1969:10) contends that people have much to gain from dealing and resolving conflict with others, while Anstey (2006:7) and Hitt et al. (2006:437-438) believe that staff could be drawn closer together after having dealt with their conflict. These sentiments appear to be linked to individuals improving their relationships with those with whom they were previously in conflict.

4.4.1.2 Better understanding

There was a perception expressed by many participants that a better understanding amongst colleagues could develop by engaging over contentious issues. There was a strong feeling amongst participants that dealing with conflict could lead to improved understanding of the issues that people were concerned about. Highlighting the above sentiment that conflict enabled people to develop a better understanding of one another, one participant stated that
the positive outcome of conflict was “Beter verstandhouding onder kollegas” [Translated: “Better understanding amongst colleagues”] (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 18). Supporting this view, another participant believed that conflict could allow him to gain a clearer picture of what was expected of him, when he declared, “Now maybe I can understand it clearly what is my role and responsibilities. … working together, err, can make yourself a better person, cause now you clearly understand that person better now” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant R). Further substantiating how conflict could enhance the understanding of issues, another participant asserted:

“They will start to realise and things come up, it is not the person being attacked, cause that is number one thing, it is going to be the issue at hand. If you work constantly through conflict you’ll notice, you’ll discover that the resolution would be, it is not the people involved, it’s the situation that the person find himself” (Focus group D, School 3, Participant 1).

This point was further emphasised by another participant, who on the questionnaire concluded that “It can bring about a better understanding, as parties realise their faults …” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 7), which suggests that reflecting on one’s mistakes could bring about the realisation that one could be mistaken.

The above extracts appear to be in agreement with the views of Robbins and Judge (2009:520) and Nelson and Quick (2008:303), who assert that individuals are able to develop more insight into their differences with others, which in turn could enhance their working relations. Hence, engaging with conflict and trying to build a better understanding of the concerns of others and themselves, could be viewed in a positive light.

4.4.1.3 Change and improved attitudes

A perception expressed by many participants was that conflict could bring about change and improved attitudes amongst staff. These perceptions, which are regarded as positive consequences of conflict, are indicated and elaborated upon below.

In a personal interview, one participant indicated how conflict could change one’s attitude towards others, stating “… you now know why that person act like that and now you change your whole attitude towards that person …” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant R). Another participant highlighted the fact that dealing with conflict had led to her broadening her whole perspective about contentious issues and at the same time to realising that there were more points of view than just one’s own. This became evident when she indicated that
“… through that conflict, I've become more aware … and not just looking at issues from my point of view” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant G). It was also mentioned by one participant that through changing one’s attitude, conflict “Can bring about changes which benefit the school or other colleagues …” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 11). In addition, another participant pointed out the positive benefits of conflict in this regard, stating that “At the end of the day, they agree about the smooth running of the school – they then push their differences aside and work towards one goal …” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 1). It therefore seems plausible that conflict could lead to change and improved attitudes, as suggested by the data above. A positive outcome of dealing with conflict is not only that one can become aware of other people’s viewpoint, but also that conflicting parties can iron out their differences and then work together in the best interests of the organisation.

These views are supported by Nelson and Quick (2008) and Robbins and Judge (2009), who in addition, indicate that individuals are able to develop a better understanding of their problems through confronting their issues with others. Further, Bipath (2008:87), contend that managing conflict effectively could bring about renewed creativity, enhanced cooperation, and dedication, and assist the leadership in gaining deeper insight into the staff. This in turn could bring individuals to change their attitudes and adopt a more tolerant approach, which suggests that conflict could have positive consequences.

4.4.1.4 Builds personal growth

In terms of the positive effects of conflict, some participants were of the opinion that conflict could lead to individuals attaining personal growth. Highlighting this view, one participant stated:

“Well it’s made me a stronger person. It’s definitely made me a stronger person. I've learnt to stand on my feet, speak up for myself, not wait for my peers, I mean my colleagues, to do certain things for me, and, uh, follow my own mind. Not follow, uh, things that my colleagues have, ideas that they have and, and just follow them, you know. If I don't agree with something, I don't agree with something. So in other words, to put it in a nutshell, it’s made me a stronger person” (Focus group B, School 2, Participant 1).

Agreeing that conflict could build personal growth through developing personal awareness, another participant mentioned “… because if I sit back and reflect, no that one was right, and we should be big enough to say, OK, it was my fault or, and, and I, that problem won’t arise again, because I am aware of what I've been doing, you know” (Focus group D, School 3,
Participant 1). It was also declared by a participant in relation to enhancing the individual that conflict “... can result in growth” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 7).

The above sentiments appear to be in line with those of Deutsch (1969), who stated that people are able to enhance their inner selves through dealing with others in settling their differences. Also, conflict could assist in developing a greater sense of “individual or group maturity” (Squelch & Lemmer, 1994:150). In addition, these sentiments appear to be further substantiated by key features of the Transformational Theory of Conflict in terms of which conflict is described as a positive factor that could enhance the development of relationships, organisations and society (Collins, 2005:18). In further support of these aforementioned sentiments, (Bacal, 2004:21) states that conflict is “a productive force, one that can stimulate members of the organization to increase their knowledge and skills, as well as their contributions to organizational innovation and productivity’ (Bacal, 2004:21). Therefore, it seems that conflict could positively influence people’s personal growth and understanding of one another at their institutions.

### 4.4.2 Negative consequences or effects of conflict

Bearing in mind that people generally perceive conflict in a negative light, as discussed in Chapter Two, a large number of the participants presented the consequences or effects of conflict in a negative sense. The negative aspects emphasised by participants, were a defiant attitude or intolerance to one another; poor relationships; formation of groups, cliques and division; poor morale, motivation and work ethic; poor health and stress; absenteeism; and negative outcomes for teaching and the learners. These perceptions are captured in the sub-categories below.

#### 4.4.2.1 Defiant attitude or intolerance towards one another

According to the participants, conflict often had many unpleasant consequences. Some participants indicated that a defiant attitude and a high level of intolerance were consequences of conflict that they perceived. In expressing his opinion as to how conflict could cause people to develop a defiant attitude towards the school management, one participant stated “Slack in your work, trying to get back at management, you didn’t listen to me, so I’ll show you now” (Focus group D, School 3, Participant 1). Another participant concurred that he would not be prepared to do anything extra for the school because of management not valuing his issues of concern adequately, reporting that “… I’m not gonna (going) do anything else, except what I’m supposed to do, and that is teaching. Cause I’m not going to … my issue was not taken seriously, that conflict was not resolved ...” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant R). In highlighting the issue of educators acting in a defiant
manner as a consequence of conflict, one participant during another personal interview mentioned that “… I’ve seen people there (at school) who’ve felt that well … if they (certain educators who are in favour with the principal) can do that without anybody saying anything, uhm, so I’m going to do whatever I please” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant I). Another participant, supporting the view that conflict could harden attitudes, especially between educators and the principal, declared:

“But the thing is this, that is the type of person, he (the principal) brings the worst out of a person and that is not the way you want to be. I’ve never fought with principals and things by all the schools; I used to work with everyone – that’s the way I was. But at this school, I have changed totally, into a monster to say that. He (the principal) changed me into that, that because I cannot accept the things that he’s doing and he knows that it’s wrong and I refuse to accept it and I’m not gonna, I’m saying I’m not selling my soul to the devil” (Focus group B, School 2, Participant 3).

The data suggests that the educator felt extremely emotional about how conflict with the principal had affected herself, sentiments which seem to be linked to the views of Tillet and French (2006:16), who contend that conflict has the capacity to draw highly emotional feelings from individuals. All this implies that conflict could negatively impact on schools, due to personnel displaying defiance and intolerant attitudes towards one another, either between teachers or from management towards teachers and vice versa.

These sentiments appear to be in accordance with those of Nelson and Quick (2008:303) and Robbins and Judge (2009:520), who point out that conflict is capable of forcing people into opposing one another. Further, conflict could ignite feelings of outrage and hostility (Tillet & French, 2006:16). In such circumstances, conflict could generate defiant attitudes and high levels of intolerance from disputants.

4.4.2.2 Poor cooperation and teamwork
Cooperation and teamwork are essential aspects of ensuring effective schools. The participants in this study believed that poor cooperation and a lack of teamwork, which seem to be closely linked to the issue of defiance and intolerance, were consequences of conflict that impacted negatively on schools.

Expressing this negative consequence of conflict, one participant contended “… cause conflict causes people not to work well together” (Focus group A, School 2, Participant 1). Another participant in the questionnaire agreed that conflict “could lead to colleagues not
being willing to participate or share in projects or tasks given in their committees, etc.” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 2), which could hamper the smooth running of schools. This point was reiterated by a participant in the questionnaire, who wrote “Mense neig om nie meer hul samewerking te gee om die doelstellings van die inrigting te verwesenlik nie” [Translated: “People tend not to cooperate any more in reaching the goals of the institution”] (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 2). In further indicating how poor cooperation and a lack of teamwork could negatively affect schools, in for example striving to develop team-building, another participant mentioned “… then also that is why people were reluctant even to go on team buildings or end of terms [staff functions] – they just thought they’d stay away” (Focus group C, School 1, Participant 1). This negative consequence of conflict was also supported by another participant, who stated “So the morale was low, no cooperation was given, everybody just had his own way of doing things and thinking” (Focus group C, School 1, Participant 2). The lack of cooperation and teamwork was also mentioned by another participant, who stated that conflict “Can cause lack of cooperation and teamwork” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 10).

This lack of cooperation and teamwork was again affirmed by another participant, who in the questionnaire wrote that educators would “Refuse to cooperate with duties” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 17). Another participant concurred, remarking that “It could lead to colleagues not being willing to participate or share in projects tasks given in their committees, etc.” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 2). Considering these sentiments, it seems that conflict has the capacity to impact negatively on cooperation and teamwork amongst colleagues.

Another participant indicated that poor cooperation and teamwork also had a negative effect on the learners. This was pointed out by one participant, who mentioned that “… err, they (the educators) lose their interest and their enthusiasm. You can actually see it in the way they carry themselves … (conflict) impact on the whole functioning of the organisation and it also impacts on the children. Cause the children are not getting the best” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant G). Conflict also influenced the educators’ performance in the classroom as was alluded to when a participant concluded that an “Educator could not perform her/his best in the class, because he or she is upset” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 6), due to being involved in issues of conflict.

The above beliefs seem to coincide with those of Anstey (2006:7) and Hitt et al. (2006:437-438), who support the views of Nelson and Quick (2008:303) and Robbins and Judge (2009:520), as stated previously, that conflict has the potential to cause rifts between individuals and groups. In addition, Rahim (2011:7) states that conflict diminishes people’s
performance at the workplace, a view supported by Bipath (2008:87). This indicates that conflict could seriously hamper a cooperative spirit amongst school staff, which could ultimately also affect the learners.

4.4.2.3 Poor relationships
Poor relationships is another negative consequence of conflict. Many of the participants held the view that conflict had resulted in poor relationships between personnel at their workplaces, as illustrated by their perceptions below.

Pointing out how conflict had negatively influenced relationships at school, one participant asserted that “Conflict removes the trust and love that are supposed to exist between colleagues. Conflict at school cancels out camaraderie” (Focus group A, School 2, Participant 1). This suggests that colleagues will not be motivated to work together in a healthy environment due to the strained relations resulting from conflict. This sentiment was supported by another participant, who pointed out that when conflict was not appropriately handled, it could lead to “… consequences in like terms of a breakdown in relationships, if things are not solved correctly …” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant I). In addition, a participant wrote in the questionnaire that conflict “Breek positiewe verhoudings tussen onderwysers op” [Translated: “Breaks positive relationships of educators”] (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 15). These sentiments were affirmed by another participant who concluded that “Conflict could affect the healthy working relationships at school” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 12). Thus it seems that poor relationships could be an important outcome of conflict which could hamper a sound working environment at schools.

These views are supported by those of Kohlrieser (2006:102) and Rahim (2011:7) who articulate that conflict may negatively affect relations amongst employees and influence the unity of groups (Tillet & French, 2006:16). Under these circumstances, it appears that conflict could lead to poor relationships amongst staff members.

4.4.2.4 Groups, cliques and division
Division, leading to the formation of groups and (or) cliques at schools, was seen by many participants as a negative consequence of conflict. This aspect is also closely allied to the issue of poor relationships, poor cooperation and teamwork. In reference to how conflict could cause division amongst colleagues, one participant declared “It tends to break the unity …” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant G). That conflict could result in the formation of groups and cliques, was pointed out by another participant, who stated:
“Look for instance, err, err, participant 2 mentioned something earlier with where in terms of cliques that are created sometimes at school because of conflicts. Now, you know, once you have that, those cliques, I’m telling you, they can really blow even small things out of proportion. We have some tiff [disagreement] or some misunderstanding, but because now these people here are my clique, then if then now everybody here must suddenly take sides with me and then we must ignore this one and you find that even a small thing was blown out of proportion and now while these people, because this people were backing me up, and actually fuelling this thing, you know. Even when you now feel that, ag, [oh] you know, what at the end of the day, this was nonsense. But now because you have the backing of this people you know, it makes a mountain out of a molehill” (Focus group C, School 1, Participant 3).

Further highlighting this consequence, one participant mentioned “Disunity ... Formation of groups at school. (Camps) Staff form cliques, e.g. pro-principal and anti-principal” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 2), suggesting that cliques are driven by their own personal agendas. This negative outcome was also supported by another participant who in the questionnaire stated that “People will also develop cliques, and this means that the relations will be strained. This usually results in division among the staff” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 4). All this suggests that conflict has the potential to drive rifts among personnel, causing a breakdown in the unity of the staff.

These perceptions appear to be in line with those of Tillet and French (2006:16), who agree that conflict could negatively impact on group cohesiveness and how people engage with one another. Further, Rahim (2011:7) points out that feelings of doubt and mistrust could arise when parties are in conflict. Therefore, it seems that these conditions could lead to the formation of different camps at institutions.

4.4.2.5 Poor morale, motivation and work ethic
Morale, motivation and work ethic are essential elements, closely linked to psychological and physiological factors (Bush & Middlewood, 2005:78). These factors relate to the needs of individuals, as pointed out by Du Preez et al. (2003:21) in Chapter Two. Bearing this in mind, it seemed likely that a number of participants felt that conflict affected the morale, motivation and work ethic of educators – sentiments that are expressed below.

Emphasising this consequence of conflict, one participant stated “No morale, educators were just simply down and out at one stage, because the leadership did not really lead as he (the principal) was supposed to lead. So the morale was low, no cooperation was given,
everybody just had his own way of doing things and thinking” (Focus group C, School 1, Participant 1). Another participant, highlighting how conflict had affected her motivation to work, said “... you lose that, uhmm ... that love that you thought you perhaps had if things are not dealt with. I mean, like, if I'm passionate about something, but every time you have this conflict, you’re not going to have like that enthusiasm and drive anymore” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant I). The loss of motivation to work in a conflict-laden environment was expressed by another participant in a focus group interview:

“... because that’s the way you get up in the morning. And then when you get to school, you get yourself there, let me just work so that the day can go past quick. Do my work, done, go home. Hometime, go home, you are pleased to go home, because now you’re away from this school. Tomorrow morning, same thing and, and I mean that’s not fair. You doing your work it’s not fair, it’s not fair to feel like that and, and nobody’s doing nothing and nobody doesn't give a damn how you feel at that school” (Focus group B, School 2, Participant 3).

All this suggests that conflict plays a huge role in reducing the educators’ morale, motivation and work ethic, a view that seems to correspond with that of Scott (2010:81), who assert that the morale of individuals are affected by conflict. Further, Du Preez et al. (2003:20), in reference to the work of Maslow, argue that individuals become demotivated when their self-esteem needs are not adequately realised. Therefore, it seems that poor morale, motivation and work ethic could be negative consequences of conflict.

4.4.2.6 Effect on teaching and learners
Closely linked to 4.4.2.5 above, is the effect that conflict has on teaching and learners. Many of the participants believed that conflict affected teaching, as well as the learners at their schools. Emphasising the effect that conflict has on teaching and learning at school, one participant stated:
... because the learners knows about this conflict. They know this one and that one is not greeting or not speaking to one another or whatever and, and, this, uh, it’s not a good thing for the learners and sometimes they want to go to another educator to ask something or to tell something, but then they, they keep it back, because then they think oh, ja, [yes] that teacher and that one don’t speak to one another or they don’t greet and, and and then that also break the, the because sometimes the child is in my class and then I taught something and the child didn’t understand but then the child maybe feels free to go to this educator to go and ask, ‘teacher explain to me this’. But now because she knows he or she picked up this vibe between the educators, they don’t feel free to go and ask teacher can you help me with, with this thing” (Focus group B, School 2, Participant 2).

This perception implies that the learners are capable of discerning when educators are not getting along with one another due to conflict issues, which in turn determines how the learners react to these educators, which could impact negatively on learner to educator relationships.

In addition, not only could conflict have a detrimental effect on relations between educators and the management, but it could also impact on teaching and learning. This was highlighted by a participant in a personal interview, when he stated:

“Conflict as we said is know that the school will suffer, cause that certain educators that is or well that’s in that conflict, won’t give their 100%. Cause maybe some ... or they have an issue and it was not resolved eagerly, easily or, err, properly. You say no, the school doesn’t take my feelings in consideration, so I’m not gonna give 100% to the learners, not going to cooperate with the management, not going to cooperate ever ... cause then I have a problem. I have a conflict, it’s not solved, so it will hamper the whole education system. Like I said, it will be a snowballing effect” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant R).

Another participant pointed out that conflict had a negative influence on the school as a whole, as well as on the learners, stating that conflict had an “... impact on the whole functioning of the organisation and it also impacts on the children. Cause the children are not getting the best” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant G). This point was again alluded to when a participant declared, “It’s stressful and the stressfulness can even be carried over to the pupils, as she said, the pupils are also suffering in, in this” (Focus group B, School 2, Participant 1). This was further confirmed by a participant in the questionnaire that “In most
cases this will also affect the learners negatively, as they can pick up when the educators are not in good terms with each other. Children then start circulating stories also, which may cause the rift to get wider” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 4).

It seems that the views expressed by, Du Preez et al. (2003:20), Bipath (2008:87), Scott (2010:81) and Rahim (2011:7) in the sub-categories above, could be applied to the perception of the educators that conflict affects teaching and the learners. It appears that poor morale, lack of motivation and poor work ethic could directly impact on how educators feel and perform at school, which in turn also negatively impacts on the learners themselves.

4.4.2.7 Poor health and stress

It seems inevitable that when the workplace is laden with conflict, the health and well-being of individuals will be affected. This was the view of some participants, who expressed the opinion that conflict negatively impacted on people’s health and wellness. Highlighting how conflict affects the health of educators, one participant mentioned “… and it sometimes makes people unhealthy, it makes one unhealthy as well and I mean we have this, we have evidence of colleagues who are on sick leave, you know, … long term incapacity due to conflict …” (Focus group C, School 1, Participant 2). Supporting this contention, another participant in the questionnaire wrote that conflict “Beïnvloed gesondheid van leerkrugte” [Translated: “Influences the health of educators”] (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 18). This negative consequence of conflict was also perceived by a participant in a focus group interview who stated that “Conflict at your workplace affects your mental and physical health” (Focus group A, School 2, Participant 1).

Stress is also regarded as part of the overall health and, well-being of individuals, as indicated by one participant, who declared “Stress relief, cause you know, one of our colleagues is also on stress relief, because of conflict …” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant R). Further emphasising this issue of health, a participant pointed out that conflict resulted in “Stress amongst teachers” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 1). Bearing all this in mind, it seems plausible that conflict could have a detrimental effect on the health and well-being of educators at their schools.

The above views expressed seem to be supported by Rahim (2011:7), who points out that “Conflict may cause job stress, burnout and dissatisfaction.” In addition, Scott (2010:80) asserts that the health of individuals is affected due to the climate of conflict under which they have to work. In further support of these views, Haraway and Haraway (2005:11) contend that conflict could even lead to “a loss of life”. Thus, it appears that poor health and stress could be a consequence of conflict.
4.4.2.8 Absenteeism

Absenteeism, as a consequence of conflict, appears to also affect the learners. Some participants perceived that conflict led to absenteeism amongst the staff at their schools, which in turn impacted on the learners. Pointing out how conflict influences educator absenteeism and the effect thereof on the learners, one participant mentioned:

“And the biggest problem that usually emanates from conflict situations is then you stay away from school and just don’t feel like coming, because there’s no drive. If you know that I’m going to be looking at participant 1 every day and I probably unfortunately have to be working close to her you know, with him and I do not now have a good working relationship, I would rather just stay away from him so it results therefore in absenteeism and like participant 2 was saying, then your absenteeism as educator then has a negative impact on your learners, because while you are not there, then your learners are suffering even more” (Focus group C, School 1, Participant 3).

Another participant in the open-ended questionnaire also stated that absenteeism was a result of conflict. He stated that conflict “… can lead to absenteeism where learners are negatively influenced” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 11). In addition, another participant, referring to conflict, stated “… and it also has an effect on a person, cause he can book him off [by the doctor]” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant R). In addition, that conflict could cause individuals to battle with each other was highlighted by another participant, who declared that “Teachers want to spite one another by staying at home. This results in learners without teachers” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 10), which influences teaching and learning. All this suggest that conflict causes educators to stay away from school, which in turn negatively affects the learners, as well as the school’s general functioning.

These perceptions seem to be in accordance with the views of Haraway and Haraway (2005:11), who assert that absenteeism is one of the results of conflict. In further support of the aforementioned views, Bipath (2008:87) point out that conflict could be a factor leading to absenteeism amongst staff. Further, it seems that absenteeism as a consequence of conflict is closely linked to the issues of morale, motivation and poor health, as discussed above. Therefore, conflict could lead to educator absenteeism, which could have negative consequences for the school and the learners.
4.5 PERCEPTIONS OF HOW CONFLICT IS USUALLY DEALT WITH

The data revealed that the majority of the participants believed that school principals were mainly responsible for dealing with or handling conflict. The participants also stated that deputy principals and HODs, as part of the SMTs were often also involved in handling conflict. Therefore, it appears that the leadership of schools often become involved in attempting to address conflict issues, a view that is supported by Loock et al. (2006:48), who state that the leadership of schools have to implement measures to prevent conflict from affecting the smooth running of their institutions. This implies that the principal and school management team have to take the lead in managing conflict at their schools.

Bearing this in mind, participants stated that principals and SMTs did at times provide opportunities for staff to deal with conflict. However, it was interesting to note that staff members portrayed the handling of conflict by the principal and SMT in a very negative way. According to many of the participants, there were a number of instances where conflict was either avoided and inadequately managed, and when conflict was dealt with, it was handled unprofessionally and inappropriately. This will be examined in the following sub-sections.

4.5.1 Conflict is avoided mostly and inadequately handled

Aquinas (2006:288) and Huczynski and Buchanan (2007:778) state that conflict avoidance occurs when people are reluctant to face up to issues of conflict and try to evade circumstances that could force them into dealing with it (conflict) as far as possible. Expressing their views regarding the handling of conflict, some participants indicated that conflict was most likely avoided or handled inadequately at their schools. Focusing on how the principal tried to avoid dealing with conflict, one participant asserted: “… I could pick up reluctance of getting involved and deeper involved. He will just face it, you know, give his wording … For me, I feel it wasn’t even resolved really after that …” (Focus group C, School 1, Participant 2). In describing the manner in which conflict was handled at school, another participant said:

“On the other hand, there’s also many scenarios where conflict isn’t really dealt with upfront, you know. It’s like, err, like a slight approach, making as if it’s not really there. So we sweep it under the carpet and hope that everybody forgets about it …” (Focus group D, School 3, Participant 2).

In further support of these contentions, another participant pointed out that “… some conflicts are not really solved cause it’s only left in the air. I’m not sure, there’s, there’s not … that clear guidance … about how to resolve the conflict” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant R). Concurring with these perceptions, another participant reported that “Conflict at this
school is normally avoided” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 2). Bearing this in mind, it seems that there is a reluctance on the part of principals and school management teams to handle conflict issues at schools.

These views seem to correspond with that of Dipaola (2003:143), who contends that grown-ups are usually reluctant to deal with conflict issues, since people tend to normally train or guide children from a young age to avoid disagreeing or quarrelling with others. Further, Robbins and Judge (2009:519) indicate that there is a perception that conflict is negative and should be avoided at all costs, views that are supported by Fox (2006:132) and Plocharczyk (2007:92). These negative stances on conflict could be possible reasons why people, and especially principals and school management teams, do not want to become embroiled in conflict.

4.5.2 Conflict is handled unprofessionally and inappropriately
A number of participants were of the opinion that when conflict issues came to the fore, some opportunities were granted for these issues to be addressed, albeit in the manner discussed above. When issues were brought to the attention of the principal and members of the school management, time was set aside for these issues to be addressed. This was revealed by one participant, who stated that “The principal will call the parties involved in the conflict to the office and call in a senior member (SMT) to sit in as a witness when mediating the process” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 15). Another participant concurred that the principal would make some attempt to deal with individuals who were in conflict, stating that the “Principal addresses the parties involved. Principal call a meeting with the different people involved” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 18). In addition, another participant agreed that members of the school management team did make provision for attending to conflict, stating that “… we normally go talk about it, … the teacher will say, the HOD will say … Let us perhaps just write this down, so that we have a record of what have been said and what decisions we have come to and with that writing, we will meet with the principal …” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant I).

These sentiments appear to be in line with those of Coleman (2003:173), who in reference to a Government Notice of the Department of Education (1999), points out that an important task of the principal is to ensure that legislation, regulations and personnel administration measures are appropriately implemented to provide satisfactory school management. This implies that school leaders have to make provision for staff to raise their issues and deal with conflict (Landau et al., 2001:38; Roulis, 2004:120). In further support hereof, Loock et al. (2006:43) state that principals should act as soon as they perceive conflict between educators. Hence, it seems appropriate that opportunities need to be granted for conflict to
be addressed at schools. However, despite these opportunities being provided to deal with personnel conflict, it still seems that schools are not adequately equipped to deal with conflict.

Considering that there appears to be a general reluctance to deal with conflict, as alluded to above, it seems plausible that when principals and school management teams have to handle conflict, it would be done with some problems. Many participants believed that when conflict was handled at their schools, it was done unprofessionally and (or) inappropriately.

Subjectivity seemed to play a big role when dealing with conflict, as was pointed out by one participant, who in reference to the school management team stated “… because where people, to who you report it to, are supposed to be objective, they rather subjective. And that immediately, uh … you put more oil onto the fire if you do that” (Focus group A, School 2, Participant 1). Highlighting how the school management team dealt with conflict issues, another participant said, “Any attempts made by the management team created more conflict instead of resolving it” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 12). Another participant reported that management did not handle one situation appropriately, by simply brushing aside the views of other educators and acting in an inconsiderate manner. This was revealed when the participant pointed out that “… management came in and, err, heard some other points of view and then the person just came in and then what he said was just a autocratic way. It was like his way [the principal’s way] or no other way, and he’s not even entertaining any other views” (Focus group D, School 3, Participant 2). Focusing on how the inappropriate handling of conflict could lead to more conflict, another participant also declared that “The principal does not handle conflict in the right manner and he usually ends up causing more conflict” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 9). The above sentiments suggest that conflict was not handled in a professional and appropriate manner by the principals and school management teams at the participating schools, as the data revealed that there was generally much reluctance to deal with conflict and much subjectivity involved when conflict was dealt with.

These views seem to correspond with those of Moore (2003:64) and Littlejohn and Domenici (2007:12), who argue that conflicts may be the result of intense feelings, stereotyping, inadequate communication, “misperceptions and repetitive negative behavior” (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007:12). This also implies that people’s interaction with one another is dependent on their encounters in the past, which could lead individuals to act with certain biases when interacting with others. Further, Haraway and Haraway (2005:11) contend that poor skills and proficiency in dealing with conflict could lead to negative outcomes for institutions and could even escalate tensions. Thus, taking these views into consideration, it seems relevant that in
the participants' perceptions, conflict was handled unprofessionally and inappropriately at their schools.

4.6 SUGGESTING AN APPROPRIATE MANNER IN HANDLING OR DEALING WITH EDUCATOR CONFLICT

Various ways of handling or dealing with educator conflict in a more appropriate manner, were suggested by participants. These suggestions, as well as the outcomes to be strived for when dealing with conflict, are presented in two categories below.

4.6.1 Practical suggestions

Participants suggested the following practical ways of dealing with conflict: providing opportunities for the conflicting parties to state their cases, listening, handling conflict with confidentiality and professionalism, openness and transparency, granting fair hearings and treatment, utilising policies, implementing conflict management training and making provision for external intervention. These aspects are indicated and discussed below.

4.6.1.1 Ensuring opportunity for parties to state or discuss their cases

Many participants were of the opinion that opportunities had to be provided for educators to state or discuss their issues in order to assist in improving the handling of conflict amongst staff. In pointing out how opportunities could be created for dealing with differences. One participant suggested that “... sometimes you would, you would confer with the one party, separately, then you would go to the other one and find out an agreement, can't they come to an agreement ...” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant I). Another participant suggested that an environment conducive to discussion was essential, stating “So if we can create that sense of trust and that sense of confidence, that I can come directly to ... any SMT member and tell them ... instead of having my little meetings and getting the group all swooped up against the SMT” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant G).

Further emphasising these above-mentioned views, one participant reported that “Aggrieved educators should be given a platform to discuss the issue at hand” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 5). It was asserted by another participant that “It (opportunities for discussion) should be arrange(d) depending on the nature of the conflict to get opposing parties together to discuss and attempt to iron out their differences” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 2). The importance of providing opportunities for staff to discuss their differences were reiterated by one participant, who wrote in the questionnaire that “Management should create a more consultative atmosphere (and) involve all staff members to find solutions if it affects the
school as a whole” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 3). It seems plausible that school management need to provide opportunities for all parties to iron out their differences and also that school management must be equipped with the skills to adequately handle such instances when opportunities have to be given for differences to be settled.

The views expressed, seem to be in line with those of Dipaola (2003:152), who advocate that the management of schools should create an environment conducive for conflicting parties to engage in communicating with each other over their concerns. Further, Landau et al. (2001:38) and Roulis (2004:120) indicate that individuals or groups need to be given opportunities to address their divergent issues at their institutions. Therefore, it seems that adequate opportunities, wherein opposing parties can state their concerns and listen to one another, could assist greatly towards resolving their problems.

4.6.1.2 Listening with all the senses

Listening, as an integral element of communication, forms a vital part of attempts to resolve conflict (Fisher & Ury, 1992:33-35). A number of participants felt that listening played an important role when conflict had to be dealt with at schools, as was evident from the data.

In placing the emphasis on the value of listening, one participant stated that “All staff members need to be listened to and treated with compassion” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 12). Supporting the contention that feuding parties need to be listened to, another participant wrote in the questionnaire that “The principal should listen carefully to both sides of the story” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 11). It seemed that participants were deeply concerned that all parties needed to be listened to in order to obtain the correct details, a point reiterated by one participant in a focus group interview, who remarked:

“So it is always then important to get these people (the disputing parties) together at the same time so that you get if, if the complainant one is then saying something then this one (the other party) is here to rectify and say, no, that is not how it happened. But now if you’re going to call one person you know, separately, then this one (the other party) distorts the story and like participant one is saying, you must be a good listener, you must listen to both err, err, parties ...”(Focus group C, School 1, Participant 3).

In addition, one participant, in referring to the handling of conflict amongst parties, expressed the concern that parties had to be listened to, not just cosmetically, but with serious intent. This became evident when he indicated:
“… let the principal, then chair or mediate the whole conflict situation, uhm, to get it resolved much better and very importantly listen and do take notes, because you know, sometimes you just feel it was just called in, in a sec (second) and there’s just nothing recorded. You just feel it’s not important, it’s not so much important for him (the principal) and … But, very important, listen and record” (Focus group C, School 1, Participant 2).

These views seem to be supported by Abigail and Cahn (2011:73), who advocate providing adequate time to ensure attentive listening and to be open towards other views without judging them. Scott (2010:275) concurs with these views, adding that those listening have to, inter alia, maintain an open posture, be patient before seeking clarification, and record the information provided. It seems that by improving one’s listening skills, the management of conflict could be improved.

4.6.1.3 Confidentiality and professionalism

Confidentiality and professionalism were rated highly amongst some participants when suggestions for the handling of conflict were expressed. Much emphasis was placed on handling conflict in a confidential and professional manner; as one participant reported, “It should be handled professionally. Confidentiality plays a big role” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 7). Another participant made it clear that all matters revealed in confidence had to remain that way, since it could otherwise become very embarrassing for the parties involved in conflict, stating:

“… what I want to add is confidentiality is important, because sometimes you are in the hearing and then tomorrow morning it’s made as an example, please don’t do this, so if it was discussed in, in a hearing set-up let it rather stay there in the hearing set-up. You know because you feel belittled now, jinne [my gosh], you were talked to, you discussed this whole thing, and here it was blurred out to the whole staff. People sometimes laugh at it, and making comments and you feel very belittled, so you rather keep it confidential very importantly” (Focus group C, School 1, Participant 2).

This issue of confidentiality was again emphasised by another participant, who declared “Be more confidential” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 14). Further emphasising the professional handling of conflict, a participant asserted that “People need to resolve issues in a professional way ...” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 9). From this data, it seems that
professionalism and confidentiality were aspects that participants valued highly when conflict had to be managed.

The above views seem to be in agreement with those of Doherty and Guyler (2008:12), who indicate that confidentiality is an important principle in mediating in conflict situations. In addition, Carpenter and Kennedy (2001:195) allude to the fact that those handling conflict should possess a broad range of qualities related to professionalism. Therefore, there appears to be a strong perception amongst educators that conflict should be handled confidentially and professionally in order to improve the handling of conflict.

4.6.1.4 Openness and transparency

A number of participants believed that openness and transparency were essential elements of conflict management. The importance of openness and transparency towards improving the management of conflict was highlighted by one participant, who remarked “And the SMT must be open, must be open and, err, clear guidelines must be set. What are we, are you supposed to do” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant R). Further indicating how openness and transparency can improve situations in schools, another participant mentioned:

“The SMT are also human beings and they do make mistakes ... and that’s why I try as far as possible, when there is something, for instance the year planner. I will try and circularise it as wide as possible, to get input ... Because at the end of the day, you don’t see all the little ... uhm, pitfalls. Whereas 20 people looking at it sees it differently. So perhaps wider, err, consultation ... But then again, there you have the time factor, it’s not always possible” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant G).

Confirming the importance of transparency, another participant suggested that there was a need for school management “To be more transparent with all staff members when addressing issues” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 6). It was also stated by one participant that “… no matter how ugly the thing might become or how bad the conflict is, but the true facts must be put on the table” (Focus group C, School 1, Participant 1). Further illustrating the elements above, a participant mentioned “Transparency is also important, where people are made to feel comfortable to air their views” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 4). All this seems to indicate that the participants highly valued openness and transparency in managing conflict effectively.
These sentiments seem to be in line with the views of Dipaola (2003:152), who postulates that an environment that is conducive for differing parties to state their issues and engage with one another, needs to be established at institutions. Further, Schermerhorn et al. (2000:5) assert that when individuals feel at ease with expressing themselves openly regarding their concerns, conflict could be satisfactorily resolved. Therefore, it appears that openness and transparency are important components of effectively dealing with conflict.

4.6.1.5 Providing a fair hearing and treatment: Impartiality and objectivity

Many participants held the view that the provision of a fair hearing or treatment and impartiality and objectivity were vital aspects in resolving conflict satisfactorily. One participant expressed the need for fair treatment to be meted out to all, remarking “Another thing is, this could prevent conflict between educators if a principal treats everybody fairly. What’s good for me, must be good for the other one also ... He must treat everybody the same” (Focus group B, School 2, Participant 3). Supporting this view, another participant responded as follows:

“... and don’t be biased. Biased towards, what you say favour this teacher and favour that teacher. I think that will resolve before a conflict can even start then you know before it even started if you, if you, know what is supposed to ... like I say, don’t be biased” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant R).

Highlighting these suggestions further, a participant mentioned “All staff members need to be treated equally and there must be no favourites” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 12). The impartiality of management was clearly brought to the fore when a participant in a focus group interview stated, “So just to make known that management must be impartial and they must make both parties aware that we [management] are impartial when we take decisions here” (Focus group D, School 3, Participant 1). The above views indicate that participants place much emphasis on all parties being treated with fairness, impartiality and objectivity.

These views seem to be supported by Patton (2005:285), who points out that people involved in conflict are hugely concerned with fair and just treatment. Concurring, Carpenter and Kennedy (2001:204) also indicate that the issue of fair treatment for all parties is an accepted norm for conflict to be effectively addressed. In addition, Doherty and Guyler (2008:12) contend that impartiality is an essential principle of mediating in conflict matters. Hence, there seems to be a strong reliance on measures that focus on fairness, impartiality and objectivity when conflict has to be adequately addressed.
4.6.1.6 Policies, procedures and/or guidelines

A number of participants felt strongly about the utilisation of policies and procedures or guidelines with regard to suggestions for improving the handling of educator conflict at their schools. Emphasising the need for schools to have policies and procedures in place to deal with matters, including issues of conflict, a participant said:

“… I think we must definitely have an on-paper procedure and steps, that is going to be followed. If you digress or overstep the line in this regard, this will be the consequences. If that teacher is not prepared to hand in her things on time, this is what you are going to do. ...There must be like something in place, on paper, if you do not do what you are supposed to do” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant I).

This view was supported by another participant, who indicated that a “Code of conduct should be adhered to and proper procedures followed to ensure fair treatment of all parties involved” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 3). In addition, a participant expressed the opinion that policies and procedures had to be adhered to by not only the educators, but also the principals and management. This was evident when one participant stated:

“Or procedure must be in place, like Section 17 for us educators. If you do this then Section 18, do this serious misconduct, everything is in place there. So if a, a, a educator steps out of place the principal is there to put you in place by following Section 17 or 18, whatever there, serious or less serious. But you don’t see anything in place for the principal, why isn’t there anything in place for the principal? If there’s, I feel if there’s something in place for principals, schools won’t be like this. There won’t be so much conflict, because how many times do they say principals are going on a conflict, a workshop. What do they learn there? Our principal comes back and does the same thing. According to him, that doesn’t apply to him, that’s his attitude. So something must be on paper to say, listen, if you do this, that is step no.1 …” (Focus group B, School 2, Participant 3).

Supporting the fact that procedures and policies should apply to both educators and management, a participant wrote in the questionnaire that “Rules and regulations should be adhered to by all staff” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 12).

The above clearly suggests that policies and procedures for dealing with conflict are a necessity. At the same time, the above sentiments create the perception that there are no clear guidelines and procedures in place for educators (including principals) to deal with
conflict. Alternatively, it could be that such guidelines do exist, but they are either not adhered to or educators and principals are not aware of them. It is proposed that staff collectively draw up procedures or guidelines for dealing with conflict.

The participants’ focus on the importance of policies and procedures is related to the view of Van Deventer (2003:91), who contends that policies are in place to steer decisions that need to be taken and determine powers that may be extended. Du Preez et al. (2003:82-83) concur, adding that policies at schools need to include matters pertaining to the discipline of personnel. In addition, Van der Merwe (2003:31) believes that conflict may be influenced by people’s perception of how staff policies are implemented at their institutions. Bearing these factors in mind, it seems that policies and procedures are essential when dealing with or confronting conflict amongst staff.

4.6.1.7 Need for conflict management training

The training of educators and empowering schools in conflict management and resolution ranked high amongst the participants’ suggestions for handling educator conflict. In suggesting ways of improving conflict management at schools through training and other forms of empowerment, one participant remarked:

“... I think what we should do or what the department must do, especially for schools or educators that works so closely with one another is put us all under a course of conflict resolution or conflict management. So that people can identify conflict and then know how to steer away from it,...” (Focus group A, School 2, Participant 1).

Agreeing with this sentiment, another participant highlighted the need to draw in skilled professionals to assist with conflict training, commenting “We need to be proactive, ... Let’s look at, err, what common conflict we have and let’s identify it and let’s get a specialist in to empower us on how to, to, to effectively deal with it.” (Focus group D, School 3, Participant 3). Further supporting this view, another participant indicated that “... the educators should be empowered with ways to deal with conflict situations as well as strategies for managing it.” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 12). It was further stated on the questionnaire by another participant that there was a need for “Conflict management training as well as emotional intelligence training to empower teachers to resolve conflict amongst themselves” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 4).
In addition to the above, a participant postulated on the value of including a wide circle of role-players to assist with conflict management training and empowerment, to ensure broader benefits for the educators in confronting issues of conflict. This was evident when the participant stated:

“Maybe, err, management can take a more proactive role and, err, involve, err, prominent members of the community or, err, psychologist, and have, err, a series of workshops to empower, not only management, but the staff, on how to deal with, err, different conflict situations, specifically pertaining to the school situation ... That can be part of, uhm, staff development ... And this needs to be, err, done on a, on a, on an on-going basis. Because not only will it help the staff and the management to err deal with conflict amongst themselves, but also conflict in a classroom situation, conflict amongst parents. So, uhm, this can be, err, a macro solution, to conflict on the whole” (Focus group D, School 3, Participant 3).

The data suggests that schools would only benefit from including as many role-players as possible in providing training and empowerment in conflict management. Furthermore, it becomes evident that educators, including principals, should be exposed to conflict management training workshops.

These sentiments appear to correspond with those of Lang (2009:240), who states that staff need to be empowered with skills to adequately deal with conflict in their workplaces, a view supported by Ngcobo (2003:187) and Snodgrass and Blunt (2009:54). In considering these aspects, it seems that the suggestions to equip all school personnel with conflict management skills could assist in improving the handling of conflict at these institutions.

4.6.1.8 External intervention

External intervention should always be an option for those in dispute, when matters appear too difficult to handle (Lewicki et al., 1992:230; Fisher, 2001:1). This was the view held by many participants, as revealed by the data.

There was a firm view amongst participants that principals or school management teams should call on the intervention of neutral external agents or third parties when they realised that they were unable to resolve conflict issues by themselves. Confirming this, one participant stated:
“where you have problems with your school which you feel that the SMT, or the, or the principal, where they, where they feel they can’t resolve this issue, I would say, then call in somebody from outside who’s going to be, who’s not going to be biased. That person, that person must be open and that person must be ... he must see himself here as somebody who is going to resolve whatever matter there is on the table. Uhm, because ... I would say laat iemand van buitekant inkom [Translated: “let somebody come in from outside”] and, and hy moet neutral staan. Hy kan luister na al die sake wat gemaak word en, uhm, luister na al die kante en luister na almal en dan kan hy aanbevelings maak [Translated: “he must remain neutral, remain neutral. He can listen to all the issues and to all sides and listen to everyone and thereafter make recommendations”] which the staff must accept and, and they have got to decide on a way forward” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant I).

Further substantiating this point, one participant remarked in a personal interview:

“... if it’s a serious quarrel, people from outside to assist the SMT. Like people that have expertise to help the conflict, to handle conflict. Sometimes it’s personal, maybe it’s too personal and you don’t want the SMT so ... it would be better to have a somebody, some person to act as an arbitrator or something” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant R).

The issue of bringing in external agents was again raised by a participant in the open-ended questionnaire, who wrote “If the principal is not equipped to handle conflict then he should get external assistance to assist him to dealing with the conflict” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 5).

Another participant felt strongly that external parties should not have any ties to the staff at school, stating “Definitely a third party who doesn’t know any of the people involved. That will just look at the issue at hand” (Focus group A, School 2, Participant 1). Concurring, another participant in the questionnaire said “I think they should rather be handled by an outsider. Someone who is not from the school, maybe someone from the Department or any other person with conflict management skills, even a pastor” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 3). All this suggests that schools should be able to call on intervention from outside the school and that such persons should be neutral and appropriately skilled to be able to resolve the conflict.
The above sentiments appear to concur with those of Scott (2010:225-226), who lists possible reasons for calling in external intervention to handle conflict, such as when management doubts its capacity to handle a conflict, is unable to ensure objectivity or trust, or wants to show a firm stance in dealing with conflict. In addition, Aquinas (2006:292) and Robbins and Judge (2009:537) also contend that mediators or third parties could be called in when disputing parties are unable to resolve their differences. These views seem to express the need for external parties to be involved when the aforementioned circumstances present themselves.

4.6.2 Outcomes strived for

Erickson and Mc Knight (2001:148) postulate that conflict could lead to a number of positive achievements when handled in an appropriate manner. In this study, this became evident when some participants mentioned examples of such positive outcomes in striving to resolve conflict amongst educators at school. Many of the participants indicated that the outcomes strived for resolving educator conflict would be to gain a win-win situation, respect and understanding for one another, to achieve compromise and agreement, and to ensure that all parties were satisfied with the decisions taken. These views will be examined in the sub-categories below.

4.6.2.1 Win-win situation

According to Fisher (2000:5), a win-win situation is when concerted efforts are made to ensure that all the role-players involved in conflict are able to optimally achieve their objectives. Some participants were in agreement that a win-win situation should be achieved in resolving conflict amongst disputing parties. In highlighting this drive for a win-win situation, one participant remarked:

“So you mustn't have, for example, a win-and-lose type of (situation), because you could pick it easily up when the other person, other colleague came in that, that person was very down ... So you must always (strive for a) win-win (situation), not a win-lose when you're dealing with conflict” (Focus group C, School 1, Participant 2).

Another participant supported this view, declaring “You want a win-win situation, and you want the relationship to be intact” (Focus group D, School 3, Participant 2), suggesting that such a situation would ensure the preservation of healthy relations between individuals. In addition, one participant felt that parties could feel undermined in the event of them not having adequately dealt with their concerns. This participant mentioned that “Preferably they
(the parties in dispute) should always work towards a win-win approach, where both parties do not feel totally disempowered at the end" (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 4). It is evident from the data that striving to achieve a win-win situation is the most preferred outcome in resolving conflict.

These views appear to be related to those of Hitt et al. (2006:447), who argue that a win-win situation enables all those involved in conflict to achieve their goals. In addition, Moore (2003:107) points out that this win-win approach to resolving conflict could allay the fears and anxieties of all parties concerned. Further, Fisher (2000:5) contends that achieving a win-win situation will enhance relationships between individuals over a long period. It seems that striving for a win-win outcome could greatly promote effective conflict resolution in the long term.

4.6.2.2 Respect and understanding

Respect and understanding seem to be closely linked to the manner in which people determine how conflict needs to be accommodated in their daily experiences (Björnehed, 2005:10). Bearing this in mind, it seems that ensuring respect and understanding amongst educators engaged in conflict was an important outcome for some participants.

Focusing on the value of respect amongst individuals, one participant said, “… one should respect another once dealing with, with conflict …” (Focus group C, School 1, Participant 2). Another participant emphasised the fact that persons had to respect each other’ opinions during a conflict situation, declaring “But to get people to respect each other, that we will differ” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant G). In addition, another participant suggested that a better understanding would develop after an issue had been resolved and that people should then leave those issues in the past. This participant highlighted this sentiment, indicating “We can now move on to the next problem or we can now go further, we can greet each other along the way, we can have a better respect for each other” (Focus group A, School 2, Participant 3). The view that conflict could lead to an improved understanding between individuals was supported by another participant in the questionnaire, who wrote that the outcome when dealing with conflict was “Total peace, with a common understanding” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 12). Another participant concluded by stating that “Educators should first of all strive for respect towards each other as a vital principle within the context” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 4). All this suggests that participants clearly identified respect and understanding as important factors for parties to strive towards when confronting differences at their institutions.
These views appear to be supported by those of Squelch and Lemmer (1994:150), who believe that conflict may promote feelings of appreciation and consideration between individuals and groups engaged in settling conflicts. This is an outcome that fosters good relationships between staff.

4.6.2.3 Compromise and agreement

Compromising is when those engaged in conflict are willing to put aside their differences to reach some measure of consensus (Fox, 2006:132). In further clarifying this point, Rahim (2011:29) states that compromising entails “give and take” from both parties involved in conflict. A number of participants in this study believe that achieving compromise and agreement was a vital outcome when dealing with issues of educator conflict.

Expressing the value of compromise in resolving conflict, one participant in a focus group interview stated:

“Where two people will just see, like we have this disagreement, we have this conflict ... somebody in the middle came and came up with a solution that the two of us can now feel that it has been settled in a way. We came to a compromise here, give a little, I'll take a little here, and now it's settled. That's the only way you can now actually, we can get past it [the conflict]” (Focus group A, School 2, Participant 3).

Another participant held the view that individuals could be mature enough to alter their stance on issues:

“... after some time there’s a change in, in there’s a change in people’s attitude, and, and people, people I think is, is ... they’re big enough sometimes to admit that, uh, I can’t always have things my way. Sometimes I have to ... you need some or compromise. A compromise has to be reached where people meet each other halfway ...” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant I).

This sentiment, namely compromising to achieve agreement, was supported by another participant, who stated “Maybe sometimes they’ll (management) just want to please both parties at the same time and come to an agreement” (Focus group D, School 3, Participant 1), implying that this should not be done just for the sake of reaching agreement. Further emphasising these outcomes, a participant wrote in the questionnaire that “Both parties should be in an agreement to work on their shortcomings. Respecting one another to work
towards a common goal” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 1). Another participant mentioned, “Try to get both parties to agree to a solution“ (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 6). All this implies that the participants highly valued reaching amicable agreements through compromising when dealing with personnel differences.

The above sentiments appear to be in line with the views of Aquinas (2006:289) and Huczynski and Buchanan (2007:778), authors who are of the opinion that compromising assists individuals or parties in reaching an agreement by dropping some of their issues in an attempt to maintain sound relationships in their workplace. This is an outcome closely linked to the win-win approach mentioned previously, wherein a more satisfactory resolution to conflict may be achieved.

4.6.2.4 Need for parties to be satisfied

An outcome that many participants felt would assist in handling educator conflict was the need for all parties to be satisfied, an outcome that ties in closely to those stated above. For the effective resolution of conflict, participants declared that all concerns and issues should be adequately addressed and that parties should feel satisfied by the outcomes reached.

The above came strongly to the fore when one participant indicated, “To me, the outcome should be, it should be positive in the sense that both parties or whoever are involved (in the conflict) are happy with the outcomes or satisfied. There shouldn’t be still you know, err, loose things hanging” (Focus group C, School 1, Participant 1). Another participant was in agreement hereof when he said “… like we have this disagreement, we have this conflict. It was solved in a way that, that you are satisfied with it, I am satisfied with it, we can, can get over this” (Focus group A, School 2, Participant 3). Further highlighting the need for all parties to be satisfied, a participant in a personal interview mentioned that “...we want to keep everything as harmonious as possible…” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant 1). This was reiterated in the questionnaire by another participant, who declared “All parties involved should feel happy after the conflict is resolved” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 12). Further emphasising this outcome, a participant stated “Both parties must be satisfied” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 11). Another participant concluded in the questionnaire that it was important to strive for “Peace once again and harmony. The situation effectively dealt with and the air cleared” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 9). Participants that all parties embroiled in conflict needed to feel satisfied by the outcomes reached.

These sentiments seem to be aligned to the win-win outcome which, in the opinion of Schermershorn et al. (2000:383), assists those in conflict in reaching a common view that is
acceptable to all. This could in turn promote longer-lasting sound relationships between parties (Fisher, 2000:5).

4.6.3 Third party intervention: Characteristics of third party

According to Lewicki et al. (1992:230) and Fisher (2001:1) institutions have the option to draw in third parties to assist them in resolving conflict situations that may have become too complex to handle by themselves. Calling on third parties to intervene at schools when the circumstances provided for this, was a strategy approved by most of the participants interviewed. Regarding the intervention of third parties in handling educator conflict at schools, the educators expressed their views regarding the characteristics of third parties and the processes or procedures that they had to follow. These two sub-categories will be presented below.

It seems that the majority of the participants emphasised that third party agents should be well-equipped and knowledgeable about resolving conflict. They should also be neutral and unbiased, striving to be good listeners and maintaining professional, sound qualities. These views are elaborated upon below.

4.6.3.1 Knowledgeable and well-equipped

The fact that third parties or external agents had to be knowledgeable and well-equipped to deal with educator conflict was a common understanding amongst most participants. This view is in accordance with that of West et al. (2005:16), who believe that various skills are essential for third parties to effectively resolve conflict. Concurring, Fisher (1983:302) highlights the fact that such agents must be equipped with abilities that are grounded by their (the third party agents’) perceptions, mannerisms and upbringing, which promotes a sense of unbiasedness or neutrality “and whose professional knowledge and expertise enable the facilitation of productive confrontation” (Fisher, 1983:302). The participants’ views are presented below as evidence of their understanding of the characteristics of third parties.

Expressing the need for third parties or external agents to be appropriately empowered, one participant said, “They should have the skill to do conflict management” (Focus group D, School 3, Participant 1). This was supported by another participant who remarked in a personal interview, “He must be knowledgeable of the particular subject also. Well-researched” (School 3, Participant G), suggesting that third parties require a solid background in the field of conflict management. Further, in handling conflict, one participant indicated that it was essential for third parties to have the necessary mediation abilities, since any inadequacies therein could negatively impact on the process of resolving the conflict.
This participant emphasised this issue by stating “Obviously the person should, should have the necessary skills or background of mediation … because it’s no use taking anybody to come and mediate and they don’t know … what to do in this situation” (Focus group C, School 1, Participant 1). These opinions were further clarified by another participant in the questionnaire who, in relation to the attributes of third parties, declared that “They must have experience in conflict resolution” (School 2, Participant 11).

Taking the above perceptions into consideration, it seems apparent that participants placed huge emphasis on the need for third parties to be knowledgeable and well-equipped to effectively handle differences between parties in resolving issues. Therefore, when third parties are being used, it is imperative that management has to consider these traits.

4.6.3.2 Being unbiased, objective, impartial and fair

It seems that fairness is tied to issues of neutrality and impartiality. According to Mayer (2000:39), many people deem fairness as an “implied standard” of behaviour. However, Carpenter and Kennedy (2001:204) contend that there is no guarantee for fairness. Further, Erickson and Mc Knight (2001:68) believe that people (including mediators) are all influenced by their own personal views of life, which could make it difficult for third parties to maintain neutral and impartial stances when resolving conflict between various parties.

Despite views stated above, a large proportion of participants expressed the desire that third parties or external agents should be unbiased, impartial and fair when attempting to resolve conflict. This can be seen from the data presented below.

Expressing the desire for fairness and impartiality to be displayed by third parties, one participant put it like this, “Somebody who is fair; fair is very important …” (Focus group A, School 2, Participant 3). This issue was supported by another participant, who wrote on the questionnaire that third parties “… should be fair-minded and unbiased” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 2). Another participant highlighted this point when remarking during a personal interview “Call in somebody from outside who’s going to be, who’s not going to be biased” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant I), in reference to third parties. This point was confirmed by another participant, who in reference to third parties declared that “They should not be biased” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 1). Further, emphasis was placed on the element of impartiality, when one participant in a personal interview indicated that “… it must be somebody impartial. It must be somebody that you don’t know …” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant R).
Linked to these above-mentioned sentiments was the issue of objectivity, which was raised by another participant, who stated on the questionnaire that “Members of the third party should be objective” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 12). This point was again mentioned by another participant, who wrote that third parties “Must not come with any preconceived ideas” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 5). All this suggests that important emphasis was placed on third parties being fair, impartial and objective in their dealings with resolving conflict.

The above sentiments appear to be linked to the views of Doherty and Guyler (2008:12), who state that “The mediator is impartial and does not take sides.” The issue of neutrality and impartiality is still a topic of debate amongst scholars, which is why Bradshaw (2008:90) argues that impartiality cannot be guaranteed, but that it remains an ideal to strive for. Hence, fairness, objectivity and impartiality may be reasonable conclusions for the participants to declare in regard to the characteristics of third parties, but it seems that no absolute way exists of guaranteeing it.

4.6.3.3 Good listening skills

Listening is an essential aspect of communication in dealing with conflict (Fisher & Ury, 1992:33-35). The value of good listening skills in resolving conflict was a characteristic that highlighted by many participants in this study, which is evident from the extracts below.

Reflecting on third party characteristics, it was mentioned by a participant that “I’m just thinking this person should be a, be a good listener” (Focus group D, School 3, Participant 3). Another participant, in supporting this view, remarked that third parties should “… have appropriate conflict management skills, listening skills …” (Personal interview, School 1, Participant R). Further emphasising the importance of this characteristic, a participant stated “… but he just has that knack of coming up with good solutions, he’s a good listener and he is just able and just has that ways about him …” (Focus group A, School 2, Participant 3). Another participant also agreed on the questionnaire that third parties “… should be good listeners before giving solutions to conflict” (School 2, Participant 4). This characteristic was also highlighted by another participant, who declared that a third party should be a “Good listener” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 2). This thus suggests that participants were of the opinion that third parties require good listening skills to tackle conflict.

These views seem to be in accordance with those of Bradshaw (2008:88), who places much emphasis on active listening skills in assisting those negotiating for the resolution of conflict. This skill is further emphasised by Purkey et al. (2010:113), who state that the “ability and
willingness to listen” is essential when dealing with conflict, a view that is also supported by Wood et al. (2004:605). It appears that educators place a great reliance on listening skills in effectively resolving conflict.

4.6.3.4 Professional sound qualities

High on the list of characteristics of third parties or external agents were professional and/or sound qualities, pointed out by many participants. This seems to be in line with the views of Carpenter and Kennedy (2001:187), who postulate that third parties should have the ability to manage processes and confidential details. These are some aspects that appear to be linked to professional and sound qualities, as perceived by the participants in the following extracts.

In alluding to the professional and sound qualities that needed to be held by third parties, a participant reported that “It must be someone I can trust and a person whose in good standing … I don’t want someone who has a record of … misdemeanours and wrongdoings to be … the arbitrator …” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant G). Supporting this view of the need that third parties must have credibility, another participant mentioned, “So the point is the person must be a person with integrity, must be genuine and really take a clear stance or a view …” (Focus group C, School 1, Participant 1). In addition, one participant stated on the questionnaire that “They should be people with character, people who have empathy towards each other. They should be examples, therefore, lead by example” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 4). In further support of these contentions, another participant declared that “They (third parties) must be professional” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 16). The data thus suggests that the educators highly valued characteristics of professionalism and soundness that could attest to the credibility and good name of third party agents called upon to intervene in conflict matters.

Considering the above sentiments, it seems appropriate that educators have placed considerable emphasis on the need for third parties to have professional and sound qualities. With these attributes present, it appears that third parties would be in a better position to effectively tackle differences between parties.

4.6.4 Procedures for third parties to follow

From the data obtained, participants mostly highlighted procedures or processes, such as listening to all parties, acting with confidentiality, acting in a neutral or impartial manner and assisting parties in finding solutions. These procedures or processes are presented in the sections below.
4.6.4.1 Listen to all parties

An important principle supported by many participants was that third parties or external agents should listen earnestly or intently to all parties involved in attempting to resolve conflict. The importance of listening to all the role-players involved in conflict was reported by one participant during a personal interview, when he stated that “Hy kan luister na al die sake wat gemaak word en uhm luister na al die kante en luister na almal en dan kan hy aanbevelings maak” [Translated: “He can listen to all the issues and to all sides and listen to everyone and thereafter make recommendations”] (Personal interview, School 1, Participant I). This view was supported by another participant, who mentioned “By listening to both sides, by listening to both sides. I think that’s very important, listening to both sides ...” (Focus group D, School 3, Participant 3). Further driving home this point, a participant declared on the questionnaire that “They (the third parties) must listen attentively to both parties” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 16), while another participant concluded that “The third party should listen and take note of what is being said” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 5), highlighting the essential role of listening when third parties are engaged in resolving conflict at schools.

These views seem to be related to those of Cloke and Goldsmith (2000:65-66), who emphasise the value of listening to all individuals involved in conflict before developing a response. The sentiments are also in line with the suggestions of Purkey et al. (2010:111), who state that those handling conflict issues should first listen intently before responding. In consideration hereof, it seems reasonable to conclude that listening could greatly enhance the chances of effectively resolving conflict amongst educators.

4.6.4.2 Acting with confidentiality

When third parties are called in to resolve conflict, it is essential that they treat all information provided with confidentiality (Carpenter & Kennedy, 2001:187). Similarly, many participants perceived that confidentiality was an essential aspect that had to be maintained by third parties or external agents when dealing with issues of conflict.

This became evident when, in focusing on this issue, one participant indicated that “Confidentiality is of utmost importance” (Focus group A, School 2, Participant 1). Supporting this view, another participant, in reference to third parties, mentioned, “And to be able to handle things in a very confidential way, very discreetly ...” (Focus group D, School 3, Participant 2). Highlighting this issue further, one participant stated on the questionnaire that “The third party should make an appointment with the people involved and confidentiality should be a priority” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 10), while another participant
declared “handle information confidentially” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 7). This all implies that conflict could be more effectively resolved when third parties abide by strict principles of confidentiality.

These views appear to coincide with those of Doherty and Guyler (2008:12), who point out that confidentiality, is one of the main principles of mediation in conflict situations. It is clear that the participants felt strongly that managing information with confidentiality could benefit the mediation process.

4.6.4.3 Acting with impartiality and neutrality

According to Davies (2004:192) and Mc Shane and Von Glinow (2005:407), the neutrality (and impartiality) of mediators is an important component of the effective resolution of conflict. This perspective was also clearly stated by many participants in the extracts below.

Highlighting the issue of impartiality and neutrality in third party mediation, it was pointed out by one participant that “… in the first place, those people are neutral and that is the first thing that you need, somebody, from neutral ground, …” (Focus group B, School 2, Participant 3). Another participant focused on the impartiality of third parties when she mentioned during a personal interview “… as the third party, they can’t, uhm … take sides …” (Personal interview, School 3, Participant I). Supporting this view, one participant, in reference to those mediating, reported “Always make known to the people involved that you are impartial when you are dealing with the issues, must make it known that we are not taking sides” (Focus group D, School 3, Participant 1).

Another participant indicated on the questionnaire that a third party or external agent should always “Be impartial or neutral in his approach” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 1). Placing more emphasis on the above procedures that third parties were required to follow, one participant stated that third parties had to be “Neutral and be able to look at the situation objectively” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 4), while another participant reiterated on the questionnaire that a “mediator should be a neutral person” (Questionnaire, School 1, Participant 1). All this implies that impartiality and neutrality play a big role in how educators perceive conflict could be effectively dealt with by third parties.

These sentiments appear to be in accordance with those of Carpenter and Kennedy (2001:187), who also agree with the issue of impartiality in regard to mediation. In addition, Doherty and Guyler (2008:12), declare that mediators should not align themselves with any of the disputing parties. However, Tillet and French (2006:158) argue that mediators are also
influenced by an environment that affects all other people and that they therefore hold their own inner perspectives and views, which could impact on their handling of conflict. Hence, the issue of neutrality and impartiality remains debatable (Bradshaw, 2008, 90). Despite these views, it seems apparent that there is a strong sentiment that impartiality and neutrality should be included as a measure to strive for when mediating in conflict situations.

4.6.4.4 Assisting in forming solutions

Assisting differing parties in generating possible solutions to their issues is an essential principle of third party mediation (Dana, 2001:94-107; Folger et al., 2009:241-244). This view was also expressed by the participants in this study, which is evident from the following quotations. Emphasising the value of assisting parties in forming their own solutions when attempting to resolve conflict, one participant stated:

“We should try to get both parties to formulate that resolution, to resolve that problem, both parties … and then let them come up with a solution to the problem, you know. So then you, err, there’s no winner as such it was a, they were both actually involved in creating that … solution to the problem” (Focus group D, School 3, Participant 2).

In support of the above, another participant in the questionnaire mentioned that all parties involved should strive for problem-solving that is acceptable to all involved. This became evident when it was mentioned to “Get both parties involved in mutual problem-solving” (Questionnaire, School 3, Participant 10). Focusing on finding solutions, one participant indicated:

“Go to the two people that’s the main one’s you, you and this one. Look you can solve this, how can you solve this, go to this one. How do you think best, what would you like that one to do? Okay, you, what would you like this one to do? So let’s put this to bed and away with it” (Focus group A, School 2, Participant 3).

Furthermore, another participant declared in the questionnaire that third parties or external agents should “Assist to find an amicable solution” (Questionnaire, School 2, Participant 5) for those parties involved in conflict. All this suggests that conflict could be better resolved by third parties who promote solutions that are generated by those who are in dispute with others.
The perceptions expressed by the participants seem to be in line with the views of Cowan (2003:180-184), who indicates that third parties should assist those persons in conflict in arriving at a mutual solution. Cloke and Goldsmith (2000:210-212) support these sentiments, adding that parties in conflict need to be presented with a number of probable solutions before deciding on one that is suitable to all. Bearing the above in mind, it appears that providing opportunities for parties to arrive at viable solutions is an important aspect of conflict resolution.

4.7 SUMMARY

This chapter presented the findings of the data collected, as well as the interpretation thereof, linking the findings to the literature presented in Chapter Two. The participants highlighted various perceptions of educator conflict at their schools. These aspects, experiences and perceptions focused on how educators understood the meaning of conflict, the main causes of educator conflict, the consequences or effects of conflict, how conflict was dealt with, and suggestions of how conflict could be handled in a more appropriate manner, including educators’ perceptions pertaining to the value of third party intervention.

The data suggests that most of the participants were in agreement concerning their understanding of how they perceived conflict. The majority of the participants perceived conflict as mainly negative which seems to be in line with the traditional view of conflict which postulated that conflict negatively influenced organisations (Robbins et al., 2003:290). However, I tend to agree with the view of Plocharczyk (2007:98) that conflict could be beneficial to institutions in various ways, as alluded to by the participants.

With such a vast range of causes of conflict available, the researcher selected the possible causes of conflict by using the framework of Bradshaw (2008:18-19). A variety of possible causes of conflict were presented, which included data-based conflict, relationship conflict, structural conflict, value-based conflict, interest-based conflict and needs-based conflict. I am of the opinion that these causes of conflict as determined by the participants, adequately presents the main themes which were prominent and that it seems to validate Bradshaw’s (2008:18-19) framework.

The consequences or effects of conflict were presented as positive and negative consequences, with most participants emphasising the negative aspects of conflict. These sentiments seem to tie in with the Traditional view of conflict as indicated by Robbins and Judge (2009:519) as presented in section 2.3.1. The most prominent positive effects of conflict as mentioned by the participants were that conflict could lead to improved
relationships, better understanding, change and improved attitudes and that it promotes the personal growth of individuals. The negative effects of conflict highlighted by participants were that conflict could generate a defiant attitude or intolerance to one another, poor relationships, formation of groups, cliques and division, poor morale, motivation and work ethic, poor health and stress, absenteeism and negative outcomes for teaching and the learners. However, I support the view of Pondy (1969:319) that conflict need not be seen in a negative light only, but that the beneficial effects thereof as pointed out by Bacal (2004:21) and Collins (2005:18), should be kept in mind.

Regarding how educators perceived the handling of conflict, most participants felt that conflict was handled inadequately, although some participants were of the opinion that there were instances where opportunities were provided for conflict to be addressed. These sentiments seem to be reasonable, and I tend to support such perceptions of how conflict is handled.

With regard to educators’ suggestions how conflict could be handled in a more appropriate manner, most participants agreed with the suggestions offered, as well as with the outcomes perceived. The most prominent suggestions were around providing opportunities for conflicting parties to state their cases, listening, handling conflict with confidentiality and professionalism, openness and transparency, granting fair hearings and treatment, utilising policies, implementing conflict management training and making provision for external intervention. In relation to the outcomes strived for, I am in agreement with the participants who believed that parties in conflict should attempt to achieve a win-win situation, respect and understanding for one another, compromise and agreement and ensure that all parties are satisfied with decisions made.

Regarding third party intervention, participants mostly presented similar views in terms of the preferred characteristics of the third parties and procedures that they had to follow. The most prominent characteristics identified by the participants were that third parties had to be well-equipped and knowledgeable, neutral, unbiased, good listeners and that they (the third parties) had to maintain professional, sound qualities. In relation to the procedures that had to be followed by these third parties, participants mainly pointed out that they (the third parties) had to listen to all the conflicting parties, had to act with confidentiality, neutrality and impartiality, and that they (the third parties) had to assist the conflicting parties to find solutions.

These views expressed by the participants from the data, appear to be reasonable and could be of immense value to these institutions if implemented appropriately. The next chapter will
provide a summary of the research findings, guidelines or recommendations for dealing with conflict in an appropriate manner, as well as a reflection on the aims and research questions of this study. This chapter will also provide a more in-depth conclusion of the study.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study focused on educators’ perceptions of conflict in three primary schools in the Northern Area of Port Elizabeth. The primary objective of this research was to explore conflict as perceived through the eyes of the educators [principal, deputy principals, HODs, SMTs and Post Level One teachers] within these three schools in order to determine their perceived understanding of conflict, the perceived causes and consequences of conflict, perceptions regarding the handling of conflict and its perceived outcomes, and suggestions how conflict could be handled more appositely. From this main objective, the question that arose, was: How do educators at three Northern Areas Schools in Port Elizabeth perceive and deal with conflict, understand its causes and consequences, and how do they feel conflict should be dealt with most appositely? From this main question, the following secondary research questions emerged, namely:

- What are the educators’ impressions of conflict?
- What are the perceived causes or sources of conflict among educators at their schools?
- What are the perceived consequences or results of conflict among educators at their schools?
- Who is currently responsible for dealing with conflict among educators at their schools, and how is it being handled?
- What suggestions and outcomes do educators propose in order to deal with conflict in an appropriate manner at their schools?

The researcher then chose to develop this research as a case study, using an interpretive paradigm within a qualitative approach. The research design was based on the interpretive paradigm, since the researcher primarily focused on the participants’ understanding of the world through their own interpretations and perceptions (Henn et al., 2006:14). Also, a qualitative approach was deemed to be the most appropriate manner to conduct this study since, “qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2009:4). Further,
because of the researcher’s innate interest in the phenomenon of educator conflict, its causes and the consequences of conflict for educators at schools in Northern Area schools in Port Elizabeth, this study was best suited as a case study in order for the researcher to achieve deeper insight in the phenomenon under research. Data were gathered by means of individual semi-structured interviews, focus-group interviews and an open-ended questionnaire.

In this chapter, the following aspects will be discussed, namely: rationale and design, summary of the main findings and recommendations of the findings as guidelines or suggestions, reflection on and recommendations for researchers wanting to conduct a similar study, reflections on the aims of the study and on the research questions, and suggestions for further research.

5.2 RATIONALE AND DESIGN

The rationale behind this study was the researcher’s experience as an educator and his involvement in the organised labour movement. Through this experience, the researcher has been exposed to and involved in many instances of educator conflict at various schools in Port Elizabeth. The researcher has also, as a union official, been called on to assist in resolving conflict issues among educators and school management. These experiences have instilled the researcher with a deep concern for educators and schools with regard to conflict between educators.

The researcher’s focus was gaining insight into how educators perceived and interpreted their experiences of conflict, through their own descriptions (Henn et al., 2006:14), which suggested that an interpretive paradigm should be applied in this study. This, in turn, could enable the researcher to explore the educators’ understanding and impression of the conflict phenomenon through a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2009:4), in terms of which the researcher could ascertain how educators defined conflict, how they perceived the possible causes of conflict, their views on how conflict was presently handled, what the possible perceived consequences of conflict were, and what they suggested could be more appropriate or effective ways of dealing with conflict.

This immense concern and interest in the conflict phenomenon motivated the researcher to design this research as an intrinsic, exploratory case study (Stake, 2005:445; Yin, 2009:47) in order to gain a deeper understanding of educator conflict, specifically at three schools located within an environment with common socio-economic problems in order to assist educators and schools in developing more apposite strategies in handling educator conflict.
5.3 MAIN FINDINGS: REPRESENTED BY USING THE ADAPTED FRAMEWORK

The findings pertaining to the educator perceptions of conflict, its causes, consequences, dealing with conflict and suggestions of more appropriate ways of handling conflict are presented in a summarised format in the following sub-sections. Figure 5.1 presents a schematic overview of the findings (See Appendix M for a larger image). This figure was presented in Chapter Two as a framework that portrays conflict as a process by using the ideas of Pondy (1967:298-306); Thomas (1976:900); Rahim (1992:89-92); Moore (2003:64); Kushner (2005:8) and Bradshaw (2008:33).

In terms of how the findings relate to Figure 5.1, the following aspects are presented: the causes of conflict categorised as data-based, relationship-based, structural-based, value-based, interest-based and needs-based conflict (Moore, 2003:64; Bradshaw, 2008:19), are located in the top left corner of the figure. These are the causes that are either latent (Pondy, 1967:30-301) or antecedent (Appelbaum, 1999:64; Kushner, 2005:7; Rahim, 2011:89-92) which has the potential for conflict to occur (Appelbaum, 1999:64; Kushner, 2005:7). This leads to the perceived or felt conflict stage (Pondy, 1967:306; Appelbaum, 1999:64; Kushner, 2005:7), in which an awareness of the conflict develops. Hereafter, the aforementioned authors present the manifestation of conflict in regard to peoples’ emotional expressions, behaviour or withholding of behaviour as a result of experiencing conflict. This is located in the top half of the figure. In addition, how conflict is handled during and after manifestation, as well the possible outcomes strived for, could influence whether conflict could have negative or positive consequences; aspects which are presented in the top right corner of the figure. The lower left half of the figure relates to how theories of conflict are interrelated with the causes and consequences of conflict, while the right lower half (in maroon) considers the suggestions of the research participants, together with the literature in drafting recommendations for all role-players in education to deal with conflict in more appropriate ways.

The summary of the findings below the first reddish-maroon horizontal line, suggests that educator perceptions of conflict and the causes or sources of conflict can be grouped under the potential for conflict and awareness and emotions of conflict (felt conflict). Dealing with conflict, the consequences and the suggestions or guidelines can be grouped below the second reddish-maroon horizontal line, suggesting that it forms part of the behaviour, manifestation and possible outcomes of conflict as process.
The claim of this study is that the findings of this study seem to validate that the frameworks of Moore (2003:64) and Bradshaw (2008:18-20) are an appropriate manner to categorise the causes or sources of conflict. The reason for employing this type of categorisation is the fact that there is a multitude of ways to classify conflict (Van Tonder et al., 2008:376), which makes classification very complex (Moore, 2003:61). The frameworks of Moore (2003:64) and Bradshaw (2008:18-20) seemed to be suitable to group the causes of conflict for this study, as will be pointed out shortly in this section. In addition, these findings also highlighted the fact that the two-dimensional model for dealing with conflict and the outcomes associated with the finding, seems to be in line with this model or framework, and will therefore also be indicated within this section. Finally, it seems that the findings of this study are corroborating with the literature pertaining to conflict; it was shown in each section of Chapter Four how the literature supported the findings.

5.3.1 Educators’ impressions of conflict

Conflict was generally perceived in a negative light by educators, which is also underscored by literature. In describing their understanding of conflict, educators listed conflict as disagreements, misunderstandings, verbal and non-verbal fighting, and the expression of diverse views or opinions (See Figure 5.1. Appendix M provides a larger image of Figure 5.1).

5.3.2 Perceived causes or sources of conflict

The educators’ perception regarding the causes of conflict were categorised according to those of Moore (2003:64) and Bradshaw (2008:19) as data-based, relationship-based, structural-based, value-based, interest-based and needs-based. Many research participants agreed that data-based conflict causes were ascribed to communication causes, lack of transparency and consultation, and gossip and untruths. These perceptions are substantiated by the views of Bradshaw (2008:28), who asserts that the incidence of conflict is influenced by inefficiencies in communication in the workplace. In this study, these communication issues related to lack of clear communication and not communicating to all educators about issues about which they should be informed. In addition, educators felt that there was lack of transparency and consultation when decisions had to be made. Another aspect was that they perceived that gossiping and the spreading of untruths about other educators were causing conflict.
Relationship-based causes of conflict were linked to favouritism and a lack of respect and tolerance of different opinions. The perceived favouritism seemed to emanate as a result of principals and SMTs not recognizing the different viewpoints of staff members and it appeared that only certain (the same) educators’ viewpoints were taken into consideration when decisions had to be made. In addition, promotion posts and not treating all educators equally when it came to policy were aspects that were examples of perceived favouritism.

Structural-based causes of conflict were attributed to management issues, leadership issues, workload allocation and time tabling, punctuality or time-related issues and roles and responsibilities pertaining to lack of consultation and uncertainty. Participants were particularly concerned with and frustrated by how duties and responsibilities were assigned, a high administrative workload and the failure of their colleagues to adhere to timeframes for completing work.

Value-based causes of conflict were caused by different beliefs and viewpoints, as the educators were not all from the same background or context, hence they carried different views of what they perceived as appropriate. In addition, it seemed that this also resulted in different viewpoints related to guidance from senior educators to younger ones. Senior educators highlighted the issue that the younger teachers did not value the guidance of more experienced teachers. Conversely, it also appeared that the older, more experienced teachers were reluctant to accept the opinions and ideas of the younger teachers.

Interest-based causes of conflict were mainly ascribed to appointments and limited possibilities in terms of promotion posts and resources. In this category, the limited promotion opportunities available had heightened tensions at schools, exacerbated by the alleged improper and unfair procedures followed in filling such vacancies.

Needs-based causes of conflict related to self-esteem needs, where participants pointed out that not valuing or giving ample recognition to the efforts of people could lead to conflict. Also placed in this category was the desire for power, from not only those in higher positions, but also from others, where the need for individuals to exert power impacted on tensions at schools.

5.3.3 Perceived consequences or results of conflict

The consequences of conflict were perceived as positive and negative. Positive consequences of conflict were associated with improved relationships, better understanding, and change and improved attitudes among educators. Conflict was also perceived as helping
to build personal growth among educators. Negative perceived consequences of conflict were associated with aspects related to a defiant attitude and intolerance of educators, poor cooperation and teamwork, poor relationships, forming of groups or cliques, poor morale and work ethic, effects on teaching and the learners, poor health and stress and absenteeism of staff.

5.3.4 Perceptions of how conflict is usually dealt with
The educators’ perceptions of how conflict was usually dealt with were placed into two categories. Educators perceived that conflict was mostly avoided and inadequately handled by the principal or school management teams. It appeared that when conflict was handled, it was done unprofessionally and inappropriately by the school leadership.

5.3.5 Suggestions and outcomes proposed in dealing with conflict
Various suggestions of how educator conflict could be handled in more appropriate ways were provided by the educators. These suggestions were grouped into four categories, namely practical suggestions to deal with educator conflict, possible outcomes to strive towards when dealing with conflict, third party intervention in terms of third party characteristics, and procedures that third parties were required to follow. Suggesting how educator conflict could be handled more appropriately at schools, a number of practical suggestions were listed by the educators: Opportunities had to be provided for all individuals or parties to state their case; management and those responsible for handling conflict issues had to ensure that all parties were truly listened to (with all their senses); the maintenance of confidentiality and professionalism was essential; openness and transparency had to prevail; relevant policies and procedures had to be in place; conflict management training for all role-players was vital; and external intervention was an option that needed to be utilised when circumstances dictated it.

Educators suggested a number of possible outcomes that had to be strived for when dealing with educator conflict. These outcomes were indicated as striving for a win-win situation for all parties involved; developing respect and understanding among the individuals and/or groups in dispute; achieving compromise and agreement; and establishing the need for all parties to be satisfied by agreements reached. This seems to validate the Social Exchange and Equity theory, associated with issues of fairness and justice within organisations (Collins, 2005:17) and with people’s reactions in response to the actions of others in instances of conflict (Abigail & Cahn, 2011:223).
In terms of suggestions for third party intervention, the characteristics of third parties and the procedures that third parties had to follow were highlighted by educators. The attributes or characteristics that third parties had to display or maintain were listed by educators in the following manner: third parties had to be knowledgeable and well-equipped to deal with educator conflict; they had to be unbiased, objective, impartial and fair; good listening skills were essential attributes; and third parties had to maintain and uphold professional, sound qualities.

Educators listed various aspects that third parties had to abide by. These were that third parties had to listen to all parties involved in conflict; they had to act with confidentiality, impartiality and neutrality; and they had to assist parties in forming solutions.

5.4 THEORETICAL SIGNIFICANCE: PROPOSED ADAPTED AND EXTENDED FRAMEWORK TO LOOK AT CONFLICT

The proposed framework for looking at conflict of Pondy (1967:298-306) and the revised model of conflict (Appelbaum et al., 1999:65; Kushner, 2005:8) were discussed in Chapter Two. It was then also stated that although these frameworks seemed to be dated, it has to be taken into consideration that “the most significant research strides on conflict resolution were made between 1960 and 1990” (Carter, 2005:4). At the same time, the frameworks and suggestions of Thomas (1976:900), Rahim (1992:89-92; 2011:89-92), Appelbaum et al. (1999:65), Moore (2003:64), Kushner (2005:8) and Bradshaw (2008:33) were included to create a more integrated manner to look at conflict.

This adapted or altered framework or heuristic (See Figures 5.1 and 5.2. Appendices L and M provide a larger image of Figure 2.6) tries to expand and to integrate the conflict framework of Pondy (1967:298-306), the revised models of conflict of Rahim (1992:89-92; 2011:89-92), Appelbaum et al. (1999:65), Kushner (2005:8), and the framework of Thomas (1976:900) two-dimensional framework into one figure. It is acknowledged that the recommendations to follow could be sub-assumed in the existing ones, but it was deemed necessary to try to provide a more comprehensive picture of the existing framework. Therefore, it is suggested that the framework of Moore (2003:64) and Bradshaw (2008:33) should be inserted into the framework as possible ways of looking at the sources and causes of conflict by means of categorisation: interest-based, data-based, value-based, relationship-based, structural-based and needs-based categories of conflict. Hence, these aspects become the subsidiary aspects below the triggers and could be perceived, latent or existing sources and causes. However, it seems that there are also other additional aspects that have to be indicated in a more articulate or precise manner; referring to the consequences of conflict. It appears that the consequences of conflict have not been indicated as part of the
existing conflict frameworks. Although the revised Pondy framework of Appelbaum et al. (1999:65) and Kushner (2005:8) indicates outcomes, these outcomes only refer to increased, stable and decreased organisational performance. However, no mention is made of the consequences or outcomes, accept at the end. The altered proposed framework in Figure 5.1 (with the findings) and Figure 5.2 (without the findings) suggests that consequences and outcomes have to become part of the whole framework, not just added at the end. It is proposed that consequences have to be thought about and that all involved should be aware of the possible consequences of conflict even before the conflict becomes observable.

Furthermore, it is important to be aware that there could not only be consequences or outcomes during the manifestation of conflict, but also consequences after the conflict have been resolved. Hence, outcomes or consequences do not appear at the end only. These outcomes or consequences could be functional or dysfunctional, or even a combination thereof. The outcomes could influence behaviours, attitudes, commitment, processes, structure and relationships; hence, the interest-based, data-based, value-based, relationship-based, structural-based and needs-based aspects. Equally important is that as the Pondy (1967:298-306) framework and the revised frameworks of Pondy by Appelbaum et al. (1999:65) and Kushner (2005:8) do not indicate the ‘feed-in’ of the conflict process into the cycle, the proposed adapted framework in Figures 5.1 and 5.2 indicates (by means of broken lines and arrows) from where and to where the process could ‘feed-in’ while the process continues.

Figures 5.1 and 5.2 proposes a more cyclical nature, similar to Rahim (2011:89-92), who also tries to indicate that there is ‘feed-in’. Finally, the existing frameworks indicate conflict-resolution approaches, but not the possible solutions that can be strived for, namely win-win, lose-lose, win-lose and lose-win. In addition, the frameworks also do not indicate that dealing with conflict could be internally or externally dealt with. The framework also indicates the different theories pertaining to conflict on a horizontal plane and categorises them. The arrows suggest that these theories can interplay throughout the process. It is therefore proposed that the proposed framework of Figure 1 seems to be more comprehensive in trying to visually display the dynamics of conflict.

The recommendations of this research are discussed in the section that follows.

5.5 **PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF FINDINGS**

This study revealed various perceptions on issues pertaining to educator conflict as perceived by the educators of three participating primary schools. The recommendations hereunder are intended for these participating primary schools. The recommendations for dealing with the perceived conflict issues are categorised as recommendations related to professional development opportunities and policies and procedures. These recommendations are discussed in the sub-sections that follow:

5.5.1 **Professional development opportunities**

There needs to be acknowledgement from educators (principals, deputy principals, HODs, SMTs, Post Level One teachers), SGBs and departmental education officials that conflict is part of life. From the data, it became evident that various sources or causes of conflict were
perceived by the participants. These aspects were indicated in a summarised format in Section 5.3.2 and refer to aspects that are grouped as data-based, relationship-based, value-based, interest-based and needs-based sources or causes of conflict, each with its relevant sub-associated facets. It is recommended that educators at the participating schools be made aware of the perceived sources or causes of conflict, as pointed out by their colleagues, as well as the possible positive and negative outcomes of conflict. This could be done through professional development programmes or staff professional development sessions. This could promote better understanding of the aspects that causes concern and conflict among educators.

The participants identified lack of punctuality as a concern. In addition, participants perceived favouritism as a concern, especially with regard to the filling of educator vacancies (including promotion posts), workload allocation and administration related aspects. Professional development as a means of enabling educators (principals, deputy principals, HODs, SMTs and Post Level One educators) as well as SGBs, was indicated by the participants as an important aspect that could enable educators to deal with conflict in a more apposite manner. In order to assist educators and SGB’s, it is recommended that the principals and SMTs enquire from the District Office of their employer, the Department of Basic Education (DoBE), as well as from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), about the availability of conflict related training courses, workshops or modules pertaining to the professional behaviour of educators, conflict management and conflict resolution.

As perceived by the participants, problems arose between older (senior, more experienced) educators and younger (less experienced) educators, because of their mutual reluctance to value one another’s ideas. In attempting to overcome these potential causes of conflict, it is recommended that younger, less experienced educators strive towards developing an open mindset towards receiving advice and mentorship from older, more experienced colleagues; the reverse should also apply: older educators should be open to ideas and suggestions from the younger educators. This could be achieved through professional development programmes that have mentoring as its focus.

It is noted that SGB members play an important role during short-listing and appointment processes to fill educator vacancies (including promotion posts). The participants suggested that SGB members should be assisted to proficiently fulfill their role in this regard. Therefore, it is suggested that professional development sessions be provided for SGB members, focusing on their roles and responsibilities and how they could assist to ensure that vacancies, especially promotion posts, are filled through correct employment procedures to prevent or limit disputes from applicants. It is therefore imperative that principals and SMTs
enquire from the DoBE and (or) from NGOs whether such professional development opportunities exist and how and when they will be presented to the SGB members.

Striving towards achieving a win-win situation in settling disagreements was an essential outcome highlighted by participants. Related to this outcome were aspects of compromise, understanding and respect, which participants perceived to be very important in resolving educator conflict. At the same time, it was also noted that it is important for those in dispute to maintain respect and understanding for others when dealing with conflict issues and to strive to resolve conflict in a manner that would ensure that all parties are satisfied with the outcomes. It is therefore recommended that all role-players involved in dealing with conflict resolve to achieving a win-win situation in which their objectives could be optimally realised. Individuals and groups have to adopt a compromising attitude when dealing with others in conflict situations and need to “give and take” in order to achieve agreement. It is further recommended that principals and SMTs enquire from the DoBE, NGOs and tertiary institutions how they can assist with professional educator development regarding the above-mentioned aspects.

Participants believed that that it was essential for those who dealt with conflict to be knowledgeable and equipped in all aspects of conflict management. According to them (the participants), these attributes had to also apply to third parties who may be drawn into attempts to resolve conflict at their institutions. Therefore, in dealing appropriately with educator conflict, it is recommended that educators (principals, deputy principals, HODs, SMTs and teachers) as well as third parties, participate in professional development activities that could enable them to assist individuals and groups in dealing with conflict. It is further recommended that principals and SMTs enquire about professional development programmes and relevant short courses from the DoBE as well as from NGOs. These professional programmes should focus on skills related to professionalism, confidentiality, openness, transparency, objectivity, fairness, good listening skills and enhancing trust and credibility attributes.

5.5.2 Policies and Procedures

Many participants held the view that that policies and procedures exerted a substantial influence with regard to the perceived educator conflict at their schools. The perception amongst the participants was that clear guidelines and procedures in dealing with conflict and other administrative issues were not as transparent and comprehensible as required, and that where policies and procedures were in place, these policies and procedures were not appropriately adhered to or implemented by educators and school management. It is
recommended that the principals and SMTs of the participating schools not only ascertain whether there are policies and procedures for dealing with conflict at their respective schools, but also whether educators are aware of their existence. Policies and procedures should be available to all educators and refer to, for example, a code of conduct (including protocols to be observed regarding to issues of punctuality when reporting for duty and for other services and duties related to educational activities, behaviour towards colleagues, etc.), administrative responsibilities, workload allocation, filling of vacancies and promotion posts, allocation of resources, as well as policies and procedures related to the handling of conflict among educators.

In Section 5.3.5, a summary of the suggestions from the participants regarding the handling of educator conflict, was provided. Regarding the above, the following is recommended: There should be policies that determine equitable distribution of workload in terms of learning areas (subjects) that educators are responsible for, as well as providing for a fair distribution of teaching periods on the timetable, and a fair load of extramural duties to all personnel. Principals and SMTs should take steps to ensure that the institutions' limited resources are accessible to all and that these resources are equitably distributed and utilised by personnel. This could be done, for example, by ensuring that all educators participate in the drafting of the school's budget, especially with regard to the resources that are required and the distribution and utilisation thereof, as well as emphasising the sharing of mutual goals.

In addition, it is recommended that clear policies or guidelines should be developed to ensure that favouritism is prevented when principals and SMTs interact with educators, as well as when vacancies have to be filled. It is also recommended that school leaders provide opportunities for all aggrieved individuals or parties to state or discuss their cases by creating an environment conducive for such interaction. This could require professional development sessions, which should address the processes to be followed as well as who the process facilitator should be.

Another source or cause of conflict among educators was related to administrative duties, such as the compilation of assessment reports, examination question papers and other tasks which are not timeously completed. It is recommended not only educators ascertain whether there are policies in place to deal with these issues, but that the root cause of these concerns first be determined. This is required, since such areas of concern are not necessarily a result of a policy-related issue, but that it could be linked to shortcomings in terms of educator skills and school resource issues.
In the event of educators (principals, deputy principals, HODs and SMTs) as well as SGBs determining that there is a need for assistance in developing or altering policies and procedures, it is recommended that the DoBE and (or) NGOs are approached to assist them with developmental processes. In addition, it is also recommended that these policies and procedures, as alluded to earlier, be reviewed on a regular basis and that changes be made in a collaborative manner.

5.6 REFLECTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCHERS WANTING TO CONDUCT SIMILAR STUDIES

After reflecting on this study, the following recommendations are formulated for other researchers wanting to conduct a similar study:

- Selected schools and prospective participants need to be thoroughly made aware of the aims and objectives of the study before embarking on the collection of data.
- Sound rapport must be established with the school heads and other key personnel.
- It is advisable to work with a liaison person, who will act as a link between the researcher and the participants.
- Possible questions for data collection must be piloted thoroughly in order to develop questions that will elicit as much in-depth data as possible.
- Interview sessions must be held at times most convenient to the participants and in venues that will ensure minimal disturbances and/or distractions.
- Questionnaire sessions must be conducted with large groups of participants (preferably the whole staff, where possible) in one venue at the same time, to ensure that participants provide the maximum responses and that all questionnaires are returned.

5.7 REFLECTION ON AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF STUDY

The aim of this study was to explore conflict, as perceived through the eyes of educators and school leaders at three Northern Areas primary schools of Port Elizabeth in order to determine their perceived understanding of conflict, the perceived causes and consequences of conflict, perceptions regarding the handling of conflict and its perceived outcomes, and suggestions in dealing more appositely with conflict. From this main objective, the question
that arose was: How do educators at three Northern Area Schools in Port Elizabeth perceive and deal with conflict, understand its causes and consequences, and how do they feel conflict should be dealt with most appositely? In determining whether this aim was achieved through this research question, it is necessary for the researcher to reflect on the secondary research questions that evolved from this study.

**Question:** What are educators’ [principals, deputy principals, HODs, SMTs and Post Level One teachers] impression of conflict? The researcher believes that this question was satisfactorily answered by the data gathered and the literature reviewed. The general view was that conflict was mostly associated with negative connotations, which research participants mainly ascribed to disagreements, misunderstandings, verbal and non-verbal fighting and different views or opinions held by individuals.

**Question:** What are the perceived causes or sources of conflict among educators at schools? The causes or sources of conflict appeared to be adequately covered by the research participants and were also supported by the literature discussed. These causes or sources of conflict were categorised into data-based conflict, relationship conflict, structural conflict, value-based conflict, interest-based conflict and needs-based conflict.

**Question:** What are the perceived consequences or results of conflict at these schools? This question revealed that the research participants perceived the consequences or results of conflict in both positive and negative terms, views which were supported by the literature. Positive consequences or results of conflict mainly pertained to how individuals could improve relationships, change and improve attitudes, and build personal growth. Negative consequences or results of conflict were associated with people displaying defiant attitudes and intolerance to others, poor relationships, formation of groups, cliques and division, poor morale, motivation and work ethic, poor health and stress, absenteeism and negative outcomes for teaching and the learners. Therefore, the researcher believes that this question satisfactorily achieved an essential aim of this study.

**Question:** Who is responsible for dealing with conflict among educators at school currently and how is it being handled? The researcher is of the opinion that the data gathered, sufficiently addressed this above question. The findings indicated that conflict was mainly dealt with by principals, deputy principals, HODs and SMTs and that conflict was generally handled unprofessionally and inappropriately. Again, this question was adequately answered.
**Question:** What suggestions and outcomes do educators propose in order to deal with conflict in an appropriate manner at their schools? The literature reviewed, seemed to substantiate the data gathered from the research participants, who proposed various practical suggestions, outcomes to strive for and third party intervention in handling conflict in a more appropriate or effective manner at schools. The researcher concluded that this question elicited the desired outcomes.

In considering the above aim and questions, the researcher believes that the literature and the findings of the data adequately addressed the questions asked. The researcher therefore concluded that the aim of this study was achieved.

### 5.8 LIMITATIONS

The researcher faced a variety of challenges which placed limitations on this study. It would have been ideal to have undertaken this research over a broader area, and to have included more schools (secondary schools as well), which could have yielded more comprehensive findings. However, bearing in mind that this is a case study (within a qualitative framework), and in view of possible time constraints in the collection of data over a wide range of schools and with a large number of participants, the research was conducted with only three primary schools that was viewed as one case. These three schools were in the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth and were selected due to their close proximity to one another. Since the study focused on these three primary schools only, it is not possible to generalise the findings of this research. However, these findings seem truthful within the context of the participating schools. It does seem plausible that readers would be able to ascertain whether these findings, or at least certain aspects of the findings, are generalisable in their context (Stake, 1995:86).

### 5.9 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

After reflecting on this study, the researcher proposes a few suggestions for further research linked to this topic.

- As this research was conducted in schools in a mainly so-called Coloured area with predominantly Coloured educators, it is suggested that future research linked to the same topic could be undertaken in other geographical locations of Port Elizabeth, such as at predominantly Black schools, where the staff consists of mainly Black educators, and with mainly White educators at predominantly White schools. Future research should also include schools
where the staffing is not only from one population group specifically, but drawn from the various sectors of society. In this way, comparisons could be drawn between schools in these different locations to check whether similar findings would be concluded.

- With regard to the research being focused on primary schools, the researcher suggests that studies also be conducted at high schools to determine whether similar or other findings would result.
- Future research could also be extended to non-teaching and support staff at the schools in order to ascertain whether these personnel are affected by conflict in the same manner as the educator staff.
- Studies could also be undertaken to determine the effect of conflict between educators and parents and educators and learners.
- Future research in conflict management training for schools in general, and for principals, SMTs and educators in particular, could prove valuable.

In this way, a more in-depth study into conflict could be undertaken and a more comprehensive understanding with regard to the management of conflict at schools within a South African context in particular could be determined.

5.10 CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to explore educators' perceptions of conflict in three Northern Area primary schools of Port Elizabeth. Through this study, the researcher gained invaluable insights into conflict among educators at schools, which could be beneficial to all educators (principals, deputy principals, HODs, SMTs and Post Level One teachers) and to education in general. The findings have revealed that conflict is an inevitable part of life and that it cannot be wished away. There is a need for all role-players at schools to acknowledge this fact and to accept that all individuals have to deal with and handle issues of conflict wherever they may find themselves.

Conflict has a wide variety of causes or sources and the consequences or results of conflict could have both positive and negative spin-offs for individuals, groups or organisations. This is all dependent on how conflict is handled or dealt with by the various role-players at school and by the outcomes that are strived for in attempting to resolve issues of concern. Further, the deployment of third parties in resolving conflict matters at schools is a strategy that needs to be explored when conflict appears to become too complex or unmanageable.
This research has provided the researcher with a platform to develop guidelines that could assist principals, deputy principals, HODs, SMTs and teachers in managing conflict more appropriately or effectively at their schools. The crux of the matter is that conflict is here to stay and that people have to find ways of managing it so that the positive effects thereof may greatly outweigh the potentially negative results for individuals, groups and organisations.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

APPLICATION LETTER TO EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

04 March 2011

Dr Ntsiko
District Director
Ethel Valentine
Sutton Road, North End
Fax: (041) 451 0193

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS

Dear Dr Ntsiko

My name is Gerard Garth Cain, and I am a post graduate student at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth. The research I wish to conduct for my Masters’ thesis involves finding ways in which schools in the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth can be assisted in managing conflict. Hence, I will focus on Educators’ perceptions of conflict at three Northern Area Schools in Port Elizabeth in the form of a Case Study.

This project will be conducted under the supervision of Dr Andre Du Plessis, (NMMU, South Africa).

I am hereby seeking your consent to approach three primary schools in the Gelvandale area of Port Elizabeth to provide participants for this project. The one school is [redacted].

The research is significant in four ways as it has the following aims:

- To determine the impressions of conflict amongst educators [principal, SMT and teachers],
To explore the perceived causes or sources of conflict affecting educators,
To ascertain the perceived consequences of conflict,
To determine who is responsible for dealing with conflict at school and how it is being dealt with and
To ascertain what educators suggest can be done to address the handling or dealing with educator conflict in an appropriate manner.

I intend to collect data through interviews and questionnaires from the school management and post level 1 educators. Permission will be sought from all participants prior to the research and only those who consent will participate. I will be responsible for administering the research and will conduct the interviews after school hours at the schools. Interviews will be recorded with the participants’ approval and each individual session should last for approximately 45 minutes. Questionnaires will be issued to participants to complete at a convenient time. All information collected will not be treated in strictest confidence, and the school, nor individual educators, will be identifiable in any reports that are written. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The role of the school is voluntary and the School Principal may decide to withdraw the school’s participation at any time without penalty. The data collected is for research purposes only.

I have applied and am waiting for the approval letter from the NMMU Research Ethics Committee (Human) which will be forwarded to your office as soon as I am issued with it. However, I cannot obtain an NMMU letter before approval from the Department of Education.

Upon completion of the study, I undertake to provide the Department of Education with a bound copy of the full research report. If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at [contact information]. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter. My promoter’s contact details are [contact information]. Could you kindly fax to both numbers, please?

Yours sincerely

Mr Gerard Garth Cain
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University

Dr Andre’ du Plessis
Promoter: NMMU
Dear Principal

**Educators' perceptions of conflict at three Northern Area Schools in Port Elizabeth: A Case Study**

**Project Information Statement**

My name is Gerard Cain, and I am a masters’ student at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU). I am conducting research on conflict under the supervision of Dr Andre Du Plessis at NMMU. I am awaiting approval from the Department of Education to approach schools for my research. A copy of their approval will be provided as soon as I am in receipt thereof. I invite you to consider taking part in this research. This study will meet the requirements of the Research Ethics Committee (Human) of the NMMU.

**2.1 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH**

The research aims:

- To determine the impressions of conflict amongst educators [principal, SMT and teachers],
- To explore the perceived causes or sources of conflict affecting educators,
- To ascertain the perceived consequences of conflict,
- To determine who is responsible for dealing with conflict at school and how it is being dealt with and
- To ascertain what educators suggest can be done to address the handling or dealing with educator conflict in an appropriate manner.
2.2 BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH TO SCHOOLS

1. These findings and guidelines will be disseminated to the Eastern Cape Department of Education, schools and the broader public.

2. The research could assist to improve relations amongst staff at schools and enhance the culture of teaching and learning at educational institutions.

2.3 RESEARCH PLAN AND METHOD

I intend to collect data through interviews and questionnaires from the school management and post level 1 educators. Permission will be sought from all participants prior to the research and only those who consent will participate. I will be responsible for administering the research and will conduct the interviews after school hours at the schools. Interviews will be recorded with the participants’ approval and each individual session should last for approximately 45 minutes. Questionnaires will be issued to participants to complete at a convenient time. All information collected will be treated in strictest confidence and neither the school nor individual educators will be identifiable in any reports that are written. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The role of the school is voluntary and the School Principal may decide to withdraw the school’s participation at any time without penalty. The data collected is for research purposes only.

School Involvement

Once I have received your consent to approach educators to participate in the study, I will

- arrange a time with your school for data collection to take place
- obtain informed consent from participants

I will provide the necessary letters of permission from the university as well as from the Department of Education to conduct the required research at your school as soon as it becomes available.

Invitation to Participate

If you would like your school to participate in this research, please complete and return the attached form.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Gerard Garth Cain
Researcher
NMMU

Dr Andre Du Plessis
Supervisor
NMMU
APPENDIX C

LETTER FROM EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Dear Mr Caul

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN PORT ELIZABETH SCHOOLS

I refer to your letter dated 04 March 2011.

Permission is hereby granted for you to conduct your research on the following conditions:

1. Your research must be conducted on a voluntary basis.
2. All ethical issues relating to research must be honoured.
3. Your research is subject to the internal rules of the school, including its curricular programme and its code of conduct and must not interfere in the day-to-day routine of the school.

Kindly present a copy of this letter to the principal as proof of permission.

I wish you good luck in your research.

Yours faithfully,

DR NYATHI NTSIKO
DISTRICT DIRECTOR: PORT ELIZABETH

07 March 2011
14 March 2011
Mr G Cain / Dr A du Plessis
Education Faculty
NMMU

Dear Mr G Cain / Dr A du Plessis

**Investigating ways in which schools in the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth can be assisted in managing conflict [Educators' perceptions of conflict at three Northern Area Schools in Port Elizabeth: A Case Study]**

Your above-entitled application for ethics approval served at the March meeting of the Faculty Research, Technology and Innovation Committee of Education (ERTIC).

We take pleasure in informing you that the application was approved by the Committee.

The ethics clearance reference number is **H11-Edu-ITE-016**.

We wish you well with the project. Please inform your co-investigators of the outcome, and convey our best wishes.

Yours sincerely

Ms J Elliott-Gentry
Secretary: ERTIC
APPENDIX E

LETTERS TO PRINCIPALS TO ASK FOR ACCESS TO SCHOOL

Educators’ perceptions of conflict at three Northern Area Schools in Port Elizabeth: A Case Study

School Principal Teachers’ Consent Form

I give consent for you to approach the educators to participate in the above research project.

I have read the Project Information Statement explaining the purpose of the research project and understand that:

The role of the school is voluntary

I may decide to withdraw the school’s participation at any time without penalty

Post level 1 educators as well as school management will be invited to participate and that permission will be sought from them.

Only educators who provide consent will participate in the project.

All information obtained will be treated in strictest confidence.

The individual educators will not be identifiable in any written reports about the study.

The school will not be identifiable in any written reports about the study.

Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

A report of the findings will be made available to the school via the Department of Education.
I may seek further information on the project from Gerard Cain on 041 4523050 / 0845285671 /
rcain@mweb.co.za

____________________  _________________
Principal            Signature

____________________
Date

Please return to:  G Cain @ Gelvandale Primary School, St Adams Drive, Gelvandale, P E
APPENDIX F

CONSENT FORMS

NELSON MANDELA METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT FORM

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR RESEARCHERS APPLYING FOR ETHICS APPROVAL:

You are not compelled to use this pro-forma. It is provided as a convenience to those applicants who do not already have an informed consent form. Feel free to design your own form!

Please delete any information not applicable to your project and complete/expand as deemed appropriate. The intention is that you make sure you have covered all the aspects of informed consent, as applicable to your work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCHER’S DETAILS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title of the research project</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reference number</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Principal investigator</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Address</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Postal Code</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contact telephone number</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A. DECLARATION BY OR ON BEHALF OF PARTICIPANT

| I, the participant and the undersigned | (full names) |
| **ID number** |

OR

| I, in my capacity as | (parent or guardian) |
| of the participant | (full names) |
| **ID number** |
A.1 HEREBY CONFIRM AS FOLLOWS:

I, the participant, was invited to participate in the above-mentioned research project that is being undertaken by Gerard Garth Cain From Faculty of Education of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

**THE FOLLOWING ASPECTS HAVE BEEN EXPLAINED TO ME, THE PARTICIPANT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.1</th>
<th><strong>Aim:</strong></th>
<th>The investigator is studying ways of managing staff conflict at schools. The information will be used for research in assisting schools.</th>
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<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td><strong>Procedures:</strong></td>
<td>I understand that I shall participate in an interview/ have to complete a questionnaire / maintain a journal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td></td>
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<td>2.4</td>
<td><strong>Possible benefits:</strong></td>
<td>As a result of my participation in this study, the findings will be disseminated to the Eastern Cape Department of Education and schools which could greatly improve staff relations at schools as well enhancing the culture of teaching and learning.</td>
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<td>2.5</td>
<td><strong>Confidentiality:</strong></td>
<td>My identity will not be revealed in any discussion, description or scientific publications by the investigator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td><strong>Access to findings:</strong></td>
<td>Any new information or benefit that develops during the course of the study will be shared at the completion of the project to all the participants in the form of a group presentation at the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td><strong>Voluntary participation/refusal/discontinuation:</strong></td>
<td>My participation is voluntary: YES NO My decision whether or not to participate will in no way affect my present or future care / employment / lifestyle: TRUE FALSE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. **THE INFORMATION ABOVE WAS EXPLAINED TO ME/THE PARTICIPANT BY:**

   (name of relevant person)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>in</th>
<th>Afrikaans</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Xhosa</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

   and I am in command of this language, or it was satisfactorily translated to me by

   (name of translator)

   I was given the opportunity to ask questions and all these questions were answered satisfactorily.

4. No pressure was exerted on me to consent to participation and I understand that I may withdraw at any stage without penalisation.

5. Participation in this study will not result in any additional cost to myself.

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**A.2 I HEREBY VOLUNTARILY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ABOVE-MENTIONED PROJECT:**

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<th>Signed/confirmed at</th>
<th>on</th>
<th>20</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Signature of witness:</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Full name of witness:</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Signature or right thumb print of participant</th>
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</table>
### B. STATEMENT BY OR ON BEHALF OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

1. I, Gerard Garth Cain declare that:
   - I have explained the information given in this document to (name of patient/participant)
   - He / she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions;
   - This conversation was conducted in Afrikaans, English, Xhosa, Other. And no translator was used OR this conversation was translated into (language) by (name of translator).
   - I have detached Section D and handed it to the participant YES NO.

Signed/confirmed at on 20

Signature of interviewer: 
Full name of witness:

### C. DECLARATION BY TRANSLATOR (WHEN APPLICABLE)

I, (full names)

ID number

Qualifications and/or Current employment

confirm that I:

1. Translated the contents of this document from English into (language).

2. Also translated questions posed by (name of participant) as well as the answers given by the investigator/representative;

3. Conveyed a factually correct version of what was related to me.

Signed/confirmed at on 20

I hereby declare that all information acquired by me for the purposes of this study will be kept confidential.

Signature of translator: 
Full name of witness and Signature of witness:
D. IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO PARTICIPANT

Dear participant

Thank you for your participation in this study. Should, at any time during the study:

- an emergency arise as a result of the research, or
- you require any further information with regard to the study, or
- the following occur

Personal and / or professional circumstances that may complicate continued participation in the study

(Indicate any circumstances which should be reported to the investigator)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kindly contact</th>
<th>Gerard Cain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>at telephone number</td>
<td>[masked]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kindly contact Gerard Cain at telephone number [masked]
APPENDIX G

SEMI-STRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

- Tell me sir, what do you understand by the term conflict among educators at school?
- Tell me what in your opinion causes conflict among educators at school?
  - Are there any other causes you can think of apart from those two?
  - Anything else that comes to mind on the causes?
- Okay, tell me then, in terms of the conflict that you have experienced or observed at school thus far, would you say that it happens more often at certain times of the year? Would it maybe happen more often at the beginning of the year, the middle of the year, the end of the year or the terms?
- How is conflict usually dealt with at school and by whom?
  - So that is the procedure you normally follow at the school in terms of dealing with staff conflict, educator conflict?
- in trying to resolve conflict you, you have an outcome in mind?
- What would you suggest should be an appropriate manner when handling or dealing with educator conflict if you look at your, your situation at school?
- In terms of these, the suggestions that you have in dealing with conflict in a more appropriate manner and so on, how would you go about trying to get these suggestions adopted by your staff?
- Tell me how else could the school be assisted in dealing with or handling conflict if it cannot be adequately resolved by the principal or SMT or any of the other role-players involved usually?
- How would you suggest should an outside person actually go about trying, trying to resolve issues at your school amongst educators? How should that outside person or third party deal with it?
- What procedures should then be correctly followed in such instances?
- In terms of the characteristics of these outside persons who can assist your school, what characteristics should they have, in your opinion?
- Tell me what are the consequences or effects that conflict amongst the staff have on school or on the educators at school?
- So you, would you say that conflict that arises at your school has in fact been bad, has it been negative maybe or positive? Please tell me.
APPENDIX H

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE

The information provided by you in this questionnaire will be treated confidentially and no names of individuals/ institutions will be disclosed. The information is for research purposes only.

Please answer the following question with regard to conflict within and amongst educator staff at school.

1. Explain what you understand by the term “conflict”.

2. What do you think are the possible causes of conflict among educators at school?

Date:
3. Please elaborate on how you perceive possible positive and/or negative consequences in regard to how conflict affects educators and the school.

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4. Who is responsible for handling or dealing with issues of educator conflict at your school and how is it usually done?

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5.1 How do you think issues of educator conflict should be handled or dealt with at your school?

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5.2 What are the outcomes that need to be strived for when attempting to resolve conflict among educators?

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6. In the event of outside/third parties being called in to assist a school in handling or dealing with educator conflict:

6.1. What procedures should these parties follow?

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6.2. What characteristics or attributes should these third party individuals have?

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END: THANK YOU!
APPENDIX I

FOCUS-GROUP INTERVIEWS

1. What do you understand by the term conflict among educators at school?

2. What causes conflict among educators at school?
   a. What are the reasons?
   b. Do you think that conflict escalates at certain times of the year?
   c. When do you think conflict is more likely to occur?
   d. Why?

3. How is conflict usually dealt with at school, and by whom?
   a. What processes are/ were followed?
   b. How was the situation handled?
   c. What does the principal/s.m.t do _ how?
   d. Why do you think it is done this way?
   e. Is the process fair and effective?
   f. What is the outcome usually after the conflict has been dealt with?

4. What would you suggest should be an appropriate manner in handling or dealing with educator conflict?
   a. Explain –Elaborate
   b. How would this assist in resolving the issues?
   c. Will this be more effective? Why
   d. What do you think the outcome should be when dealing with conflict?
   e. How do you think your suggestions can be considered by the educators at school?

5. How else could the school be assisted in dealing with or handling conflict, if it cannot be adequately resolved by the principal or SMT?
   a. Why could this be more effective?
   b. What characteristics should these other parties have?
   c. What processes should they follow? – Why, explain

6. What are the consequences/effects that conflict has on schools?
   a. How does it influence educators?
   b. What impact does it have on educators /the school?
APPENDIX J

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW DATA EXAMPLE

Interview

INTERVIEWER: Tell me, what do you understand by the term conflict among educators at school?

PARTICIPANT: Oh, when I look at conflict, I see it as a disagreement ... with regard to decisions that have been taken. Implementation of new ideas where all the parties are not in agreement with particular decisions or a plan ... Simple little issues ... like someone died, and everybody wasn’t informed and it just happen through a forgetful moment. That could cause conflict, because people perceive it as everybody not being treated in the same light, others are more important.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, could you please elaborate on the causes of conflict, among educators at school.

PARTICIPANT: In our specific situation, ... I would think uhm not consulting with all role-players and in most cases, it’s not done deliberately. It’s an oversight, hasty decisions have to be made because we have such a heavy workload, such a packed program ... that there are many times when I reflect that the ... all the role-players weren’t consulted and it could even be a case of underestimating input from certain, from certain members err because of stereotyping or past impressions that have been created and yet I have come to realise that those very role-players can make valuable contributions if consulted timeously and also in the correct manner.

INTERVIEWER: The role-players that you are referring to, whom now?

PARTICIPANT: I”m now speaking basically our post level 1 role-players ... not the SMT. The SMT we, I think we to a certain extent are consulting.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me, in reflecting, when do you experience more conflict at school? Is there more conflict at the beginning of the year, at the end of the year, the term? Are there times when there’s more conflict or higher levels of conflict.

PARTICIPANT: Yes definitely at the beginning of the term, especially first term err that your workload allocations, the timetabling. Everybody wants a comfortable ride on the timetable, ... wants an easy workload. And we all out watching who has more than the other, when it comes to admin time, and then also when it comes to the end of the term ... When people have lost their enthusiasm and the energy and the behaviour problems that get you down hey.

INTERVIEWER: So when you refer to behaviour in ...

PARTICIPANT: In terms of the children. All those petty issues that are sent to you, ... as the term wears off, or comes to an end, the behaviour of the children also becomes more err uncontrollable. I don’t know what impact, do they get tired of us, are we losing our excitement in terms of our presentation.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me, how is conflict usually dealt with at school and by whom?

PARTICIPANT: In most cases, ... if I speak of my own personal ... issues that are brought to my attention, I will consult with, with you ... I bring it to Mr Williams’ attention and then invariably we call an SMT meeting, then we take err a united decision and we try to follow policy. I also found if policy is not in place, then decisions are not accepted easily. But once policy is there, everybody understands policy, and we are consistent with our policy, it makes it so much easier to take decisions.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me uhm, in terms of basically dealing with issues of conflict within the SMT, how is that process done? If you take the situation with uhm educators involved.
Uh we try to, to address the issue directly with the parties concerned. Listening to both sides of the story ... and if necessary, if we as an SMT can’t come to a mutual agreement, then we will, uh uh lean on an outside party to come to our assistance. But it hasn’t been necessary yet. We have been able to solve it as uh, on an internal basis.

**INTERVIEWER:** So in terms of your understanding in resolving issues of conflict, has it been fair to all, the processes that were followed?

**PARTICIPANT:** I, I think so, I’m trying to think of a specific case now ... where we had such a situation.

**INTERVIEWER:** Uhm, and maybe adding onto that, what is the outcome that you see is important, in resolving conflict? What is the outcome that you would like to achieve in, in resolving issues of conflict with educators?

**PARTICIPANT:** For me the ultimate aim will always be keeping the unity ... and if I can succeed in, getting the two parties ... To me its if there’s no other way but to talk about the issue and come to an amicable agreement. But it is not always possible ... that’s not the reality. But to get people to respect each other, that we will differ. But in terms of the organisation, to take a decision that will be to the benefit of the child at the end of the day. But not a win, win, win situation.

**INTERVIEWER:** Just elaborate more on that win, win situation that you are referring to now.

**PARTICIPANT:** Uhm that any party, party or partner should leave the discussion feeling “okay that I was right in the situation”. That to me is not the goal that I want to achieve. But that we can as role-players, ... okay, this is your point of view, ... this is how you see it. But in this instance, my way of doing it, will be to the benefit of the organisation. ... And that will depend a lot on the development and personal growth of ... your members ... I will be able to understand, okay, this time it its not my idea that goes through. ... and I believe that impacts a lot on how I deal with people, my personal growth. Where am I in terms of my development.

**INTERVIEWER:** Uhm tell me, what do you think should be an appropriate manner in handling issues of conflict, reflecting on how you are doing it, doing it presently? Is there any way that you think can be improved somewhat?

**PARTICIPANT:** If people can have that confidence ... to directly bring it to SMT, uh notice, any issue that they are unhappy with ... then it will be ... and as soon as possible also, before it has reached so many other members. And the story has been contorted, and misconstrued in the process. So if we can create that trust and that sense of confidence, that I can come directly to ... any SMT member and tell them, “Man look here, the athletics day that was planned for that day, is not going to be a good ... ”. You know, instead of having my little meetings and getting the group all swooped up against the SMT. The SMT are also human beings and they do make mistakes ... and that’s why I try as far as possible, when there is something , for instance, the year planner. I will try and circularise it as wide as possible, to get input. ... Because at the end of the day, you don’t see all the little ... uhm pitfalls .Whereas, 20 people looking at it sees it differently. So perhaps wider, err consultation ... But then again, there you have that time factor. It’s not always possible.

**INTERVIEWER:** Uhm, you mentioned about people having more confidence and trust to directly approach the SMT ... How do you see that at present? Do they have the necessary trust and confidence?

**PARTICIPANT:** If people can have that confidence ... to directly bring it to SMT, uh notice, any issue that they are unhappy with ... then it will be ... and as soon as possible also, before it has reached so many other members. And the story has been contorted, and misconstrued in the process. So if we can create that trust and that sense of confidence, that I can come directly to ... any SMT member and tell them, “Man look here, the athletics day that was planned for that day, is not going to be a good ... ”. You know, instead of having my little meetings and getting the group all swooped up against the SMT. The SMT are also human beings and they do make mistakes ... and that’s why I try as far as possible, when there is something , for instance, the year planner. I will try and circularise it as wide as possible, to get input. ... Because at the end of the day, you don’t see all the little ... uhm pitfalls .Whereas, 20 people looking at it sees it differently. So perhaps wider, err consultation ... But then again, there you have that time factor. It’s not always possible.

**INTERVIEWER:** Uhm, you mentioned about people having more confidence and trust to directly approach the SMT ... How do you see that at present? Do they have the necessary trust and confidence?

**PARTICIPANT:** I think there can be a, an improvement in that ... because there are certain people who will come and speak to the SMT and they speak on behalf of others, which tells me that everybody does not have that trust and confidence. But its then, if I look at it, it’s also maturity. I’m only teaching for X amount of years, so I’m also watching and learning how this organisation operates. I don’t just air my views, I will rather speak to someone else. As I grow into the organisation, I gain the confidence to give my input. That’s been, that’s been my observation.

**INTERVIEWER:** So you referring now to those who are now teaching for a few years only. And in terms of the other staff who are there for much longer periods. Do they have that confidence to come forward?

**PARTICIPANT:** Some of them ... I think, I think, most of the matured ones.
INTERVIEWER: So why do you think the others show a lack of confidence?

PARTICIPANT: I think that would go for any newcomer in a family, in a sports club, in an organisation. You’ve got to read the mechanics and the politics ... and therefore you basically stand aside and you watch what’s happening ... and eventually when you know how it operates, then you know and, and sort of probably when you start feeling part of this organisation, then you are also more willing to give your opinion.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, uhm ...

PARTICIPANT: And also probably important, you don’t know how these SMT members are going to react. Are they just going to shoot you down, or will they listen to you. Because in many instances your, your junior teacher has a fear for SMT. Some SMTs will just grill you, you know, not even listen to what you have to say. But then you have an SMT who will listen and see yes, but there’s worth in what you’re suggesting.

INTERVIEWER: So how will you describe the SMT at your school, in terms of that?

PARTICIPANT: Okay, this is now my opinion. I believe that our SMT is very approachable ... Sometimes I think we need to be a bit more firm and take decisions which we believe ... or what we have decided on in the first instance, carry it through. But we are so focussed on keeping the team together, that we are prepared to, to give in.

INTERVIEWER: Okay then uhm how else could the school be assisted in in handling or dealing with conflict issues should there be a scenario where the SMT or the principal cannot manage the situation ... How else, could the conflict then be, resolved?

PARTICIPANT: I suppose depending on the particular issue, calling a particular specialist in that field and then the unions also, the EDO. I think we have a EDO that we can depend on.

INTERVIEWER: And tell me, if an outside party does have to come in to assist, what are the procedures that they should follow, you think, in resolving the conflict issue?

PARTICIPANT: I haven’t been involved in (Laughs) something like that, But I would think that they should be able to, be able to give both parties a fair hearing. To be transparent, be impartial and also to know what this organisation stands for ... All the information must be shared with them and they not coming to defend a particular party ... It must be in the interests of the organisation at all times.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. And tell me the characteristics that you would perceive of such persons from the outside. What are the characteristics that you think they should have?

PARTICIPANT: A person who is matured. Not necessary in age, but matured in his thinking. And not someone who is easily influenced. He must be knowledgeable of the particular subject also. Well-researched. He must know the cultural context in which the err issue, is being addressed. He must know the environment also. You know, because a particular issue in Gelvandale will be differently dealt with in the western suburbs.

INTERVIEWER: Any other important practices that might stand out for you, other than those ...?

PARTICIPANT: It must be someone I can trust and a person whose in good standing ... I don’t want someone who has a record of ... misdemeanours and wrongdoings to be ... the arbitrator ...

INTERVIEWER: Okay fine, tell me uhm, reflecting on how conflict has influenced the school, what are the consequences or effects that conflict has on the school or on educators?

PARTICIPANT: Because it, it brings about tension, causes stress amongst them. It tends to break the unity ... err they lose their interest and their enthusiasm. You can actually see it in the way they carry themselves ... impact on the whole functioning of the organisation and it also impacts on the children. Cause the children are not getting the best. But what I’ve experienced err through our conflict situations, that at the end of the day, ... I personally grew out of it. That I can testify to. Through every situation that we have experienced, I feel that I’m just, I just have to grow strong.

INTERVIEWER: So you say that is of the good points of conflict, improving your personal growth. Are there any other good points you wish to mention of conflict, other than the negative?
PARTICIPANT: And also uh that through that conflict, I’ve become more aware that consultation is more, ... is very important, and the transparency and the consistency and getting policies in place ... Do things timeously ... and not just looking at issues from my point of view ... Because, because I come from a comfortable situation, I’m just going to say R450 for that camp. Someone else is going to say, “But look at where these children are coming from, can they afford the 450 ...?” And this is a discussion that is coming out of err the tour. Mr Cunningham is saying, “Let’s look at a hostel”. So he’s exploring hostel err hostel possibilities ... instead of just going it my way, it must be the hotel way. And and I think once we get that buy-in, then we get more, people coming on board and the task also becomes lighter. It’s not my tour any more. So I had to learn from that ...

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Tell me is there any, anything else around issues of conflict amongst educators that you would like to mention? Anything else that stands out in your mind ...?

PARTICIPANT: Basically personality difference ... and how do you address that? Cause I believe that everybody has good intentions ... when they say something, when they suggest something. But it is how it is perceived ... and because I’ve been there so long, I know that when that person says something in that particular way, it is not aimed at me personally, but it’s the way it’s being said ...

INTERVIEWER: So in reflecting in the way things are being said and interpreted, uh how do you see the value of communication and listening then?

PARTICIPANT: Again it is, ... referring to the communication and you said the value of listening and communication, it is more getting to know you, and understanding. This is how, when you look, you have that facial expression and I mustn’t rub you. Today I must just avoid you. You know that is how you get to know the various team members, like your own family. Today is not a good day to speak to you and that is why I see the team-building exercises as important. Because through those activities I learnt to get something more about you although some people think its nonsense, just playing around. But it is important to socialise in a different way, away from the work situation. Like I didn’t know Miss Nomdo’s father had cancer, I didn’t even know she had a father until now recently. But of err the opportunity was there for me to get a little bit more insight into her life. I think then we will have less, less misunderstandings.

INTERVIEWER: So you place a strong emphasis on getting to know staff very well?

PARTICIPANT: And to know what’s happening in your life – not necessarily your personal business, but so that I can understand where you coming from. If, if I look at the growth of Mr Domingo ... You don’t need to write the name ... I can, and the way he reacted in certain situations but because we knew what was happening, we could understand and now we can also see the growth and the maturity in him. He phoned just now and asked can he go on the camp with us. And that was new. And then he came back again and said, man no, the athletics is more important to him ... Cause there are members that are still distanced from me and only, I was just thinking that now when they die, now I want to go say how he did this and he did that ... And why didn’t I say thank you, now while they are living and alive? So we need to get closer to each other, of course there are limitations to the closeness (laugh) ... 

INTERVIEWER: Okay fine then uhm, I think we’ve covered all aspects of that. Is there anything else that you still want to add to? ... 

PARTICIPANT: I don’t think ... Well there is ... Ja err, it’s also an issue that I can reflect on. In the school setup you only have that limited possibility for promotion. And people improve their qualifications. They grow themselves and yet they remain on post level 1 for 20 years, 25 years and I believe that’s cause for frustration because you have developed yourself in the meantime. But now you don’t get the opportunity to exercise management, to exercise your leadership on a higher level. You remain a class teacher ... and there’s the financial implication that goes with it, plus the personal frustration and that pride that comes with, I’ve now been promoted and that you find in the err outside world. The opportunities are more ... available cause if you speak to youngsters that you taught ... How they have progressed, within 10 years. And after 20 years, 25 years, here I am. I’m still driving my jalopy. I’m still struggling. So that also brings inner conflict ... and therefore I fight authority and whatever authority suggests. I will counter, but its actually my inner strife that I have ...

INTERVIEWER: So you say the person, person has to have that personal well-being and feeling of ... self-worth.
PARTICIPANT: Self-worth, satisfaction, I can see where I’m going ... The journey that I have travelled ... I know, okay sometimes it’s my own choices that I make ... that err leads to nowhere, but sometimes it seems to nowhere. But in general this, the school doesn’t lend itself to giving more people that opportunity ... to promotion. And I think we need to encourage ... Like I wasn’t encouraged ... at a young age, ... look at being a HOD. I never thought, I never focussed on deputy. But if, if I had been encouraged at a earlier stage, I would have perhaps taken on other positions. So I believe it’s my task to encourage the younger ones now, like Mr ______ always said, says you know. Prepare yourselves for these positions ... The times have changed hey, drastically (laughs).

INTERVIEWER: Is that it?

PARTICIPANT: Yes, if anything else comes, I’ll write it down.

INTERVIEWER: Then thank you very much for all the information and the time and effort given. Thanks.
APPENDIX K

FOCUS GROUP DATA EXAMPLE

Mini focus group: School 2 - 01-17

Interviewer: In terms of conflict amongst educators, what do you understand by the term conflict amongst educators at school?

Participant 1: Conflict in turn itself, is a negative. I see the situation where people don’t come to terms with or agree with one another, either over certain issues or…things that might’ve happened personally and that causes conflict between educators and that causes them, ‘cause conflict causes people not to work well together.

Interviewer: Thank you. Participant 2 would you like to add anything?

Participant 2: Well my, is like, agreeing to disagree conflict basically. Uh, it is a situation where nobody wants to give into, to listening to what the essence of the thing is and whether or not we can find a solution to it. It is a situation where nobody wants to say “but I’m going to give in my idea and maybe be open to, to something else”, maybe try another suggestion. It is when you are basically when you are head on to want to, to make your point. That’s how I feel.

Interviewer: Thank you. Participant 3, your opinion in terms of conflict amongst educators at school?

Participant 3: I also see it as, uh, uh, where people, the situations where different, people differ, nobody wants to back down from, from an opinion. You have this opinion, I am right, not backing down and nobody else is going to change your view. And people become, it’s not something that will pass easily. They become a bit aggressive and, and now it becomes like personal, it’s no longer just the issue, it’s a bit worse than just the issue, it goes further and becomes personal, and I want to show this person I will deal with you in this way or my point will be seen at the end. I’m not seeing in your view, you are wrong I am right. And that is where the two clash and they can’t come to an agreement to say hey let’s, let’s find a halfway or compromise, they don’t want to compromise…at all, they want my point or my view to be seen and, that’s it.

Interviewer: Fine, thanks. Is there anything else any other participant would like to add to that?...okay fine with that. Okay uhm, question 2. What causes conflict amongst educators at school? Participant 1.

Participant 1: Definitely unfairness, unfair treatment, of educators…uhm … a lack of transparency…and just the fact that educators are not brought into the whole picture…leads people to doubt one another and that causes conflict.

Interviewer: Okay. Uhm in terms of unfairness, lack of transparency and not being brought into the picture uh, uh, uh from, from which side, or from which side would you...

Participant 1: Management

Interviewer: …from management?

Participant 1: Definitely management. You only hear things after a decision has been made.

Interviewer: Okay fine.

Participant 1: and that causes people to withhold whatever knowledge they have about the topic or how they can help bring about change. And uh that actually stifles growth.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you for that. Uhm participant 2, what, what causes conflict amongst educators at school?

Participant 2: Uhm, violation of rights, basically trying to uhm want to know, the people know that I’m the leader or the head and you will follow. And another thing is with violation of rights I can also add, basically, I don’t know how to call it, humiliation it might be. If you post level 1 you can’t think for yourself, you have no input, you are basically the worker and you must just follow. They don’t see post level 1 people as people that can be productive, in the sense of giving input. Your productivity
should only be, when you look at ants or bees for instance, the queen bee is getting, the queen ant is getting all the attention in everything, she makes decisions but you will always find the workers. Workers must work and SMT, the HOD’s they are the soldiers so they are a little bit higher than the workers post level 1 people and they are basically listening, so conflict can actually be caused by that, you know, one sided opinion and as Mr Potgieter says, the decision has been made and you hear it afterwards. You don’t have the right to differ, with that is said.

Interviewer: Thank you for that. Participant 3 would you like to add?

Participant 3: Uhm add to that also lack of respect. A lack of respect, people do not respect the other one, lack of understanding, uh lack of tolerance, uh people do not tolerate somebody else’s ideas they, how can I put it, they do not expect or see others ideas as valuable, or others opinions as valuable. And as soon as somebody else comes with a different idea than the one you have, especially when it’s somebody who have been teaching less years than you, who are in a lower post level than what you are, and immediately you become uhm, protective of your stance uh, how can I put it, you do not see the other person’s view and you see your views as superior to, to, to whoever else wants to come up with an idea. If he’s not at your level, his idea cannot be that good because he is not at a senior level, you are there so they should follow then your ideas. You are right, so you have that lack of respect, a lack of understanding, lack of tolerance for somebody else’s ideas and that normally causes problems when this person feels he can make a valuable contribution, but from the other side, you feel no, you can’t.

Interviewer: Thank you there. Tell me, you mentioned now this problem with the people who are, view themselves as superior and that they do not respect or value the opinions of the educators. Why do you think it’s like that? What could be the reason for that?

Participant 1: I think if I, ... other parties can come in there, I see it as a lack of insecurity, a lack of self-esteem, to push down your authority on the basis of your position, ‘cause now you find a situation, especially here, you don’t respect the person but you respect the position, and it’s not supposed to be like that, because you actually supposed to respect the person and their position should be last actually. Actually respect the person, uh the educator, the colleague as a person and later think of the position. Here in our case, you rather respect the position, but not the person.

Interviewer: Okay, is there something you would like to add to that perhaps?

Participant 2: Uhm, a lot. You know uhm, another thing that I can see basically it comes down to the mere fact that change is the problem. Uhm you know, it is that thing of you don’t want to accept change, things change. Uhm, when you look at our profession, looking back in the days, what were for those days, in that apartheid era to work you know, there was some situation in that according to our profession. You know, you were allowed to study until so far, and so far, but now with changes coming in and the educators, a person coming from varsity now is coming out with a degree and now I’m sitting with a diploma but I don’t want to accept that, that person might have better knowledge for the circumstances that we are in now. So, because I’m not open to change, I’m rather going to stay with my way whether it is the correct way, uh and I cannot let somebody that is younger than me come and tell me what is the new changes and things. I’m older than you, uhm I’m longer than you in this profession, but yet the way that, I might be longer doesn’t say that I know it all you understand, so to me the mere fact that I’m not open to change is going to be one of the reasons why we cannot move forward. Another thing is also that I must be the one because, I am the superior one, I must be the one coming up with a good idea, I’m the one who’s supposed to receive the recognition but yet I don’t want to recognise the other people that actually helped me to get there. That is my, one of the things I’m thinking. Another thing is also the fact that, we have our different views but it, from a Christian point of view you know uhm, we, we like to use Christianity as, as a way to suit me and, and you know, I want to tell people about the bible but yet I’m not the one that wants to be open, or to be open to something like that. I mean one of the, the, the things we actually (unclear) must be in contact with a higher being and you must be able to show people you are not afraid to pray at school and now somebody gives a good lesson at moral lesson and stuff and now at the end of the day you come and you crush that message the person is giving. I must be, I must be, if participant 1 is better than me in giving a lesson, a preaching lesson to children or to whoever else, I must accept that. I mustn’t come and crush his things whether I like you, or your idea or not of seeing something and (unclear) it all around. I mean that is also one of the things we can think of when it comes to conflict, your spiritual connection, because that influences the way we think also at the end of the day.
Participant 1: We don’t have a body as such to actually deal with conflict issues. In our school in particular, it’s normally; conflict usually happens that unions and departments must be called in. Third parties were called in at previous instances, uh and they were manipulated in such a way that they decided not to go further with the conflict resolution at the school. In this case it was the PCRD. We, the principal tried to influence them by getting people from his side to speak to them so that the problems that would come out or the conflict that would come out would not seem so harsh if one of these people were to speak to the PCRD so that it’s not so harsh. So there is not a body here actually at the school, it’s normally the department, or the unions that get called in, sometimes even the lawyers, sometimes even legal help must be sought in uh, trying to resolve the conflict, but conflict in itself at this particular institution is never resolved and if I must say so I don’t think it will ever be resolved.

Interviewer: Okay fine. Uhm, tell me what processes are followed normally when, when there is conflict in a school, what processes are followed to handle the situation? You mentioned about the Department ...

Participant 1: Talking about process. I would say process and words like procedure and protocol you can see that as swear words, because where people, to who you report it to, are supposed to be objective, they rather subjective. And that immediately uh...you put more oil onto the fire if you do that. Rather stay objective and view all viewpoints to see how we can resolve the matter, and then still keep yourself intact as a person who is fair and just. But here, let’s say you have a conflict situation, and the matter goes forward, then you actually hanging yourself ... Because the person who is supposed to be objective will also be the executioner as well to see that you go down (laughter). That now it’s difficult for me, it is difficult for many colleagues, educators to go and report matters and to try and resolve conflict because how can you go to people who actually plays two roles. You can’t be judge and executionor.

Interviewer: Thank you, uhm participant 2, would you like to add anything to how conflict is usually dealt with at school and by whom?

Participant 2: The person that is supposed to see that the conflict should be resolved is usually the one involved in all the conflict situations. So uh, I don’t think the one that is supposed to be, uh the guide with the conflict to be dealt with, because he is involved he uh as participant 1 says he’s not objective, because now he’s trying to protect himself. And usually, it seems as if protocol is totally all and out there, because what happens in the conflict situations it seems that the person in charge is involved in this. He becomes blind and, and you know, whatever you say or whatever the person even if they not bringing in the department he is adamant on having his way. So if it’s not your way, if it’s not my way, wow, I’m not listening. And he will say that he is now objective and trying to come to the problem or a solution but at the end of the day with things, is just coming to you all of the time, you know he is just pouring oil onto the fire then it actually causes the conflict to become worse. The matter doesn’t actually, it will never be resolved because why even you know, our school doesn’t have uh, policies or things uh they have it on paper but they don’t have the manpower or and they don’t want suggestion, they don’t want input from somebody else. There’s a certain few who has the privilege to that conflict situation and one of the, the, the greatest enemies that is supposed to be part of resolving conflict is our unions we cannot, uh you don’t actually find the unions are very welcome at our school. They are welcome if they coming to speak to people about; they are not welcome in giving input as to how we can actually have a constructive conflict resolution at our school.
Interviewer: Okay, in terms of dealing with conflict at your school and by whom, I hear you are referring to a specific person and so on. Could you just maybe elaborate more on that, who, who are you actually referring to? Who’s actually dealing with the conflict?

Participant 2: The roleplayer is usually the principal, the manager of the school. And unfortunately so, the department is giving principals that situation of you are in charge I’m keeping you accountable, but you know, in certain, in certain, if it’s certain people, a certain few, then you will always be reminded that I have to do this, because the department is keeping me responsible for this. But if it’s somebody else, maybe a friend of mine or somebody I think I can manipulate in a certain way, then I will slide it under the door. You know so, I mean things like that at the end of the day, now when you are coming there, you don’t, if you are not sure which side of the manager you are standing, you are going to come with this, oh whatever I’m going to say is going to be gunned down so immediately, you’re already aggravated. So now you are seeing two red bulls, seeing red and nobody wants to go down. So the only way the superior one is going to get his way is by giving you the black heart. This is my position this it’s “harties” and I am the one who is going to be accountable for whatever is happening not as if you are also going to be held accountable for whatever your actions might be.

Interviewer: Tell me does the principal involve any other role-players in dealing with conflict usually?

Participant 2: The ones that he think that would be able to be a good eye witness. The one that will be a good one of say standing behind his back and covering him for whatever he is doing wrong. Then he will call you in, but as soon as you are the one that is going to say I’m not going to be biased in going for this thing, I’m going to be fair. If it’s going to be black or white, I’m not going for the grey area. Then you know, then immediately that situation will even change there. So the one that was called in supposedly to be helped, if he changes into the direction of you that is now in the right, then the wrong person is going to turn around on you as well.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you. Participant 3, would you like to add something to how conflict is usually dealt with at school and by whom?

Participant 3: I just thought of something now. One of the main, you say what causes, I just want to come back to that there what causes, and (unclear). What causes a lot of conflict at the school is also that like they say in afrikaans, ‘vis en vleis’ [ fish and meat ]. When it’s you, things will be dealt with in this way, when it’s this person things will be dealt with in that way. And that causes conflict ‘cause normally people find out but you did that same thing but things are now handled this way. This person done that thing but things are now handled this way. And when asked here how is conflict dealt with at this school poorly, the answer is poorly. The principal will most of the things here at this school that will cause, caused conflict and somehow or the other be traced back to him. It is never really between two teachers it goes back to him. Whatever, whatever happens, two teachers can argue now they’ll have a conflict but it will go back to him because he will side with this group and that group will side. And now people think oh you with him do this, no I’m not going to do it, run back to the principal, this person says this and now and clash. Now we going to sort it out in this way, the principal normally say whom, by whom, the principal sort out the, sorts out the problems but he doesn’t sort it out, he tries to, it is never dealt with. How is it dealt with? It’s dealt with poorly and there is never a proper solution. Things will die down, but there has not been a solution found. There has not been an outcome. Things were just tied up and somebody thinks oh let me leave it. But there is never a solution for the conflict and that is why every time it will come up and old things will always come up because that thing has never been solved there

Interviewer: Tell me uh, you mentioned now about no outcome or an outcome. So, so usually if you want to describe that outcome what is the outcome of the attempts to resolve conflict via the principal now?

Participant 3: There’s no solution and there should be a solution or a compromise between the two teachers but there isn’t really, the thing is just…

Participant 2: It dies a slow death.

Participant 3: ...It’s not a death, it goes into a lull, it lies there where something else will happen and this will flame up again it, it will come back to that. So it’s never a situation of we have solved this I, uh sticky problem here. It has not been solved. So if something else, now it’s a lot of things building, building, building on each other and it all comes back to him. Everything goes back there.

Interviewer: So in terms of the outcome there, what is the outcome you would actually like to see happen in resolving conflict? What should that outcome be?
Participant 3: Where two people will just see, like we have this disagreement, we have this conflict. It was solved in a way that, that you are satisfied with it, I am satisfied with it, we can, can get over this. We can now move on to the next problem or we can now go further, we can greet each other along the way, we can have a better respect for each other. I respect him for having brought up your grievance, you respect me for bringing up my agreement somebody in the middle came and came up with a solution that the two of us can now feel that it has been settled in a way. We came to a compromise here, give a little, I'll take a little here and it is now settled. That's the only way you can now actually, we can get past it. And there's no longer that it will stay here and any of us can return to it and say here, there, that because that moment, you are now satisfied with how the thing has been handled, you are satisfied, I am satisfied.

Participant 1: You know what is actually strange especially here at our institution. When you want to resolve conflict you need to be adult about it to take care of the issue. Now let's say you want to resolve conflict and you go to the principal ..., you actually giving him a stick to hit either you or the other person and instead of trying to solve the problem, to him it's a joy 'aah! So that one also got a problem with that one. And he will write that information down and he will keep it all more than 10 years. Now to me that is a bit sadistic because it happened a previous occasion where the unions came in when he had some information about people about 10-15 years back. Now trust is also involved here, how can you go to a person, a manager uh with all due respect, to help you to come to a solution because you don't want to lose uh that person's friendship because you are colleagues at the end of the day and you need to work together because, especially at this school. You are supposed to be one big family but now you find this big divide and instead of bringing people together, he's causing more harm.

Interviewer: Thank you for that. Tell me we, we moving on to the next question. What would you suggest should be an appropriate manner in handling or dealing with educator conflict? Suggestions?

Participant 1: Definitely a third party who doesn't know any of the people involved. That will just look at the issue at hand.

Interviewer: Okay. Participant 2 would you want to add to that?

Participant 2: I think just solving conflict and following laws as to think that we uh, we don't believe in that moral issue of me being honest and fair towards somebody else, is not go with what the law is prescribing for you to do.

Interviewer: Okay, participant 3?

Participant 3: I would also say bring in a third party to handle it. And give each person the opportunity to state his or her case, to put it in that way. And that person can somehow get the two people to agree to a solution. Instead of coming up with who was wrong and who was right. And that shouldn't be an issue of 'you were right, and you were wrong'. The two people should agree that this is the appropriate action that has been taken. And preferably a third party who has nothing to do with the school or whatever else actually, try to bring that in 'cause then people will have more, how can I put it? 'Hulle gaan meer geloof in daai een persoon het [They are going to have more trust in that one person.]'. It is not anybody trying to gun me or trying, is in favour of this one or in favour of that one. This person is totally neutral. Doesn't have anything to do, knows nothing about what is going on here and that person should half be, be trained really. A trained person to, to resolve that conflict. Don't know where we gonna find such a person but we need to get somebody in, have the seniors or people at the school out of resolving conflict because at this moment in time, at this school it is never going to work, never, not yet. In years to come once we have grown with that understanding that, that fighting the issue and not the person and then we will perhaps be able to have people here dealing with conflict. But until then get a third party and they can sort it out.

Participant 2: I'd like to say something uh. To me I also think we must learn to keep personal emotions and personal personalities out of our profession. We must be able to really at this school, it's not supposed to be like that but at this school I think one of the best suggestions would be; keep your personal problems and emotions outside the school's gate, be professional when you come here and I think the problem is here, there is no professionalism that is basically here. I wouldn't say no, you will find it amongst a certain few but when it comes to certain individuals, uhmm, professionalism, it's really not where it's supposed to be. It starts from when you came in by the gate. It's about greeting, it's about where you smoking, it's about the private picture of the school. We always tell the learners that you must be the mirror for your school, but unfortunately the educators are not the mirrors for the school and it's starting with the principal you know uhmm, he's supposed to be the one that's in charge. You will see all the other principals would come and they would say you
know 'I'm proud of what you have achieved'. When you, when, when, when a school comes back from a tour for him you will find the principal waiting for their learners there and the educators, no not with us. The principal is not even there to come and say goodbye to you. I mean because why? It is gain for teacher A, it is gain for teacher B but it doesn’t seem as if it’s supposed to be pride for the school. So professionalism there is the main thing that is lacking in our school, if I can say it that way.

**Interviewer:** Thank you.

**Participant 3:** just adding to that. Another thing, they always say prevention is better than cure. Another thing with, with dealing with educator conflict, is trying to, you should, you should be proactive and see things are going to go wrong here…and put things in place to prevent it from going too far. You, you as the manager should see, you should be able to see this. People are going to, emotions are going to run high here. How am I going to stop people from getting to that level? Squash, before our two people get here, they were here, they were about to go there, stop it there. Squash it there, rather cool off, let’s go before they got there because people normally now you go there and I go and I go and I go until we now clash now. Prevent that, you see people are going to clash on an issue, try and get to a situation where you can then prevent that before it gets out of hand to put it that way. Stop it before it gets out of hand and it will be an effective way of, … You should be vigilant man, you as the manager, I think should be able to identify and not pour oil here, so that you further on stirring up the people’s emotions. And people easily pick up when you choosing sides. They can pick it up, you can try hard to camouflage it and sugar coat things. They know what, what you are about. So if not the principal or whoever else, someone there in that top structure should see things are going out of hand. Stop it immediately before people’s emotions run too high and, and it becomes a bit too late to, to stop it.

**Participant 2:** I think if I may. It also boils down to maturity. Uhm, you don’t find, you know you can’t, uh you know that you are not strong and you know people are sensing that you won’t be able to win this fight and then I’m becoming personal, ‘jy maak my ore seer’ [you are hurting my ears], you are loud, ‘jy kannie reg engels praat nie’ [you can’t speak English properly], you know. Just things like that and it’s not supposed to come from the manager. Uhm, you know, you can’t, you can’t go and try now because I can’t win this fight in a professional way, I’m going to get you like as if you are in a street fight, you know? So you know that is also one of the things always causing that that spark to be there.

**Participant 1:** You know what I agree with participant 2. We had a situation here at school, uh that was about 12-13 years ago. Okay, these problems are still there it was never resolved. And that is so sad. People retire here with conflict issues still not being resolved and that is so sad. Where I know I asked this gentleman from the department personally, in a meeting, I think what we should do or what the department must do, especially for schools or educators that works so closely with one another is put us all under a course of conflict resolution or conflict management. So that people can identify conflict and then know how to steer away from it, ‘cause I think only when people are empowered in knowing how to deal with conflict will they be able to steer away from it or they will know if, I’m not gonna put some more oil to the fire but I’m not gonna lose if I just go down a little bit uh tomorrow I can come back again and then when the mood is okay just tell that educator, listen here, I don’t think that was okay, you hurt my feelings when you said that, said that and that. Because at the end of the day we are people working together and we not working for ourselves, yes we working for a salary but uh we trying to educate the learners and ourselves as well but we’re also here in service of the community and trying to take the school forward. And so that at the end of the day when there’s no conflict, so that your pain can be my pain and your joy can be my joy. At this moment there’s nothing. We sit with this situation where two educators retired. We were still on tour, nothing was held for them. They were here for 43 years. Now does that mean 43 years. My thing is this even if you don’t agree with the people or even if you don’t talk to them, I believe my motto is do the right thing, just do the right thing, even if people don’t have respect for them in other ways but they will have respect for you in that way. Because one day that person is also going to retire. It’s not to say that you want something at the end of the day, but you leaving the profession, you leaving people behind. What legacy are you leaving behind?

**Interviewer:** Thanks for that. Tell me uh, you mentioned earlier about third parties, the role of third parties. Could you maybe just elaborate on the characteristics that these third party should, should have in dealing with conflict.

**Participant 1:** Well they must be trained, they mustn’t be biased and they mustn’t have contact with the principal to tell them the problem because that can influence their thinking at the end of the day as well. And they must be mature in such a way that whatever is divulged will not end up on the street or with the cousins, or with a cousin, or with a cousin or friend or one of the colleagues you
know, that knows them perhaps. So they must be a professional in every way. Even if they meet them in Greenacres, must just greet, mustn’t come and discuss the case with me. “Hi, how are you? Fine”. Okay, then I go.

Interviewer: Anything else, would like to add to the characteristics of a third party?

Participant 2: Somebody that is basically open to, to change. Uhm somebody that will respect everybody’s point of view. Uhm that would be able to, to be creative in, in as participant 3 says somebody that should be able to see something happening before you can go, knowing how to handle it, calming down people and things like that. That is what I think. You know somebody that is noble, somebody that is with the idea of I’m in charge here so you then have to be, because that can then also be a problem. You can’t have a third party coming to speak to somebody whose got that superior way and you also have that dictatorship within them.

Participant 1: Or you don’t want a person that’s easily influenced.

Participant 2: Ja, but someone who can balance the two basically.

Interviewer: Participant 3?

Participant 3: Somebody who is fair. Fair is very important, and like it’s a, Samantha now said somebody who, you will somma see man this person has got that way of, of, of dealing with a problem. They just have that knack, don’t know how you going to put it, just have that knack. Getting respect from people without being, without being, overpowering, you know overpowering people. You here, but you are that easy type of person, people will easily follow this one not for his being uh autocratic or aggressive whatever but he just has that knack of coming up with solutions, he’s a good listener and he is just able and just has that ways about him, I can solve this problem by getting two people together and, and letting them both feel, for lack of another word, valuable, uhm appreciated, special when and they would easily try and follow whatever ideas this person has of getting around the problem. He just has, he’s not that overbearing type, this is the way this. He will subtly move them to a direction where they feel the two of them are actually solving the problem themselves. He is just there in the middle encouraging, encouraging and at the end they’ll, they’ll see that they have solved the problem and he was just the mediator, catalyst to, to solve the problem.

Interviewer: Tell me then you touched on this now, that the third party should go around trying to resolve issues in a certain manner. Would you like to expand a bit more on that how should the third parties go about what processes or procedures should be followed in trying to resolve this conflict?

Participant 2: If I may say. Uhm you know, I think being a professional person in knowing how to deal with conflict, uh that person should know what the procedures are, uhm but you should also be in a way as, seeing that you know, have a sense of humour, maybe because sometimes humour can break a person’s you know that subtleness about somebody. Uhm have that characteristic as well. And the steps that should be followed cannot be any other than what the laws stipulate it’s supposed to be. Uh, you can’t maybe you know; bending the rule in a situation at our school might cause things to actually become a problem. So, strictly by the book, don’t go any other way except by the book. That is the only way I think at our school, maybe at other schools bending the rules might just help but with us, I think there are so many people who went through that story of bending this rules but it’s going to cause for the other person uhm to have flack at the end of the day. So either no black no grey just either black or either, one of the two.

Participant 1: If I can come in here, participant 2 just said confidentiality. I think that is of the utmost importance… You know you find the situation here at our institution where without trying to get to be personal, where the people working in the tuck-shop knows more than the educators. And uh, that is a problem. And it’s not to say that you are up there and they are down there but it’s a thing of, … protocol. Know why you are there and what is expected of you as a person trying to resolve the conflict either as mediator, arbitrator whatever. Confidentiality is of utmost importance.

Interviewer: In terms of elaborating further on from procedures of the third parties in resolving conflict is there anything else you’d like to add participant 3?

Participant 3: To me…I don’t know what the, the procedures are. At this school would say that most of, of the conflict at this school is personal, most. And, and the conflict that lasts the longest is not professional, it’s personal. Things that are professional most of the times at this school, I can tell you they are being resolved far easier than the personal things. So to me a way of, of, of solving those personal things, give those people…the opportunity to state what they want you on your own and not repeating to this. That person tells you as the person that comes in, you go and tell them here the two of you, I’m going to go that one, I’m going to this one, I’m going to this one, I’m not gonna tell you what
that one say, I’m not gonna tell your…Right, now they get together. You heard that one’s story and that one now you come and now they can infront of the other one then say what his or her problem is. That one will say what the problem is and then work from there. Instead of you repeating, this one said to this one, and this and that said to that one. Cut out all of the others that’s not involved. Go to the two people that’s the main one’s you, you and this one. Look you can solve this, how can you solve this, go to this one how do you think best, what would you like that one to do. Okay you, what would you like this one to do so let’s put this to bed and away with it. That will be the best way of getting them to speak without getting angry. Cool them down, sit them down, speak to them right okay you come, let them come up with ideas themselves on how to solve this problem and find that midway. But most like I say, most of problems here, but the most difficult to solve is the personal issues. It’s a personal attack on you and straight away I don’t like you for this and I don’t like for that what happened last time. The mere reason that you are with that person. I don’t really have some, anything against you it’s just because you are friends with that one that I don’t like you. Now it’s something that, you did something wrong. Teacher, okay, you said something wrong there with this wrong and that wrong we solve that very, very easily. But now you come to a, ... I don’t like you, I don’t like that, it lasts very, very long here.

Participant 1: Actually one of the reasons, if I could just come in there…uh we have never ever had a team building exercise. And, and I think by introducing that, uh I think people will be able to identify conflict and know how to steer away from it. But now to, to management, team building has got different meanings. Team building is here eating together, that’s team building. I know how many of us see it and you can’t tell them listen here, that eating part is just a little part of what you trying to achieve you see but you guys do it every year where you have this bosberaad or this team-building. After that you cool off and enjoy one another’s company. But here by us I think…uh.

Participant 2: Eating together is also a problem because uhm it starts off with you coming and you, I’m sorry to say it, uhm teaching at one school for too long might be the biggest problem. There are too many old people who are sitting with old ideas would, when you come in by that gate they decide on a new person coming in there. They actually targeting you, she must decide today, where she’s going to be fitting in and that is where the problem comes in, because why you won’t believe at this school, people are told who to greet, or not to greet.

Interviewer: What do you think are the consequences or effects of conflict on educators and the school?

Participant 1: It stifles growth. Conflict at your workplace affects your mental and physical health. Conflict removes the trust and love that are supposed to exist between colleagues. Conflict at school cancels out camaraderie.

Participant 2: ...how you treat me, I’ll treat you back. You don’t want me to do things and so I just come and do what I’m supposed to do, ‘maar jy gaan nie vir my se nie’ [but you are not going to tell me] but I won’t, I won’t do anything extra because even that is a problem. Uh you can go on one day to do things for the school and the next moment you must ma go do it after school as if it’s now…you are doing it for yourself. So to me you just don’t feel like coming to school at all. You start scampering about the people and you feel that you know you forever speaking you, not intentionally, you come and now you see a colleague that you, you are so tired and frustrated you start speaking to other schools, start speaking to other professionals about how you feel at school, how you feel about the people at your school.

Interviewer: Anything else that you’d like to add maybe to the effects or consequences that conflict has on schools?

Participant 3: Definitely you become non-co-operative or a bit lazy, lethargic to co-operate. You not that eager to do that extra, that eager to contribute ideas. You become half stagnant and only do this little bit here. You, you become hurried to get home, you can be...

Participant 2: Professional instead of education.

Participant 3: You, you rather feel it could be holiday the whole year through…and you become blocked, hard also sometimes. Uhm not as forgiving and, and, and also defensive sometimes protecting yourself and, and sometimes not aggressive but also abrupt. Somebody just says the wrong thing and you there. You must remember that time you did that and, and you snapping, you’re snappy especially to a particular group of people you, you, you tolerate it from somebody else but as soon as somebody else says or does a certain thing you, you on that person and, and it makes you less wanting to be here. When you start off, you enthusiastic, your enthusiasm drops just like that. As soon as something started oh no not again!
Participant 1: you know it might sound as a joke. When we come here the 9th January, greeted one another, wished everyone well for the new year. The very first thing that we asked, .... The majority of educators asked, “When is the school closing for March?”

Interviewer: Is there any other aspect of conflict amongst educators that you wish to elaborate on?

Participant 1: Yes, we went on a tour. We were waiting for one educator to arrive. The rest of the staff wished us well. While we were still standing and waiting for our colleague, the principal summoned us to the office. He asked us why didn’t we come to the office to say our goodbyes to him. I explained that we were planning on doing that but we are waiting for the one educator to arrive. An argument ensued because I told him that we did not leave the premises and that we would have come to the office. Here we were still standing, me and this one educator and he comes around ...uh ‘ja you would’ve left without saying thank you, I did so much for you during the year and look at that the thanks that I’m getting’, ‘I said but we are not off the premises, who said that we leaving? If we were out by that gate then you could’ve come with that accusation but we are still here on the premises’. We waiting for this educator to come in and to say listen we are leaving on Sunday, did we get a goodbye? Did the children get a goodbye from the principal? No.

Participant 2: And the worst of it all is we’ve become inhumane. You only feel sympathy with some people losing. You know, when you are losing family members whether it’s sisters, brothers or might be a aunt or good friend of yours, you’ll find out that some people will at our school it is the truth. A certain group of people will give uhm things, at our school you will find three groups of people wanting to go on their own to the, I mean in the times of bereavement you, you don’t need that group of people. Sometimes, somebody’s mother in-law passed away, nobody sympathised, nobody and now you want to sit like crying, “oh, I lost my mother ....” So I mean at the end of the day it is...uh we are losing our humane side...

Participant 3: It’s about three groups of people, go to a family. They will go to sympathise, horrible!

Interviewer: Anyway uh, thanks I think we’ve come to the end of the interview. I want to thank you all for participating and really giving so much more in depth information. I thank you very much for that.
APPENDIX L

AN ADAPTED ENCOMPASSING FRAMEWORK OF CONFLICT AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION
APPENDIX M

SCHEMATIC SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS BY USING THE ADAPTIVE FRAMEWORK