

**ABSENT LEADERSHIP IN CURRICULUM  
IMPLEMENTATION**

by

**GRAEME BENTLEY EDWARDS**

**MINI-DISSERTATION**

submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

**MAGISTER EDUCATIONIS**



**CURRICULUM STUDIES**

in the

**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**

at the

**UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG**

**Supervisor: Prof B Smit**

**NOVEMBER 2006**

## DEDICATION

This research project is dedicated to all school leaders who consistently strive to add value to their learners by leading with a clear moral purpose.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to the people who assisted me in completing this research. In particular, my thanks are extended to the following:

St Benedict's College for their financial contribution to this research project.

My supervisor, Professor. B. Smit, for not only guiding me, but for motivating me to go further and to aim higher.

The Post-Graduate Writing Centre at the University of Johannesburg (Kingsway Campus) for their guidance and assistance in the writing of this research report.

My wife, Terry Edwards, for her continuous patience, support and encouragement.



My children, Andrew and Daniel, for their patience and for believing in me.

My mother-in-law. Mrs. Muriel Hall, for her generous assistance with the transcribing of interviews and the typing of the chapters.

## **ABSTRACT**

Schools are essentially concerned with people and the development of knowledge and skills. Schools require leadership in order to achieve their goals. Furthermore, schools are tasked with being relevant in their contemporary societal contexts as well as for society in the future. Regarding the type of leadership in schools, Sergiovanni contends that schools need special leadership because they are special places, because they are lifeworld intensive and because “school professionals don’t react warmly to the kind of hierarchically based command leadership or hero leadership that characterizes other kinds of institutions” (2000:165 - 166).

Against the backdrop of this commonly held belief, this research project undertook to investigate a school where the new curriculum had been successfully implemented in a context where there was absent leadership. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, the school type and context, the human interventions and the school culture were considered.

The qualitative approach was selected for this research with a grounded case study as the relevant research design. Epistemologically, this research is located in the constructionist paradigm and an interpretivist theoretical perspective will be employed in the research project. Interpretivist philosophies promote the notion that human action can be distinguished from physical objects by virtue of the fact that they are inherently meaningful. The data were collected by means of some semi structured interviews and a dyad interview. Both convergent and divergent questions were posed to the participants in the data collection strategies.

The process of data analysis was approached from a grounded theory perspective. This approach requires that a theory should emerge from the data rather than the data proving or disproving an existing theory. Six themes were identified through the process of data analysis. These themes were then processed into five findings which collectively developed and compiled a substantive theory.

The findings of this study revealed that schools require leadership. Leadership should be considered in its broadest sense with all educators possessing the potential to lead. In addition, the appropriate use of power and authority were identified as essential ingredients for successful leadership. School culture was also found to be an essential component of successful schools. Not only is school culture essential for the successful daily functioning of schools, but an appropriate school culture is imperative for dealing with change and the successful implementation of new policies, curriculum and school reform initiatives. A collaborative school culture was identified as the type of school culture that is appropriate and that would support and facilitate the management of change.

In light of the findings, implications for policy and practice are presented and suggestions for future research are made. Lastly, the limitations of the study are noted and the conclusions of the study discussed. It is hoped that this study will assist policy makers and school principals to seriously consider their leadership style in terms of sharing power and authority and in the creation of school culture that are empowering and positive, one that considers individual potential as well as group cohesiveness.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **PROBLEM DESCRIPTION AND AIM OF THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the absence of purposeful, enthusiastic and committed leadership, the overriding aims, vision and mission of an educational institution have little chance of being met to any satisfactory degree. When examining the principles of Curriculum Development, Carl (2002:76) lists as one of the principles, this statement: "Effective leadership is essential". If one accepts that the delivery of the curriculum, and the act of teaching and learning, are the core business activities of a school, then one should also examine the broader structures and procedures that would facilitate this process.

Curricula are usually designed by people other than the practitioners, who will ultimately be required to implement the curriculum. Curriculum policies succeed or fail in the classroom. This success or failure may extend beyond the activities and ability of the class teacher. Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley and Beresford (2000:6) comment that a strong relationship exists between successful teaching in the classroom and quality of leadership that exists in a school. They argue that whilst the quality of teaching strongly influences the levels of pupil motivation and achievement, the teachers themselves are motivated by the quality of leadership.

In this chapter, I will introduce and present the background to this study. This will provide the basis for the research question. In addition, the aim of the research and a rationale for the methodology will be given. Having orientated the reader to the particular field of the research, the ethical considerations and concepts will be clarified.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND TO THIS STUDY**

### **1.2.1 Managing change in schools**

Schools are often associated with numerous titles, ranging almost paradoxically from “agents of change” to “islands of stability”. One should, however be consciously aware of the fundamental purpose of their existence, namely the process of teaching and learning. This is manifested through the curriculum. Although simply stated here, the process of teaching and learning in itself is vastly complex and often underpinned by a variety of agendas and imperatives. Ornstein and Hunkins (1998:101) remind one that in the maze of competing theories and principles of the psychological foundations of the curriculum, “we have not arrived at certainty as to how people learn.”

All curricula are rooted within a certain social, philosophical, historical and technological context. Carl (2002:63) states that, “the community and school are inseparably bound”. As such, an understanding of the time, context and generation of the curriculum in question must be considered when attempting to answer any question which might relate to the construction, content or methodology of the curriculum. Besides the macro context of the curriculum, one needs also to consider the micro context of the school and community. This relationship is explained by Carl (Ibid.:63), “Education takes place within a broad or narrower (local) community and the norms and values of the latter often influence the curriculum.”

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, man has been described as having a preoccupation with productivity and the acquisition of goods. This suggests not only creating change, but also keeping up with change within the industrial field (Owen, 1973:3). According to Owen, the same can be said for education. The debate thus far revolves around a central issue, namely that curriculum implementation and development are essentially concerned with the management of change.

Carl (2002:76) argues that the process of curriculum development is about change. Referring to Oliva's principles, Carl states that "change is unavoidable, because life grows and develops through change" (Oliva 1998 as cited in Carl, 2002:77). Furthermore, "curriculum change is the result or consequence of changes which take place in people" (Ibid.:77). In South Africa, it could be argued that the origin of real educational reform took place some thirty years ago, that is in 1976, when the Soweto riots vividly demonstrated dissatisfaction with the education system at that time. The broader macro changes have, however, occurred at an accelerated pace since 1994. Political factors, together with exponential advances in technology, the rapid rate of change, urbanisation and population growth, have resulted in the curriculum experiencing closer scrutiny and re-examination.

Fullan (2001:ix) notes that complexity is associated with change. He contends further that change can also be likened to a "double edged sword" (Ibid.:1). On the one edge, the pace of change is relentless and it creates a frantic sense of activity. On the other edge, however, when there is an acknowledgement that things are unsettled, there is also recognition of the need for change (Ibid.:1). With rapid change as a key factor in our contemporary educational climate, the schools and processes that school leaders are managing are different from those of thirty years ago. The management of the curriculum therefore is concerned with the management of change.

Schools are bound to a certain context and the changes in broader society have had a direct bearing on them. In addition to the above, the connection between education in the form of the curriculum and the culture within the broader context of society must also be recognised. Lawton and Gordon (1996:10) draw attention to the link between culture and curriculum and argue that the "link between education and culture is important because those involved in the education service make decisions about the aspects of culture considered important enough to be included in school programmes" (Ibid.:10).

South Africa is a country that has undergone enormous change since 1994. The management of change is something that has been experienced in all sectors of society. For school leaders, this dynamic dimension is added to their portfolio of duties and responsibilities. Principals of schools are required to adopt a management style that deals with diversity and cultural issues in a manner that enhances and promotes successful curriculum implementation and development. Brown and Land (2005:15) argue that “education is not a neutral concept” and that, “without question, educating everyone in the twenty first century will require curricular change” (Ibid.:1).

Writing in the context of English schools, Day et al. (2000:159) state that since the late 1990’s, school leadership has become increasingly complex. They add that this is as a result of the accelerated pace of change and demands on schools to produce results in a limited space of time. Similarly in South Africa, the election of a democratic government in 1994 and the subsequent reforms in policy, including educational policy, has also created a climate of change and a context where school leadership has become increasingly complex. Squelch (cited in Lemmer, 1999:143) refers to the concept of “enabling leadership”, arguing that schools need strong leaders (Principals) to succeed. Squelch defines these as Principals who are “prepared to share their power and authority and who can initiate and manage change” (Ibid.:143). Furthermore, successful Principals are those “able to plan, organise, motivate and direct people towards achieving the common goals that are aimed at genuine transformation and school improvement” (Ibid.:143). The statements by Squelch suggest the type of school leadership that would be most appropriate in dealing with change and the curriculum in contemporary society.

### **1.2.2 The role of leadership in managing change**

As stated above, the central argument around which this research is based is that curriculum implementation and development are essentially concerned with the management of change. In order for this to be successful, the leadership and management style that principals adopt must therefore be one

that facilitates and provides for the management of change. It follows that the best strategy, therefore, to manage the implementation of the curriculum must be within a style of leadership and management that is best suited to the management of change. Harris, Day, Hopkins, Hargreaves and Chapman (2005:11) note that “the current focus on leadership stems from the need to cope with discontinuous and accelerating change.” This is particularly relevant within the current South African context which could be regarded as a society in which the virtues of transparency, openness, participation and consultation are placed in high regard.

Leading on from the above, it is suggested that school leaders will be required to employ different strategies in order to effectively manage change. Pretorius (1995:13) claims that the days of autocratic leadership are gone, and argues further that future leadership must be of such a nature that it has a strong value system. This value system should contain the elements of respect, justness, integrity and fairness for the individual, as well as sensitivity for cultural diversity (Ibid.:13). Principals who are able to manage change effectively can be characterised as being transformative rather than transactional, invitational rather than autocratic and empowering rather than controlling (Day et al., 2005:29). In keeping with Pretorius’ sentiments, Day et al. contends further that leadership skills and behaviours should be driven by beliefs and trust in self and others (Ibid:29).

Day, Hall, Gammage and Coles (1993:29) also make reference to ‘enabling leadership’ when addressing the concept of curriculum leadership. They comment that all educators within a school community should be involved in curriculum development and not just those who have it as a designated function. In keeping with a greater degree of involvement by all staff members in curriculum development, the prime task of curriculum leaders is viewed as one of stimulating staff initiatives and encouraging creative thinking around curriculum matters. This implies that curriculum leaders enable others to view themselves as having contributed to the process of curriculum implementation and development (Day et al., Ibid:29).

As discussed above, the process of curriculum implementation and development requires a leadership style that is profoundly different from the past. Day et al. (2000:6) comment that the “challenges posed by the changing demands made on schools in the past 20 years have exercised the minds of many writers on educational leadership”. This suggests that for school improvement to be realised, principals are required to adopt a leadership style that not only embraces change, but that effectively manages it. The pace of change, complexity of leadership and demands on schools to achieve results, has resulted in a closer look at what constitutes effective leadership. Taking this line of thinking further, Day et al. (Ibid.:160) note, however, that “whatever else is disputed about this complex area of activity (school leadership), the certainty of leadership in the achievement of school effectiveness and school improvement remains unequivocal.”

### **1.2.3 A culture of change in schools**

Contemporary leadership styles are characterised by a fresh look at the use of power and authority and a closer examination of values. The use of power and authority has evolved from a notion of ‘power over’ to one of ‘power with’. Furthermore, when developing a school, central to the concept of power and authority is whether principals exercise power over their staff or power with the staff (Ibid.:149 & 150). Similarly, cited in Day et al. (2000:161), Blasé and Anderson (1995) describe the act of leadership as a shared or devolved activity that is one in which leaders use power with and through people, as opposed to exercising power over them. It is this approach to leadership, where educators are actively engaged with the principal in the development of curriculum that gives rise to a culture in schools that facilitates and encourages curriculum implementation and development.

It is necessary to sound a word of caution here. Whilst the creation of a climate or a culture in which the use of power manifests itself through people as opposed to over them, will most certainly lead to the facilitation of curriculum implementation, this factor alone cannot be regarded as an absolute. Factors such as inter alia time, resources, the skill, motivation and



levels of energy of educators are all factors that will ultimately influence the effective implementation and development of curriculum.

Day et al. (1993:128) regard this creation of a culture as a critical role of an effective leader. They note that the culture “most conducive to success is characterised by openness, trust, a preparedness to face risk and ambiguity, and a positive attitude to the curriculum.” Central to this culture is a sense of ownership and belonging to a team which, through collaboration, lessens personal anxiety (Ibid.:130). The culture of the school, as noted by Jelninek, Smircich and Hirsch (1983:336), is just another word for the social reality. It is “continually created and recreated by peoples’ ongoing actions” (Ibid.:336), or, as simply stated by Fullan and Hargreaves (Cited by Day et al., 1993:7), “Culture is the way we do things and relate to each other around here.”

The above comments on culture give rise for due consideration to the type of school culture that best facilitates curriculum implementation, curriculum development and school improvement. The development of a collaborative culture is most likely to lead to the achievement of these desired outcomes. Sergiovanni (2004:50) contends that “cultural connections and covenantal relationships are the fundamental pillars of collaborative cultures.” The cultural connections, he continues, are “bargains of the heart and soul.” These bargains are based primarily on “loyalty, purpose, sentiment and commitment that obligate people to one another and to the school” (Ibid.: 50). The cultural connections in collaborative cultures are therefore more covenantal than contractual. In essence, principals of schools must adopt a style that facilitates and enhances the process of curriculum development within the present social context and culture of the school.

In the preceding sections, the role of school leadership was outlined in relation to the implementation and development of the curriculum. It was noted that the style of leadership has been significantly altered in order to embrace the rapid pace of change in a technological world and to ensure that schools remain relevant and adequately meet the needs of the learners and those of society at large. As society has changed, so demands for changes in

the curriculum have been made. Increasingly the shift has been to replace the traditional and cultural subjects with those that have a greater emphasis on vocational, technical and scientific subjects (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998:81-82). These forces exert additional pressure on developers of national curricula, school principals and curriculum practitioners, namely the teachers in the classroom. In addition, the creation of a school culture that facilitates and embraces change was also explained. It was noted that the school leader plays a crucial role in the leading and managing of this process. In order to fully realise sustainable school improvement, it is imperative that school leaders and teachers are able to effectively and efficiently manage change.

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTION**

The major concepts that influence curriculum development and implementation are those that bear testimony to the historical, psychological and social factors as they manifest themselves in a particular time in history. Furthermore, in section 1.2 above the critical role that leadership plays in all aspects of curriculum delivery and school improvement in general were consistently outlined. The concept of the management of change as a central component of the process of curriculum implementation and development, presents the foundation for the theoretical platform for the study.

In this research project, however, I wish to examine the process of change and curriculum implementation from an entirely different perspective to that which has been portrayed in the background to this study. It is my intention to research this process in a situation where there is absent leadership, a field that has not been inquired into before.

The research question is thus as follows:

**Within an educational context where the principal is 'absent', what are the factors or human interventions that lead to the successful implementation of the curriculum?**

## **1.4 PURPOSE AND AIMS OF THIS RESEARCH**

The research question posed above approaches the process of curriculum implementation from an unusual perspective. The purpose of this research is therefore to explore and explain the processes and human interventions that may lead to the successful implementation of the curriculum within a context where there was an absent leader.

Recognises that there are usually general aims and specific aims in a study of this nature, the general aim of this research is to understand leadership in education in relation to the implementation of curriculum and school improvement.

In order to achieve this general aim, the specific aims of this research are to:

- a) obtain rich and accurate data that, once analysed, will contribute to the broader knowledge base.
- b) describe and explain the role of educational leadership and how it impacts on curriculum implementation.
- c) portray the different levels of leadership and demonstrate how these may influence the effectiveness of curriculum implementation.
- d) present the findings that emerge from research conducted in a context where the curriculum was successfully implemented and there was an absence of leadership.

## **1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD**

### **1.5.1 Epistemological assumptions**

Epistemologically, this research finds its place within the interpretivist paradigm, within which the world, and indeed all the objects in it should be regarded as “pregnant with meaning” (Crotty, 1998:43). He notes that in this paradigm all knowledge, and by implication the meaning of all reality as such,

is “contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world” (Ibid.:42). The social context is the sphere in which this meaning is developed and transmitted or constructed.

With the very nature of this study in mind, namely to investigate the factors or human interventions that enabled the curriculum to be successfully implemented in a context where there was absent leadership, the study demands a search for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Henning, van Rensburg and Smit (2004:3) refer to this as a “quest” for understanding. Furthermore, I wish to gain this understanding from the perspective of the people who successfully implemented the curriculum and experienced the phenomenon of achieving this in a context where there was absent leadership. It is the human interventions within a social context and the participants’ perceptions that are required to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2000:xv).

A qualitative approach was used in this research project, it being the most appropriate as it stresses what, Denzin and Lincoln (2003:20) describe as “the socially constructed nature of reality”. In this study, the phenomenon of the absent principal exists within a certain social construct, namely a school. The entire educational process continually, consciously or unconsciously presents certain values to the learners. The values and norms are taught most effectively but are not usually formally reflected in statements or goals. This is the “Hidden Curriculum” (Apple, 2004: 78 & 79). As such, qualitative research is concerned with an understanding of “a complex phenomenon by examining it in its totality in context” (Ibid.: 198).

### **1.5.2 Theoretical perspective**

An interpretivist theoretical perspective will be employed in the research project. Interpretivist philosophies promote the notion that human action can be distinguished from physical objects by virtue of the fact that they are inherently meaningful. Crotty (1998:67) refers to a number of different

definitions of interpretivism but primarily regards it as being concerned with understanding. This implies that to understand the actions of the participants, I will be required to fully grasp the meaning of those actions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:296). In addition, I accept that there are likely to be multiple realities. Henning et al. (2004:21) note that the view of the world is made up of multi-faceted realities and, consequently, these are best studied as a whole, with recognition of the context in which the experiences occur.

### **1.5.3 Research design – grounded case study**

A grounded case study research design will be used in this research project. From a practical perspective, the research design could be described as a Case Study with elements of Grounded Theory. Grounded Theory can be identified in its “systematic discovery of theory from the data of social research” (De Ploy & Gitlin, 1994:142). When defining a case study, Merriam (1998:27) proposes that the most defining characteristic lies in the delimiting of the object of the study, the case. The notion of a “bounded system” or a “unit around which there are boundaries” (Ibid.:27) relates to this research project in the sense that the phenomenon of an ‘absent principal’ operates within the context of a certain educational context. It is within this context, the bounded system that the action of individuals with regard to curriculum implementation and development can be studied.

As noted above, the search for meaning and understanding is achieved by employing qualitative research techniques. These techniques provide an understanding of the totality of the experiences within a particular context. Curriculum implementation and development are complex enterprises and are better understood from a holistic perspective. A holistic approach to the gaining of meaning and understanding are underpinned by qualitative research techniques and the case study research design. The elements of Grounded Theory will be manifested through the analysis of data.

## **1.5.4 Methodology**

### **1.5.4.1 Site selection**

The site that I will select for the data collection is a school that has experienced the phenomenon of an absent principal. There was an 'absence of leadership' for some nine months. It was during this time that the new curriculum (the Revised National Curriculum Statement Grade 8 and 9, 2002) was implemented and developed. In addition, the preparation for the implementation of the Further Education and Training Curriculum was undertaken (National Curriculum Statement Grade 10-12, 2003). All the data were collected from one site. This site is the bounded system and the case study referred to in section 1.5.2 above.

### **1.5.4.2 Sampling**

The research participants were all members of the staff where the phenomenon of the absent principal was manifested. In addition, each of the participants was a member of the staff at the time of the resignation of the previous principal, during the time when there was an absent principal and were members employed at the school. Participants with a range in age, gender, years of teaching experience and positions in the hierarchy of the school's management structures were selected. The participants were all adults and qualified educators who were volunteers and are willing to take part in the research project.

### **1.5.4.3 Data collection**

Two data collection strategies were employed. The first data collection technique was in the form of individual interviews which are a recognised strategy of data collection in qualitative research. The interviews were semi-structured with prepared questions being presented. Both convergent and divergent questions were posed. By asking both divergent and convergent questions, I provided for brief, focussed answers as well as created an

opportunity for the participants to elaborate on their responses. The latter type of response revealed aspects that had not been originally anticipated (Mills, 2003:59).

The second data collection technique was a dyad, a form of interview unique in that there are two participants and their responses are stimulated through the questions posed. My aim here was to encourage the participants to not only respond directly to the questions posed, but also to discuss and debate the aspects of the phenomenon between themselves. It was through their interaction with each other that understanding and meaning of the phenomenon of the absent principal and curriculum implementation was obtained.

The interviews and the dyad continued until the themes and topics became saturated. Each interview and the dyad were recorded on an audiotape and later transcribed. After each interview and the dyad field notes were made to record my reflections, observations and experiences of the data collection process (Morse & Field, 1996:91).

#### **1.5.4.4 Data analysis**

On completion of the respective interviews and dyad, a process of data analysis followed. The purpose of the process of data analysis was to reduce the data collected and identify themes and categories. The data analysis process included the transcription of the interviews and dyad from the cassette recordings, open and axial coding and then the identification of emerging themes. The identification of emerging themes was as a result of placing similar units of meaning into categories and sub-categories. Provision was made for 'memo making' in the data analysis process. This was most useful when identifying links and emerging themes. The data analysis process was facilitated through the use of colour to identify and link codes, memos and emerging themes. (See Appendix E for an example of data analysis using colours.)

## **1.6 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS AND TERMS**

### **1.6.1 Leadership**

Leadership can be broadly described as a relationship between a person (leader) and members of a working group (followers). This relationship is such that there is a specific aim or intention to achieve a certain objective. Leaders make a difference. Initiative, motivation, influence and goal directedness are all ingredients of the leadership recipe. Manthey (2004:13) states that “leadership that matters is leadership that is sustained”, he goes on to say that this “requires a plan for distributing it to others” (Ibid.:13).

### **1.6.2 Management**

Under the guidance of leaders, policies and procedures for the meeting of specific needs and functions are implemented. These ensure that vision of the school is realised through efficient daily functional processes. In short, management is concerned with getting the job done. It implies drawing on available resources, both human and fiscal, communicating effectively and producing the necessary framework for the organisation to fulfil its purpose. Although leadership and management are often regarded as separate concepts, Day et al. (2000:38) argue that the two must coincide. Using a nautical analogy, they comment that “leadership makes sure that the ship gets to the right place; management makes sure that the ship (crew and cargo) is well run” (Ibid.:38).

### **1.6.3 Absent Leadership**

Although not precisely defined in the literature, absent leadership implies that there is no leadership present. This does not mean, however, that there is not a person in a designated leadership position. In some instances, there may well be such a person in place but for various reasons does not exercise or execute any leadership functions. This will be explored in greater detail in chapter 2.



#### **1.6.4 Curriculum implementation and development**

Carl (2002:53) notes that there are different interpretations to the term or concept of 'curriculum development'. For the purpose of this study, curriculum development is regarded as the process by which the new curriculum, namely 'The Revised National Curriculum Statement' is implemented. This is practically manifested through orderliness and systematic planning at the school where the phenomenon of absent leadership and curriculum implementation occurred.

### **1.7 COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS**

#### **1.7.1 Ethical measures**

One of the stated aims of the research project is to obtain rich and accurate data that will contribute to the broader knowledge base. (See 1.4 (a) above). In order to achieve this, the participants should enter the process of data collection voluntarily. In addition, they should be made to feel safe and secure during the process of data collection, they must be assured of anonymity and they should feel free to withdraw at any time (Kvale, 1996:110-114).

The following steps were followed in the collection of data:

1. A letter of permission was obtained from ISASA (The Independent Schools' Association of Southern Africa) to conduct this research. (See Appendix A)
2. A letter of permission was obtained from the school to interview staff members and to conduct the research on the school's premises. (See Appendix B)
3. A letter of invitation to participate in the study was handed out. This was followed by a letter in which guidelines of the data collection process were outlined and the ethical requirements were presented. The details were explained to each participant and they each signed a copy of the document prior to the process commencing. (See Appendix C)

4. A letter of “Ethical Clearance” was obtained from the University of Johannesburg. (Ethical Clearance Number 023 26/07/05; See Appendix D)
5. Throughout the transcription of the data, the data analysis and the presentation of the findings, the names and identity of the participants as well as that of the school were not revealed, neither directly nor in an implied manner.

## **1.8 MEASURES TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS**

This research project seeks to present finding and accurate descriptions of the lived experiences of educators who experienced the phenomenon of absent leadership and successful curriculum implementation. Trustworthiness can be viewed as a barometer that establishes or ensures that sufficient academic rigor was applied in qualitative research without sacrificing relevance (Lincoln & Guba as cited in Krefting, 1991:216). Four measures are applied in qualitative research to measure trustworthiness, namely credibility, transferability, reliability and confirmability (Myburgh & Strauss, 1998:36).

### **1.8.1 Credibility**

Accountability and truth value are components of credibility. The truth value of the study considers whether the researcher has established confidence in the truth of the findings based on the research design, the participants and the context of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:53). With regard to the credibility of the study, a study may be considered as credible when the descriptions presented are accurate in as far as the people who share the experience would immediately recognise the description (Sandelowski, 1996:44).

### **1.8.2 Transferability**

In the broader context of trustworthiness in qualitative research, Halloway and Wheeler (1996:166) describe transferability as the manner in which the findings can be generalised or ‘transferred’. The transferring of the findings

would occur from the research findings to a larger group. Purposeful sampling and rich descriptions of findings will improve transferability. The selection of participants is therefore most important. In this study, the participants selected represented diversity in terms of age, gender, position held and experience in education.

### **1.8.3 Dependability**

In qualitative research and indeed in this study, my key objective is to understand the human actions and the context in which the phenomenon of absent leadership and curriculum implementation and development occurred. Unlike quantitative research which seeks control the experimental environment, qualitative research seeks to derive meaning from the participants rather than control them (Morse & Field, 1996:52-53). Whilst there is a need to recognise the uniqueness of each situation, dependability is the test for consistency throughout the study. It also assesses whether, if the study were repeated, the findings would be consistent (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:290).

### **1.8.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability is a strategy used in qualitative research to assess neutrality. Neutrality implies a freedom from bias in the data analysis and presentation of findings. Poggenpoel (1998:350) notes that neutrality refers to the degree in which the findings are derived solely from the responses of the participants and not as a result of other biases, motivations and perspectives.

### **1.8.5 Trustworthiness and reflexivity of the researcher**

It is difficult to be free from any bias. In the role of the researcher in this study, I am aware that there is a likelihood of certain biases which should be noted and continually guarded against. These perceptions, preconceived notions and biases are borne out of the position that I hold as the principal of a school.

I, the researcher am a White male in my early-forties. With some eighteen years of experience in education, of which eight have been as the principal of a school, I possess a deep interest in school leadership and management. Leadership experiences, together with an interest in the topic of educational leadership, offered a platform on which to consider the situation of absent leadership. Associated with changes and curriculum implementation the research question was formulated.

In an increasingly competitive and ever changing educational environment, I am aware of the need to keep abreast of developments and the latest educational thinking in order to ensure that the school I lead continues to be relevant and meet the needs of the learners and the broader community that it serves. My thoughts and perceptions are influenced by my own experiences as well as the leadership style which I have found to be most effective. In my dealings with the teachers, I continually strive to create a collaborative culture based on sound educational practice and principled leadership.

When entering the site, I was continually aware of my own thoughts and perceptions regarding school leadership and educational management. Furthermore, throughout the process of data collection and data analysis, I was careful not to allow my own experiences and paradigms to distort the findings. This was achieved by a verbatim transcription of the participants' responses and by permitting the data to speak for itself.

## **1.9 DIVISION OF CHAPTERS**

**Chapter one** provides an introduction and the background for the research problem. In addition to outlining the structures within which the research will take place, it also provides the aims of the research and the methodology that will be used to process the data. There is a brief clarification of the concepts given.

**Chapter two** contains the data collected from a literature study of books, journal articles and the Internet. The focus here is on the commentary on the

current literature that exists on the topic of school leadership, curriculum implementation and absent leadership. This chapter theoretically locates this study within the current discourse of the research question.

**Chapter three** provides a detailed description of the research design and methodology used for data collection as well as the processes of analysing data.

**Chapter four** presents the raw data as well as an interpretation thereof. Issues of trustworthiness are also presented.

**Chapter five** is the conclusion. Here the findings of the research will be summarised, strengths and weaknesses discussed and recommendations made.

## 1.10 CONCLUSION

The task of leading and managing a school has become increasingly complex (Day et al., 2000:158). Principals are faced with enormous challenges and increasing demands being placed upon them from all stakeholders. This, together with the task of being the 'curriculum leader' presents an added dimension to the complexities of task of school principals. The curriculum and the entire practice of teaching and learning are the 'core business activities' of the school. It is therefore imperative that principals devote a great deal of their time and resources to this task. This research will endeavour to examine the process of curriculum implementation and development in absence of leadership. The school where this took place was successful in this activity in spite of there being no principal in place.

In this chapter the background to the problem, the research question, aims of the study, the research methodology, ethical considerations and a outline was provided. A brief outline of the following chapters in this research was also presented. In the next chapter, the study will be located in a theoretical framework through a literature study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

When an education authority, a school, a principal or an educator are in the process of actively engaging the implementation of curriculum, they are essentially dealing with change. Carl (2002:76) argues that the process of curriculum development and implementation is about renewal and change. Furthermore, he refers to Oliva's principles that "change is unavoidable, because life grows and develops through change" and that "Curriculum change is the result or consequence of changes which take place in people" (Oliva:1988 as cited in Carl, 2002:77-79). It would seem therefore that the management of curriculum is closely linked to the management of change.

As is the case with all forms of change, the process is one that must be both managed and lead. The same is true with regard to the implementation of curriculum. Recent literature examines the changing role of the school principal as the educational and instructional leader. This complex topic often manifests itself within the specific leadership style of the principal and how this links to the management of change and curriculum implementation.

Within the context of this study, the process of curriculum implementation is examined in an environment where there is an absent leader. Davies (2005:2) states that "It is clear that in almost all definitions of leadership that [sic] the concept of future direction and moving the organization forward predominates". As such, one could conclude that in order to successfully manage change and implement curriculum in a meaningful and sustainable manner, the principal needs to adopt a leadership style that introduces a different approach toward positions of authority, responsibility, change and power.

A literature review serves to place the research topic within the broader context and current discourse. In this research project, the literature review

provides a framework and contextualises the study with regard to the current thinking with regard to educational leadership theory and curriculum implementation (Henning et al., 2004:27).

In this chapter, the research question, that is, ‘Within an educational context where the Principal is ‘absent’, what are the factors or human interventions that lead to the successful implementation of the curriculum?’ will be placed within the theoretical realm by examining the related topics as they are presented in the literature.

This Literature Review will be located within the current discourse of school leadership and the instructional role of the educational leader, with a particular view to how absent leadership can be synonymous with successful curriculum implementation. In addition this Literature Review will also deal with the theoretical aspects of absent leadership through an investigation into sustainable leadership and sustainable instructional leadership. This is significant as an understanding of these concepts will serve as a foundation for the discussion on sustainable leadership and sustainable instructional leadership, placing the research topic right at the forefront of the current educational discourse. In order to achieve this I will firstly locate the study in the broad context of school leadership.

The concept of an absent leader is one that is not well represented and recorded in the literature. This Literature Review will consequently outline various forms of leadership as a framework for successful leadership in schools as well as examine how leadership is related to the curriculum and the successful implementation thereof. In addition, In order to achieve this I will firstly, examine the concept of school leadership.

## 2.2 SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

### 2.2.1 Introduction

Traditionally, the image of the school principal was one in which he/she was perceived as the all powerful, all knowing, 'super hero'. In the context of this view of the principal, a situation in which there was an absent principal might have led the school to an inevitable crisis and a situation of impeded functionality. However, whilst this may still be the case in some schools, more recent views of leadership have evolved to more democratic forms of leadership. This suggests that it may even be possible for a school to function in terms of curriculum delivery in a situation where there is absent leadership, albeit for a limited period of time. A study of leadership theory is relevant as it provides the theoretical basis of leadership. This is useful when making assumptions and presenting comparisons between schools functioning with an effective leader as opposed to a situation where there is absent leadership.

There has, however, been a shift in leadership theory from the extreme traditional view of the principal as being all-powerful and the one who possesses all knowledge to an approach of greater teacher involvement and the devolution of power and responsibility. In this contemporary age, the view of exactly what constitutes effective and influential leadership is a topic that continues to attract interest and debate. In one of his earlier works, Adair (1973:4) contended that "a leader is not a person characterised by any particular and consistent set of personality traits". In later work, Adair presented a working model for leaders and suggests that effective leaders are those that are able to influence people. (Adair, 1988:2). Fullan (2004:1 - 2) referring to this theme, namely that leadership is not about a 'super hero', argues that, "Charismatic leaders inadvertently often do more harm than good because, at best, they provide episodic improvement followed by frustrated or despondent dependence" (Ibid:1 - 2). These contributions suggest that the manner in which one perceives leadership has changed. This evolution in leadership theory will be examined in the remainder of this section.



### **2.2.2 A changing perspective of leadership in schools**

School leadership is quite different from other leadership in other organisations. The distinguishing factor is that school leaders have the responsibility to create and lead an environment that enhances learning. Southworth (2005:75) contends that, "It is precisely this focus on student's development which makes school leadership distinctive and different from other forms of leadership." This requires further investigation. As indicated above, the role of the principal as the leader of learning has evolved.

The literature reflects a change in the type of leadership role that is required of the principal. This leadership role transcends all areas of school activities and functions. Since teaching and learning are considered as the core business of a school, the principal's leadership role must include curriculum implementation and development. Lambert (2002:37) argues that the "the days of the principal as lone educational leader are over". She contends further that the "old model of formal, one person leadership leaves substantial talents of teachers largely untapped" (Ibid.:37). This would suggest that curriculum leadership should not lie solely with the principal but that teachers should be directly involved and responsible for driving the process and indeed providing leadership at certain levels within the school structure.

In chapter one, reference was made to the concept that curriculum implementation is essentially about dealing with and managing change. Continuing along this line of thinking, Fullan (2004:16), makes reference to the role of the principal in dealing with change by stating that "only principals who are equipped to handle a complex, rapidly changing environment can implement the reform that leads to sustainable improvement in student achievement". He argues that "effective school leaders are the key to large-scale, sustainable school reforms" (Ibid.:16). It would be generally accepted that the core business of schools relates to teaching and learning. Thus, it follows that the improvement and reforms described by Fullan, link directly to curriculum implementation and development. The above presents a case for the role of effective leadership and management as the key ingredients for

curriculum development and school improvement. Hence the literature reflects that the principal is required to lead and manage this change, the implementation of the curriculum. It is also suggested that this should occur within the framework of a leadership style that seeks to embrace and empower teachers and structures within the school. This will now be discussed.

Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley and Beresford (2000:17) present an argument that examines the changing face of headship. The roles of the head of a school can be broadly placed into two categories, namely roles of leadership and roles of management. The role of the school leader is diverse and often paradoxical. More recent writers recognise that the principal has an important leadership role to perform. Mann (2005:53) contends, however, that to understand project leadership, "it is necessary to appreciate the complexity of the tasks leaders perform and the specific challenges they face". One of these challenges lies in the creating of space to facilitate an approach that is more collegial and one that facilitates the notion of shared responsibility. Sergiovanni also argues against the 'superhero' and charismatic view of what constitutes an educational leader:

It remains that the superhero images of leadership will not work. In tomorrow's schools success will depend upon the ability of leaders to harness the capacity of locals, to enhance sense and meaning and to build a community of responsibility (as cited by Harris in Harris et al.,2005:1).

Bath (cited by Harris in Harris et al., 2005:1) extends the notion of teachers taking more responsibility and being involved in the leading of curriculum matters.

I would like to put forward a revolutionary idea that all teachers can lead. If schools are going to become places where all children and adults are learning in worthy ways, all teachers must lead.

Harris et al. (Ibid.:161) maintain that, “The research evidence shows that effective leaders exert a powerful influence on the effectiveness of the school and the achievement of students”. Whilst this is accepted, the above presents a clear shift in the direction that is being followed. Writers of contemporary educational leadership do certainly stress the role of the principal in curriculum implementation. The shift, however, occurs where the notion of leadership in curriculum implementation is extended to teachers and to different levels within the school structure.

In this section it was established that leadership is required at different levels in the school for effective curriculum implementation. The next section will explore the types of leadership that are required for the effective management of schools and successful curriculum implementation.

### **2.2.3 Leadership styles in curriculum implementation**

A number of different leadership styles are present in schools. These are often related to different situations and personalities. Some of these are more traditional and refer to the principal as an authoritative figure or the “lone instructional leader”, while others are more collaborative and include the “Invitational Principal” style (Lambert, 2002:37). A study of these leadership styles places the research question in a broader theoretical perspective.

#### **2.2.3.1 Transactional. Transformational and post-transformational leadership**

Harris et al. (2005:16) refer to transactional leadership, that is, the leader as the lone instructional leader, as essentially pivoting around the “leader-follower dichotomy”, where the leader is in a position superior to the followers and where the followers depend on the leaders. The main focus of this form of leadership revolves around the developing of procedures and structures that lead to the completion of tasks.

Through the work of Burns (as cited in Harris et al., 2005:17), transactional leadership as a theory evolved into transformational leadership theory. Burns highlighted a distinction between transactional and transformational leadership and suggested that most leaders, use transactional management rather than transactional leadership. Transformational leadership, as more closely defined by Duignan and McPherson (1992), focuses on the moral values and value-laden activities of the leader. This form of leadership presents a significant shift in the use of power.

Post – transformational leadership is the most recent in this series of leadership theories. This new theoretical position emerged from a study into effective headship in the United Kingdom (Day, 2000:56). This theory presents two main aspects, the first of which is that effective leaders are constantly managing competing tensions and dilemmas. The second factor is that effective leaders are people-centred. Reporting on the same piece of research, Day (2000:167) labels this form of leadership as ‘values-led contingency leadership’.

Moral purpose as a component of successful leadership is highlighted by Fullan (2004:11), who states that “moral purpose relates to both ends and means”. The end, according to Fullan, deals with the difference that the institution makes to its customers and the means are about the manner in which the leader treats his/her followers.

The literature presents a number of leadership styles that could promote successful curriculum implementation. These will now be named and briefly described.

#### 2.2.3.2 Invitational leadership

In essence, invitational leadership is aimed at creating a total school environment, which Novak (2005:44) suggests “appreciates individuals’ uniqueness and calls forth their potential”. The role of the leader is to encourage and it is based in a relationship of “doing with rather than doing to”

(Ibid.:46). This style of leadership links very closely to the trends in educational leadership mentioned above, that is that the notion of leadership being shared rather than being the sole domain of the principal.

#### 2.2.3.3 Participative leadership

Participative leadership is described as “the process of involving subordinates in the decision making process” (Anthony, 1978:3) and it is a leadership style that uses the expertise and creativity of subordinates to address and solve managerial problems (Ibid.:3). Participative leadership is closely linked to ‘Invitational leadership’ in that ‘doing with’ implies participation and collective involvement. Somech (2005:777) describes a study in which school effectiveness is compared in the context of directive leadership as opposed to participative leadership. On the one hand, the results reflected a positive relation between directive leadership and organizational commitment whilst on the other hand, the results also reflected a positive relationship between participative leadership and teacher empowerment. The latter implies a shared commitment to curriculum implementation. Fullan (2004:169) contends that a shared commitment leads to the implementation of best ideas. If one is to align school leadership with current trends, it could be argued that participative leadership is a more appropriate approach to curriculum implementation.

#### 2.2.3.4 Distributed leadership

Manthey (2004:13) comments that “leadership that matters is leadership that is sustained, which requires that it is distributed to others”. This implies that leadership is most powerful when it is given away to others (Ibid.:15). The concept of distributed leadership will now be discussed.

Harris et al. (2005:161) argue that the key to school improvement lies in “cultural rather than structural change”. They argue further that school improvement comes about through “the expansion rather than the reduction of teacher ingenuity and innovation” (Ibid.:161). Leading on from 2.2.2 above,

where the influence of effective leaders was discussed, Harris et al. (2005:161) present a word of caution by pointing out that although the international research base of leadership is vast, “there are relatively few studies that have established any direct causal links between leadership and improved student performance”. When it comes to successful curriculum implementation, Harris suggests one tentative conclusion. This is that “distributed leadership was more likely to have an effect on the positive achievement of student outcomes than leadership which was largely, or exclusively, ‘top down’.

#### 2.2.3.5 Summary

The leadership styles presented above are all manifestations in the shift away from the principal as the “lone instructional leader” referred to by Lambert (2002:37). Although sustainable leadership is also a leadership style that is a far cry from an authoritative leader, it will be discussed below as a separate leadership style due to its close connection with absent leadership.

### **2.3 SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP and ABSENT LEADERSHIP**

In this section, I present the theoretical aspects of sustainable leadership as they are found in the literature. This will be followed by an investigation into the concept of instructional leadership and then I use this basis to develop a hypothetical link to curriculum implementation and absent leadership.

Hargreaves (2005:174) refers to a research project in Canada (ACSA, 2001:5) which examined the retirement trends of educational leaders. It was found that by 2005, “60 per cent of principals and 30 per cent of vice-principals in Ontario will have retired”. This sample presents what Hargreaves refers to as “The crisis of Leadership” (Ibid.:174). Whilst the expected reaction is that education authorities must recruit and train more educational leaders, he contends further that the solution lies not only in sourcing the most suitable type of leaders, but also in structuring the educational environment so as to enable a consequential process of sustained leadership (Ibid.:175).

Sustainable leadership presents a significant shift in the thinking of leadership development. Rather than entering people that possess a specific set of competencies and individual traits into a position of leadership, Hargreaves (2005:173) argues that the impact and importance of leadership is that leadership is a process and a system. He refers to this form of leadership as “active leadership and promotes the notion of “active leadership as a process that influences and develops things that matter in ways that spread and last for the benefit of all” (Ibid.:173).

A second aspect of this significant shift lies in the manner in which the leadership is developed. Sustainable leadership implies a shift from the single charismatic leader who, although they do exert immediate influence, is evanescent (Ibid.:173) to leadership that lasts. Sustainable leadership lasts, it “secures enduring success over time” and, secondly, “it is patient” in that “it defers gratification instead of seeking instant results” (Ibid: 185 - 186).

In addition to the “The crisis of Leadership” referred to above, certain sectors of the educational landscape are faced with the urgent need to develop leadership within their schools. Christie (2004:19) defines this as “building leadership succession in a time when religious vocations are dropping in developing countries”. In this specific context, she is referring to catholic education. She presents this opportunity positively by adding that “this challenge has the potential to bring vitality and energy to schools if worked with positively” (Ibid.:19).

Sustainable leadership has a direct relation to the research question and to curriculum implementation and learning. In the context of an absent leader, successful curriculum implementation took place. Hargreaves (2005:187) argues that “leaders develop sustainability by how they approach, commit to and protect deep learning in their schools” and, “by how they sustain others around them to promote and support learning”.

Sustainable leadership ensures that improvements and innovations will last over time and especially when the leader has left. In the context of this

research it appears that elements of sustainable leadership existed as the process of curriculum implementation continued in spite of there being an absent leader. One could assume that if a school leader had implemented the principles of sustainable leadership, the school could possibly have continued with its daily functioning and curriculum activities should a situation of 'absent leadership' arise.

In light of the research question, curriculum implementation in the context of absent leadership is the central topic being examined. One could argue that in the absence of leadership, there were other social and environmental contributors to the successful implementation of the curriculum. These are linked to curriculum implementation and absent leadership. I will, however, firstly examine the concept of instructional leadership.

## **2.4. INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP**

### **2.4.1 Introduction**



With reference to Lambert's statement above, namely that "the days of the principal as lone educational leader are over" (2002:37), the question that arises is how then, in the complex and challenging environment of curriculum implementation, does the principal employ new leadership techniques that will indeed bring about effective and sustainable curriculum implementation? This is the/a role that a principal is required to play with regard to teaching, learning and the curriculum. It is the role of 'Instructional Leadership.'

### **2.4.2 Instructional leadership**

The principal must serve as the instructional leader of the school", (DuFour, 2002:12). Whilst this is generally accepted, there are a number of ways in which this concept may be transferred into reality within the context of a specific school. In this article DuFour relates some of his experiences, failures and the valuable lessons learnt. Many principals devote a great deal of time to managing curriculum implementation, monitoring teaching methodologies and



checking on the outcomes being taught. Whilst these are indeed worthwhile pursuits, Du Four argues that the principal's efforts should rather have been directed at understanding, monitoring and evaluating the extent to which the learners were in fact learning and achieving the outcomes. DuFour (2002:13) suggests that learning should become the preoccupation of the school and that “this shift from a focus on learning is more than semantics”. In terms of the school becoming a truly learning environment, “teachers and students benefit when principals function as “learning leaders rather than instructional leaders” (Ibid.:14).

The role of the principal as instructional leader has certainly undergone a significant shift in the past 5 to 10 years. Whilst one recognises that school type and socio-economic factors create a certain degree of “curriculum uniqueness” in all schools, today’s principals are tasked with a very clear and specific purpose – to make their schools places of real learning. Their leadership style must therefore, support and sustain this very purpose.

In practice today’s principals are required to lead learning. They work alongside teachers and they “participate in regular, collaborative, professional learning experiences to improve teaching and learning” (King, 2002:61). Principals should also make the activities surrounding the process of teaching and learning their highest priority. In order to truly lead learning, the principal must develop leadership capacity in schools. Distributing leadership exceeds the limited boundaries of simply delegating tasks. It provides “regular opportunities for everyone in the school community to share what they are learning about their own practice” (King, 2002:62). The concept of distributed leadership has been discussed in some detail above. Leading on from this the concept of shared instructional leadership will be explored below. This links to distributed leadership as it relates to curriculum implementation and development.

### **2.4.3 Instructional leadership in practice**

If one argues that true, lasting and meaningful learning comes about with 'doing', how then do principals of schools 'do instructional leadership'? In essence this is a search for the behaviours of instructional leadership. The work of Sheppard (1996:328) suggests that "the promotion of teachers' professional development was the most influential instructional leadership behaviour". Blasé and Blasé (1998:7) refer to this as a distinctive shift from "control to collaboration." They contend further that principals need to express their interest and support for learning by being visible and by actively displaying an interest in classroom and learning activities. It is recorded that principals, intent on promoting teaching and learning through instructional leadership techniques, made informal visits to classrooms. Teachers consider this as customary, routine and non-threatening. Blasé and Blasé (1996:105) report that, "although the visits were generally unannounced, teachers viewed them very positively". The leadership style, Management by Wandering Around (MBWA), argues Frase and Hetzel (1990:2), promotes a climate of trust and openness. This in turn creates a platform upon which teachers can reflect on their practice in a positive and purposeful manner. Once data were gathered, it was found that the principal could actively provide practical instructional leadership by employing certain suggested strategies.

One of the strategies suggested was that the principal should make constructive suggestions based on his/her own experiences and so encourage reflection on methodology and practice. This places the principal at the centre of curriculum implementation. In addition, principals are advised to give regular and relevant feedback. This indicates both knowledge about classroom practise as well as an interest in the activities and processes of classroom practise. In order to initiate and develop shared instructional leadership, Blasé & Blasé (1998:28-46) suggest that principals solicit advice and opinions by drawing on the experience and knowledge of others. This enhances the instructional leadership opportunities of teachers.

Dareah and Playko (1995:132) take this concept further by contending that instructional leadership is not the domain of the principal but that, “instructional leadership can take forms that go well beyond direct intervention in classroom activities.” Gupton, (2003:33) on the other hand, approaches the topic of instructional leadership in a far broader and more embracing manner by suggesting that the behaviours of instructional leadership are not prescriptive and that they can “be enacted in different ways, with many styles, and with various philosophies”. These two authors concur that instructional leadership is essentially related to behaviours, be they direct or indirect, that affects the teaching provided and the learning that results (Daresh & Playko, 1995:33).

#### **2.4.4 Sustained instructional leadership**

Educational reforms are often accompanied by an effort to train teachers and to support them in the implementation of new methods and ideas. It is not uncommon for teachers to leave the training sessions uplifted, inspired and enthusiastic. Of concern, however, is the loneliness and abandonment that teachers feel along the way. This is particularly true when they start encountering problems and obstacles. This section examines the notion of sustained instructional leadership as a subset of sustained leadership.

There is a close link between sustainable leadership as a general concept and sustained instructional leadership as a sub theme thereof. Sustainable instructional leadership involves the role of leadership in curriculum implementation. Manthey (2004:14) contends strongly that the success of leaders with regard to student learning cannot be measured by their impact on student learning at the end of their tenure, but rather by the number of quality leaders that remain at the school when they leave.

Feiler, Heritage and Gallimore (2000:66) suggest that certain selected teachers can play a role whereby they serve as teacher-leaders, in-house experts, and provide real information, modelling and assistance to other teachers. Of the lessons learnt from this approach, there are two that are of

significance. Firstly, that the teacher-leader spends most of his/her time in the classroom or working directly with another teacher. This person's time should not be taken up with planning field trips or other more functional type tasks.

Secondly, the support of the principal is essential and this concept further enhances the curriculum leadership role of the principal. Whilst the principal should still be regarded as the instructional leader of the school, this leadership is distributed to other members of staff who are further empowered to be instructional leaders in their own right. The task of the instructional leadership and curriculum implementation is therefore a shared one, and one that develops sustainability in instructional leadership.

Upon the premise that "instructional leadership must be a shared community undertaking" and that, "leadership is the professional work of everyone" (Lambert, 2002:37), emerges an interpretation of leadership in schools. This approach delves deeper into the leading and learning resources that exist within a school. At the centre of this notion is that whilst teachers accept and understand that they are responsible for the learning of the pupils in their care, they also need to assume a deeper responsibility for the learning of their colleagues (Lambert, 2002:38). Lambert continues to argue that "leadership is an essential aspect of an educator's professional life" (Ibid.:38). As such sustained instructional leadership permeates beyond the confines of classroom practise. It extends to the ongoing professional development of fellow colleagues. This process is supported and encouraged within a culture of collaboration which implies the unifying presence of a shared vision.

#### **2.4.5 Summary**

The notion of sustained instructional leadership suggests that there is capacity for shared leadership in schools. It is the responsibility of principal to shift thinking to a point where it is acceptable for all to lead. In turn, the building of a culture of shared instructional leadership will be promoted. In practise, this approach manifests itself through the principal, teachers and

even parents and students, participating together as mutual learners and leaders (Lambert, 2002:38).

This Literature Review examined school leadership, sustainable leadership and instructional leadership within the broader context of absent leadership. As the concept of absent leadership and curriculum implementation are central to this study, I will now present some of the current writing on absent leadership and curriculum implementation in a situation where there is absent leadership.

## **2.5 ABSENT LEADERSHIP**

As noted in chapter one, following my experiences in teaching and in school leadership which have encouraged me to become more aware of those leadership practices that facilitate successful curriculum implementation and having experienced a situation in which the leader was required to leave with little notice, I see, for the purposes of this research, an absent leader as fitting into any or all of the following broad categories.

In the first instance, the leader would be absent if he/she were simply not present physically, for example ill, retired or having not been replaced following resignation.

Secondly, the leader might be physically present but be so far removed from the daily happenings in the school, that for all intents and purposes, s/he could be regarded as absent. For instance, s/he might merely be fulfilling the administrative and ceremonial requirements but not be actively providing leadership and direction for the school.

The third interpretation of the concept of an absent leader involves his/her lack of involvement and/or interest in curriculum implementation, where either one of the two above scenarios would apply.

### **2.5.1 A study of absent leadership**

As noted above, the concept of an absent leader is one that is not well represented and recorded in the literature. However, a study on acting headship conducted in 2002 and 2003 presented the following findings. The first finding concerns the reasons for the creation of a situation of absent leadership. In approximately one third of the cases studied, the situation of permanent absent leadership arose from “retirement, resignation and, a much smaller third cause, promotion” (O’Brien, Murphy & Draper, 2003:46). Of significance also was that the duration of the intended situation was often exceeded. The second significant finding was that, “well over half the appointments were sudden” (Ibid.:46) The appointments here refer to that of an acting head and in most cases these were filled internally by what could be described as the “the next person in line” (Ibid.:46). Thirdly, the report indicated that induction and preparation for the position was generally weak. Whilst there were exceptions, the majority of the cases reported that they, that is the acting head, “had to fall back on their own past experience and advice from absent heads, if available” (Ibid.:46).

Finally, the entire question of length of tenure and the associated uncertainty related to authority were investigated. It was found that the uncertainty of how long they would be acting created difficulties in planning ahead as well as the “extent of their authority and the extent to which they could introduce radical change” (Ibid.:47).

In summary, the findings of the study indicate that emotions of anxiety, insecurity and sense of a lack of authority emerge in situations where there is an absent leader.

One could argue that in the absence of leadership, there were other social and environmental contributors to the successful implementation of the curriculum. These could also be regarded as the factors and human interventions, which the research question seeks to address. Certain factors

have been identified in the literature and these will be named and discussed in the following section.

## **2. 6. CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION AND ABSENT LEADERSHIP**

### **2.6.1 Introduction**

In the traditional school scenario, the principal would be top of a rigid hierarchical structure in which all information, leadership and decision making would disseminate. Recent literature reflects a shift in the way businesses and schools are run. Marshall (1995:1) suggests such strong hierarchical structures are no longer relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. As an alternative, he argues that businesses and schools should strive for a more 'Collaborative Style'. He goes on to add that Collaboration is the "premier candidate to replacing hierarchy as the organising principle" (Marshall, 1995:4). This section creates the hypothetical link to curriculum implementation and absent leadership. I will examine the concept of collaboration by identifying a number of themes that underpin this concept and then conclude by describing a culture in which there is evidence of collaboration.

### **2.6.2 Collaborative leadership**

As a model for leadership, collaborative leadership is presented through a number of themes. There is, however, one central, overriding theme, namely the concept of a shared vision or outcome. A central role that the collaborative leader plays is to create an environment where there is a shared vision. This involves joint strategies and goes beyond the purview of any individual or group of individuals. Shared vision is a "process that leads to the establishing of common ground" (Chrislip, 2002:109). It is also leads to a group of people working together through the creation of a shared vision (Chrislip, 2002:41-43). Vandal argues that school leaders must not regard educators as "troops to be deployed but rather as colleagues in service of children." He adds that, "the strongest vision for action is one that is shared" (Vandal, 2006:55).

Of importance here is that this 'shared vision' extends further than a mere consideration for the work that must be completed. Shared vision must also include the type of working environment that is strived for. This can be referred to as the work 'culture'. This implies that there must also be a collective or shared moral purpose. Fullan (2004:11) contends that moral purpose is an essential ingredient for successful leadership in the statement, "Whatever the enterprise, having moral purpose makes excellent business sense in the long run". Linking this concept to the work environment of work 'culture', Fullan (Ibid.:11) argues further that "to improve the quality of how we live together is a moral purpose of the highest order". It is the moral purpose that leads to a successful school system. Manthey (2004:13) reports that "Educational researchers have learned that for a school system to thrive it must have a collective moral purpose".

The first of the sub themes is that Collaborative Leadership is viewed as a "function performed and not a position held by one" (Marshall, 1995:68). The practical manifestation of this is that everybody in the organisation is a leader as leadership is regarded as situational. Leadership therefore depends on circumstances and not on position or authority. The paradigm shift comes about as the collaborative leader recognises the value of more than one leader and travels from a point of view which is based on the assumption of one leader to a paradigm of the "The Assumption of Many" (Marshall, 1995:69-70).

Whilst Sergiovanni acknowledges the value of situational leadership as found in the Collaborative Leadership approach, he argues that too much attention is given to the instrumental, situational and behavioural aspects of school leadership. He contends further that "not enough attention is devoted to symbolic and cultural aspects" (Sergiovanni 1990:19). In order, therefore for leaders to add value to situational leadership, they must place emphasis on symbols and meaning (Ibid.:19).

The second theme deals with the role of power and, paradoxically, powerlessness. The notion of many leaders is supported by Pascarella, who



argues for greater participation and he tends that this participation means that power must be shared rather than the leader's attempts to accumulate more power. Realising the importance of power and its link to self esteem, he adds that "participative management is really about people and that it begins with nurturing their self esteem" (Pasarella, 1984:139). Rubin also subscribes to the concept of powerlessness in his argument that democracy demands collaboration. He strongly states that "collaboration is democracy's mandate" (Rubin, 2002:4). The notion of powerlessness is suggested in that leaders need to release power in order to gain it. The response to true leadership is based on the manner in which educational leaders deal with the issue of power. This concept of power is also referred to by Blasé and Blasé, "Principals who embrace teacher professionalism, do more than share power, they multiply it! (Blasé & Blasé, 1996:2). This view is significant to the contribution of the role that power plays in a collaborative leadership in that it emphasises the exponential benefits of sharing power and responsibility.

The third sub-theme is very closely linked to the concept of power and it surrounds the process of decision making. Telford (1996:26) introduces this concept by indicating that collaborative leadership is most clearly manifested through the decision making process. It is, the way in which leaders structure decision making processes. These processes "allow appropriate staff, student and parent participation such that a shared vision and agreed upon ways of implementing the direction, respecting and valuing people and empowerment" (Ibid.:26).

The fourth theme of collaborative leadership is that which describes the mutual benefit derived from working together. Collaboration, as argued by Chrislip is more than the sharing of knowledge and information. It goes further in that it is a relationship that allows each party to also achieve their own goals. The theme of a shared vision is one that presents strongly in the literature regarding collaborative leadership (Chrislip, 2002:42).

The final theme of collaborative leadership surrounds the notion that collaborative leadership is founded on the quality of the relationships that

exist. Rubin defines collaboration as “A purposeful relationship in which all parties strategically choose to cooperate in order to achieve a shared outcome” (Rubin, 2002:17). Barnett and McCormick state that, “leadership in schools is mainly characterised by relationships with individuals. (Barnett & McCormick, 2003:55). Collaborative Leadership displays a very strong emphasis on relationships and the shared outcome or shared vision.

### **2.6.3 Collaborative culture**

The collaborative leader is characterised not only by business like actions, such as rational analysis, bottom line thinking and efficiency, but also by behaviours of the heart. These focus on relationship, respect for others and elements of motivation (Marshall, 1995:80). One could also link Sergiovanni’s concept of ‘Value Added Leadership’ to that type of leadership that leads to the formation of a “Collaborative Culture”. In later work, Sergiovanni refers to each person’s role. He argues that for collaborative cultures to work, each person must view their specific role as part of a “reciprocal relationship that spells out mutual obligations” (Sergiovanni, 2004:49). As such, a balance between individual autonomy and collaborative work is achieved.

Collaborative Cultures are characterised by inclusiveness. Through the process of managing a constructive learning encounter, all information necessary for making decisions is gathered. This in turn leads to coherence in the group and agreements which lead to action. This is the “Collaborative Culture” (Chrislip, 2002:41-43).

Rubin regards the role of relationships as being central to a Collaborative Culture. He calls them “Relationships that Bind” (Rubin 2002:16-17). A Collaborative Culture is developed when the leader pays attention to relationships. A leader’s task therefore is to “convene and sustain relationships” and to implement the “the skilful and mission – orientated management of relevant relationships” (Rubin, 2002:18).

True and lasting relationships are built on a sincere sense of collegiality. Collegiality, writes Sergiovanni, is essential for the emergence of a Collaborative Culture. Cultural connections and covenantal relationships form part of collegiality and these are the “foundational pillars of collaborative cultures” (Sergiovanni, 2004:50). The collegiality being referred to here is, according to Sergiovanni, more covenantal than contractual in that it is based on “bargains of the heart and soul”, these are, “based primarily on loyalty, purpose, sentiment and commitment which obligate people to one another and to the school” (Ibid).

Within the context of the research question, the concept of collaboration is a significant aspect in that it speaks to the probable environment that existed in order for the curriculum to be successfully implemented where there was absent leadership. In addition, having looked at sustainable leadership, as a form of leadership whereby staff members of the school develop a sense of responsibility and power, which leads to a greater sense of cohesiveness. This, in turn, leads to the creation of a collaborative culture within the school which is the probable foundation that ensures the continued functioning of processes in the school. Sustainable leadership therefore is the driving force that enables a school to function on an ongoing basis where sudden disruptions or interruptions would inhibit the educational goals of the school being achieved.

This section links to the role of the principal as an instructional leader and how leadership/ and the delivery of the curriculum will be sustained should the situation arise where s/he will be absent. In a nutshell, the principal sets in place structures that ensure the teaching continues effectively in his her absence over time.

## **2.7 CONCLUSION**

It becomes clear that the literature suggests that leadership is essential for curriculum implementation and development. A curriculum leader may be referred to as a “reflective practitioner” (Day et al., 1993:6). This seems to

suggest that the responsibility of curriculum implementation exceeds the limitations of the principal's authority and expertise. The responsibility of curriculum implementation extends through the ranks of Deputy Principal all the way down to the teacher in the classroom. Feiler et al. (2000:66) argue that teachers should be engaged in leading their colleagues in curriculum implementation and development.

Change is a process that needs to be considered and a vast collection of written work exists on leadership as a topic and educational management. More recently, however, authors have tended to focus their attention on leadership styles that are more collegial in nature and those that bring about school improvement. Whilst the role of the Principal is still significant and he / she can even be described as a 'Leader of Leaders', the concept of an absent leader presents an interesting dimension to the discourse on leadership in schools and indeed, other institutions.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the previous chapter, the literature review, I discussed the key concepts of educational leadership and curriculum implementation. Specific issues such as instructional leadership, the implementation and development of curriculum were also described. I argued that the role of instructional leader can be played by all educators and that it is not necessarily the sole domain of the school principal.

Chapter three draws attention to the research design and research methodology. Mouton (2005:55) describes the research design as a “plan or blue print” of how the research should be conducted. The process of data collection and data analysis are described. As stated in the research question, the human interventions that lead to successful curriculum implementation are studied. The aim of this investigation is to gather information about the process of curriculum implementation in a context where the principal was absent. The research design and data collection processes are now described.

#### **3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research design that I have chosen is a grounded qualitative case study. The study is characterised by a clear focus on a “phenomenon that has identifiable boundaries” (Henning et al., 2004:41). This implies a case study with elements of grounded theory within a qualitative research frame. An overview of the qualitative research paradigm and a grounded case study are described next with specific reference to their applicability to the situation being researched, together with the paradigmatic assumptions.

### 3.2.1 Paradigmatic assumptions: Interpretivist tradition

Qualitative research manifests itself in a search for meaning. The search for meaning is central to the task of qualitative researchers. Creswell (1994:145) appropriately states that, “Qualitative researchers are interested in meaning - how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world.” Qualitative research can also be viewed as a “quest” for the understanding of a phenomenon from the participant’s perspective as he/she makes meaning of his/her world (Merriam, 2000:xv). Merriam continues along the theme of ‘meaning’ by explaining that qualitative research is fully understood by the “idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction to their world” (2000:3). This making of meaning involves the collecting of field texts in the form of words about human experiences. Words and human experiences are the foundations of the knowledge and understanding that qualitative research seeks to gather (Ibid.:5). Henning et al. (2004:20) state that, “Knowledge is constructed not only by observed phenomenon, but also by descriptions of people’s intentions, beliefs, values and reasons, meaning making and self understanding.”

Furthermore, meaning making is constructed as the researcher converts raw empirical data into what Henning et al. (2004:6) describe as a “thick description”. The ‘thick description’ is the end result of a process through which an account of the phenomenon has evolved into an interpretation of the information in light of other empirical data in the same study (Henning et al., 2004:6). The concept of meaning making was extended by the research manifesting itself as one with the characteristics of an unfolding, emerging, interpretive approach.

Within the broader context of the qualitative research paradigm, it is the interpretivist tradition that underpins the findings of this study. Merriam, (2000:4) refers to this as the “interpretive qualitative approach”. She describes the interpretive qualitative approach as “how individuals experience and interact with their social world” and “the meaning it has for them” (Ibid.: 4). Within the context of this study, I investigated the interpretations and meaning

that emerged in what Crotty (1998:66-67) would describe as the “social life world” of the participants.

The interpretivist tradition presents two different views of meaning. The first view, as described by Schwandt (2001:153) is the “meaning of an action”. This “resides with the consciousness of the actor” and it is understood “in terms of the actor’s intentions” (Ibid.:153). The second view is that “action has meaning” (Schwandt, 2001:154). In the search for deeper understanding and meaning, the researcher recognised that the related concepts, namely educational leadership, the ‘absent Principal’, school improvement and curriculum implementation could not be controlled. In fact, one does not wish for these to be controlled because it was “exactly this freedom and natural development of action and representation that we wish to capture” (Henning et al.,2004:3).

Put slightly differently, qualitative research aims to gain a deeper understanding and meaning of the research phenomenon. The research phenomenon is directly linked to the human action of the people involved and is therefore inherently meaningful. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:296). In order, therefore, to understand a human action, the meaning must be fully grasped (Ibid.:296). This is in line with interpretivist philosophies which can be regarded as an “epistemological position that requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action” (Bryman, 2004:540).

Qualitative research engages in seeking to understand a “complex phenomenon by examining it in its totality in context” (Borg, Gall & Gall, 2003:198). This implies that the context in which the research is undertaken is important. When entering the ‘context’ of the data collection site, Bodgan and Biklen (2003:4) suggest that qualitative researchers, “feel that action can best be understood when it is observed in the setting in which it occurs”. The context of this study, namely the process of curriculum implementation where there was an absent principal presented a complex and dynamic interchange of human relationships. These interchanges locate themselves within the

sphere of a certain value system as well as being located within a broader context.

For one to fully understand the dynamics of the interchanges mentioned above, one should recognise the values that are associated with, and found within the particular context being researched. The qualitative research design investigates the “socially constructed nature of reality.” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:13). The phenomenon of an Absent Principal exists within a social construct, the educational landscape namely a school. This social construct is the reality of the lived experiences of the participants. Values, attitudes and opinions are continually communicated and the school cannot be regarded as neutral or as a ‘value void’. The entire educational process continually, consciously or unconsciously, presents certain values to the learners and teachers. Apple (2004:78) refers to these norms and values, the one’s that are “implicitly, but effectively taught by schools”, as the “Hidden Curriculum.” He adds that “they [the norms and values] are not usually talked about in teachers’ statements of end or goals” (Ibid.:78 - 79). As qualitative research also seeks to understand those values that are embedded in the context being studied (Borg, et al.: 993:197), the unfolding research presented clear evidence of the values and norms that the school instilled.

The phenomenon of “Absent Principal” is one that presents itself in a unique context. The inductive study of the phenomenon presented a deeper understanding of the complexities of school leadership and curriculum implementation. The inductive approach presents a relationship between theory and research where the theory is in fact the outcome of the research. (Bryman, 2004:9). Grounded theory, which is summarised by Charmaz (2004:496) as “a set of data collection and analytic procedures aimed to develop theory”, is an important part of this study is therefore an appropriate approach for this study.

The point of departure and previous experiences of the researcher will influence his approach to the study. This is presented below and followed by a description of the research design.



### 3.2.2 Grounded case study

The research design selected for this study was a Grounded Case Study. It comprised of a case study with elements of Grounded Theory. In order to fully understand the link between the two, each will be discussed separately at first.

A case study within a qualitative approach, suggests that the 'main assumption is that a phenomenon is investigated as a 'bounded system' (Henning et al. 2004:2). This could also be viewed as an "individual, group, institution or community (Merriam & Simpson, 1995:105). In later work, Merriam (1998:27) suggests that the "single most defining characteristic of a case study lies in delimiting the object of study, the case." An additional main characteristic as suggested by Hitchcock and Hughes (1995:317) is that "a case study is concentration upon a particular incident". The selection of a case study correlates directly with the research being undertaken. Bryman, (2004:48) makes the point that "a case study entails the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case". Despite the complex nature of curriculum implementation, the implementation of the curriculum in a context where the principal was absent is the limited context of the research and it required the intense attention of the researcher. As such, the meaning that could be derived from this study positioned itself within a certain context, the researcher, however, was still required to study the process of curriculum implementation from a holistic perspective.

I selected a case study as it focuses on a specific description and explanation of the phenomenon. The broader context of national curriculum (RNCS 2002) implementation that was being undertaken at the time of the study places the research in a larger educational context. In the process of curriculum implementation, there are certain factors that cannot be anticipated. Linked to the unique nature of this study in that the process of curriculum implementation took place in the context of an absent principal, one must accept that such factors are impossible to separate and, as such, the

selection of a case study research design is appropriate for this study (Merriam, 1998:29).

The case study has elements of grounded theory. Bryman (2004:401) makes mention that there is “considerable controversy about what grounded theory is and entails”. He defines grounded theory as a “theory that has been derived from data” and that data have been “systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process” (Ibid.:401). One of the key concepts of Grounded Theory is that the theory evolves during the process of conducting the research. Strauss and Corbin (1994:46) suggest that this takes place “through the continuous interplay between analysis and data collection”. In the context of this research, there was little educational theory to draw on and hardly any indication how this inquiry would unfold. The research topic suggests certain complexities and grounded theory presents a suitable approach in dealing with these complexities. In fact there was no theory to prove or disprove. The researcher set out with a topic to investigate and that which was relevant was allowed to emerge.

Tuettemann, (cited in O’Donoghue & Punch 2003:115) points out that, “in grounded theory the whole process of data collection and analysis is a tightly woven iterative process involving constant comparison, which leads to the gradual development and refinement of theory grounded in the data”. Henning et al. (2004:115) add that emergent theories are “grounded in the researched reality” (Ibid.: 115). This implies that to achieve a theory, the researcher draws from his/her own theoretical position and existing knowledge (Ibid.:115). This approach therefore links closely to the definition of grounded theory as offered by Charmaz (as cited in Merriam, 2002:142). This approach suggests that it is “the study of experience from the standpoint of those who live it”. It is this interpretation of grounded theory that was used in the process of data collection and data analysis.

The “Absent Principal” operates within a certain educational context and his/her actions as well as those of the teachers with regard to curriculum implementation can be studied and analysed. The major themes that emerge

are the concepts of educational leadership, the “Absent Principal”, school improvement and curriculum implementation. These collectively contribute to the process of making meaning and developing an understanding of the phenomenon. A manifestation of the grounded theory approach which was realised as the study unfolded was the formation of a substantive theory. Substantive theories, unlike grand or formal theories, have reference to everyday-world situations (Merriam, 1998:17).

In the following section the data collection process, sampling and site selection as well as data analysis are described.

### **3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.3.1 Sampling and site selection**

In the discussion on qualitative research above, it was noted that the data would be inductively analysed. Bodgan and Biklen (2003:65) state that “the method of sampling in analytic induction is purposeful sampling”. The research was conducted in one school and the research participants were all members of the staff at that school during the period of time when the phenomenon of “absent principal” was manifested. The participants therefore comfortably fit what can be regarded as “desirable participants”. Henning et al. (2004:4) describe this criterion for desirable participants as coming from “the researcher’s knowledge of the topic and also of how the theorising on the ground is developing during the research”.

The participants were selected with a particular purpose in mind. The process of the actual data collection was initiated by a discussion with a senior member of staff. This served as a conduit for the developing of trust and matters of ethics and consent were discussed and explained. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon from the perspective of different individuals, I then indicated that I wished to interview participants that presented diversity in age, gender, seniority in the school, years of experience and subjects taught. Although a senior member of staff assisted in the

identifying of participants that met the required criteria, the participants volunteered to be involved in the research.

The sample group comprised of six people. The structure of the sample is outlined below.

Participant One: Mr R. He was the acting principal at the time when there was an absent principal at “School A’.

Participant Two: Mr D. He is the second deputy principal at ‘School A’ and was also the deputy in place during the time when there was an absent principal.

Participant Three: Mr H. A senior housemaster at ‘School A’. He has some seven years experience at ‘School A’.

Participant Four: Mrs T. is a very experienced teacher. She has been teaching for thirty years and is involved in counselling of learners at ‘School A’.

Participant Five: Mr. M. A young, single male teacher with some five years experience in education. All of which have been at ‘School A’.

Participant Six: Mrs. P. A young, single female teacher with thirteen years of teaching experience, of which five have been at ‘School A’.

The site selected for this study is a school in a well established urban area. It has a long and proud history of excellence on the sports field and in the classroom. This school, which is indicated as ‘School A’, proved to be most suitable for the purposes of this research. Not only was the new curriculum successfully implemented, but this was achieved when there was an absent principal.

Whilst it is recognised that each research project will present different approaches to data collection, there are certain similarities that exist. Creswell (1994:148) suggests that data collection involves three stages. These are (a) setting the boundaries for the study; (b) collecting data; and (c) establishing the best way for recording the information. In order to gain the data that linked appropriately to the research question, I selected the research site with care. Patton (1990:169) refers to this as “selecting information rich cases”. The setting selected to conduct the research was one in which there had been an ‘Absent Principal’ for a period of nine months. This time of absent leadership, corresponded with the implementation of the General Education and Training Certificate (GETC) in grades 8 and 9 as well as the preparation for the implementation of the Further Education and Training Certificate (FETC) for grades 10, 11 and 12. As such, it proved to be an excellent site as the two key elements of the research topic were present, namely an educational context in which there was absent leadership and the implementation of new curriculum in the context of absent leadership.

### **3.3.2 Data Collection**

#### **3.3.2.1 Individual interviews**

Kvale (1996:1) writes, “If you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk with them?” He suggests further that it is through listening to people that the researcher “learns about their views on their work situation and family life, their dreams and hopes” and that this will assist the researcher in understanding the “world from the subject’s point of view” (Ibid.:1).

Interviews are a recognised strategy of data collection in qualitative research and according to Bogdan and Biklen (2003:2), a data collection strategy referred to by best-known representatives of qualitative research. Kvale (1996:31) records that the “main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say”. The interviews were semi -structured and I posed convergent as well as divergent questions. By employing both

convergent and divergent questions, I allowed for both brief, focussed answers as well as creating an opportunity for the participants to elaborate on responses. It was my experience that some of the responses of the participants did reveal aspects that I had not anticipated (Mills, 2003:59).

In order to facilitate the meaningful progression of the interview, I prepared an interview schedule. It contained a list of the questions to be posed. The questions were made available to the participants several days before the interview and they served as a structured guide for the interview process. The process itself was therefore authentic and dynamic. Some of the responses led me to deviate slightly and further explore the detail of topics relevant to the research question. In fact, it is “this flexibility of the interview that makes it attractive” (Bryman, 2004:319).

The strength of the interviewing technique in qualitative research is that there is a great interest in the participant’s point of view. It was my intention to fully explore each participant’s point of view and, consequently participants were permitted, even encouraged to ramble on or even to go off at a tangent (Bryman, 2004:319 - 320). The participants wanted to talk and share their experiences. Being sensitive to the requirements of the research question, I allowed this to continue for a while, but then carefully re-directed the participants back to the topic. It was found that probing was an effective strategy to re-direct participants. As Bryman (2004:122-123), cautions, probes should be in the form of open-ended questions so as not to influence the potential answers by limiting the options open to the participant.

As indicated above, four interviews were conducted. The first of these was with the participant who was the ‘acting principal’ during the period when there was no officially appointed Principal.<sup>1</sup> The next three interviews were conducted on an individual basis and the three participants varied in age, gender, position, years experience in education and years teaching at the

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this research, in a context where there is no officially appointed principal, it shall be regarded as there being an Absent principal

particular school. The interviews were conducted at the school itself and an office was made available for the purpose of the interviews.

### 3.3.2.2 Dyad interview

The second data collecting strategy used in this research was a dyad. When conducting a 'dyad' interview, the researcher seeks to stimulate discussion, even debate on the particular topic between the two participants. A dyad may be described as, "a kind of qualitative research in which the moderator supervises a discussion between two respondents". (Qualitative terminology, available from: <http://www.fieldwork.com>). The aim is to generate dialogue rather than a direct answer and response interview between the researcher and the participant.

One dyad was conducted. Both participants were young members of staff with less experience than the educators in the individual interviews. Both were at the school for the duration of the time when there was an Absent Principal. As with the individual interviews, both participants were given an outline of the questions several days prior to the dyad. Whilst the questions were used as a guide, the interaction between each participant, and the participants and the researcher was dynamic. In the emerging dialogue and discussion it was found that aspects linked to the research question were highlighted as well as those issues that had not been presented to the participants as a direct question. This style is well within the purpose of qualitative research. Bodgan and Biklen (2003:4) state that, "Qualitative interviews are, of course, supposed to be open-ended and flowing."

### 3.3.2.3 Recording of data

In the four interviews and the dyad, an audio recording method was chosen. This method provides an accurate record of the interviews and can assist the researcher in identify the mood and attitude of the participant. These recordings were then transcribed. My words as well as those of the participants were transcribed verbatim. By transcribing the actual words of the

participants, the 'subject behind the interviewer' is eliminated (Henning et al., 2004:76).

### **3.3.3 Data analysis**

Creswell, (2002:55) points out that data analysis in qualitative research essentially consists of three parts. These are text analysis, describing the information and developing themes and interpretation. The interpretation phase means "making sense of the data" (Ibid.:277) and it also "situates the findings within the larger, more abstract meanings" (Ibid.:55). He adds that the researcher can build sophistication and complexity to the research by layering the themes and interconnecting them (Ibid.:273). Kvale (1996:187) adds that the methods of analysis used in qualitative interviews can be used to "organize the interview texts, to condense the meanings into forms that can be presented in a relatively short space and to work out explicit meanings of what was said."

#### **3.3.3.1 Qualitative content analysis**

On completion of the respective interviews and dyad, the tape recordings were transcribed verbatim. As indicated above, I used Charmaz's model as a guide in data analysis. This involves reading through the transcriptions and searching for words or phrases that can describe the 'codes'. Charmaz, (2004:506) describes coding as "the process of defining what the research is all about". Charmaz (ibid.:506) insists that "grounded theory coding means creating the codes as you study your data". As such, the codes emerge as the researcher engages and interacts with the data. In fact the coding process may even take the researcher into unforeseen areas. Charmaz (Ibid.:506) refers to this process as "line by line' coding. In this research, I used this approach and proceeded through the process of coding each interview and the dyad.

During the process of coding, I also made comments and wrote personal and methodological memos. Memo writing, explains Bryman (2004:405), "are



notes that the researchers might write for themselves” and, as Charmaz (2004:511) adds, “memo-writing helps you to elaborate processes, assumptions, and actions that are subsumed under your code.” These were based on thoughts, feelings and even hunches about the responses of each participant. Emerging out of memo writing, the grounded theory approach now led me directly to theoretical sampling. Charmaz (Ibid.:513) explains that theoretical sampling occurs when “you go back to your original sample for the purpose of developing your emerging theory.” In this research, I allowed a period of time between the four individual interviews and the dyad for this very purpose. During the dyad, more focussed questions were asked. The categories became more clearly defined and identified. This then placed me in a position to fulfil the purpose of grounded theory, which, as described by Charmaz, (Ibid.: 516) is to “develop a theoretical analysis of the data that fits the data and has relevance to the study.”

In the process of coding, memoing and identifying emerging themes, I used different colours. This system was useful in identifying responses that were similar in content or linked to an emerging theme. Appendix E provides an example of this process.

Leading on from the above, Bogdan and Biklen (2003:259) interpret this as the development of a theory using inductive methods. Using the data, the researcher is now in a position to propose a substantive theory. The substantive theory describes “an interrelated set of categories grounded in the data that emerged from the constant comparative coding and analysis procedures” (Brott and Meyers as cited in Merriam, 2000:155). The substantive theory can possibly lead to a formal theory which, according to Bryman, (2004:404) has “a higher level of abstraction and has a wider range of applicability to several substantive areas”. I found that the data that had been collected was rich and full. This allowed for useful comparisons and interpretations from which a substantive theory could emerge.

By nature, the process of data analysis in qualitative research is that is it analysed inductively. Qualitative researchers “do not search out data or

evidence to prove or disprove a hypothesis they hold before entering the study” (Bodgan and Biklen 2003:4). During the process of data collection, the concept of the “Absent Principal” could be described as a phenomenon rather than a theory. In the data analysis process, however, this phenomenon and its link to the successful implementation of the curriculum, emerges not as a theory to prove or disprove, but rather as a description of the phenomenon. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995:297) argue that “qualitative research is not explicitly about the verification of existing theories and hypotheses, but rather with discovery”.

Throughout the process of data analysis, nature of the research design and methodology had to be borne in mind. Considering that this was a grounded case study, two aspects required consideration. The first is when analysing and interpreting data from a grounded theory perspective, the development of a theory was an aspect that I was required to consider. This theory had to emerge from the data. The process as defined by Bryman (2004:404) was used as a guide for data analysis. This process is illustrated in Figure 3.1 below. The second consideration was that the approach had to be iterative (Ibid.:401).

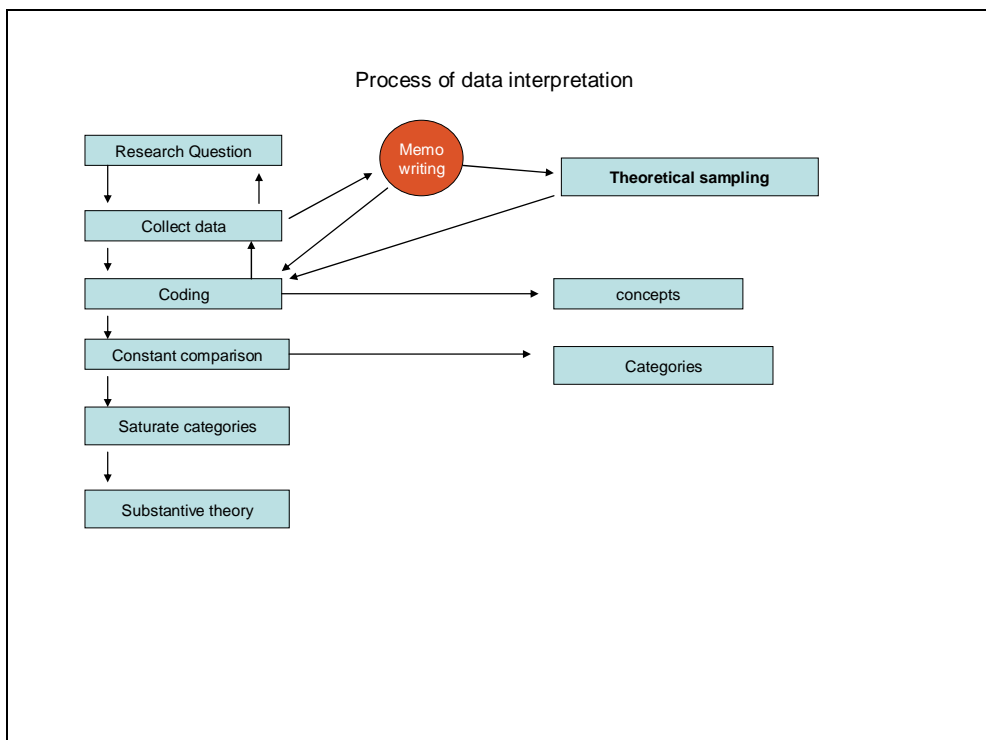


Figure 3.1. The process of data interpretation

### 3.4 METHODOLOGICAL NORMS: TRUSTWORTHINESS

Merriam (1998:198) notes that “All research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner.” Qualitative research thinking has evolved as indicated by Bryman (2004:273). He refers to Lincoln and Guba by noting that an alternative to reliability and validity are required to assess the quality of qualitative research. Choudhuri, Glauser and Peregoy (2004:443) insist that as “qualitative inquiry does not operate within the same positivist paradigm of quantitative research”, and that, “the standards applied to quantitative research-internal and external validity, statistical conclusion validity and construct validity—cannot be applied ad hoc to qualitative research.” Scholars are now more inclined to refer to the trustworthiness of qualitative research as criteria for assessing social research. The purpose of this concept is to serve as the checking mechanism or the ethical barometer against which the authenticity of the research can be tested. Put differently, they are the acid test of whether or not the researcher has followed good research practice!

Bryman (2004:30) once again refers to Lincoln and Guba when addressing the issue of assessing the quality of quantitative research. He notes the following:

Some qualitative researchers sometimes propose that the studies they produce should be judged according to different criteria from this used in relation to quantitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that alternate terms and ways of assessing qualitative research are required. For example, they propose trustworthiness as a criterion for how good a qualitative study is.

Describing trustworthiness, Leydens, Moskal and Pavelich (Ibid.:66) describe it as “how we determine whether we have accurately described the settings and events, participants’ perspectives” (Leydens et al., 2004:66). They add that, “trustworthiness is generally established by using various data collection and/or analysis techniques.”

Bryman (2004:273) reveals that trustworthiness is in fact made up of four criteria. The four main criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Whilst there are equivalents to each of these in quantitative research, the criteria underpin the requirement for qualitative research to be assessed according to a set of appropriate criteria. The criteria are outlined below.

### **3.4.1 Credibility**

Credibility, according to Bryman (2004:30), is essentially defined as how believable the findings are. As a means of strengthening the credibility of the study, Choudhuri et al. (2004: 443) list four types of triangulation.<sup>2</sup> These are the triangulation of data, investigator, methods and theory. Furthermore, Schurink, Schurink and Poggenpoel (1998:33) note that credibility is used as a strategy to uncover the truth-value of the study. In essence, the truth value seeks to establish how confident the researcher is with regard to the findings with reference to the research design, participants and context (Lincoln and Guba 1985:53). In this study the themes that emerged from the data collection were consistent suggesting that even if more participants were interviewed, the findings would have been the same, thus making the study credible.

### **3.4.2 Transferability**

Transferability is essentially concerned with whether or not the findings apply to other contexts (Bryman 2004:30). One needs to accept that qualitative research typically focuses on the intensive study of a small group and that “the findings tend to be orientated to the contextual uniqueness and significance of the aspect of the social world being studied” (Ibid.:275). This is particularly true when a case study is the research design. I am of the opinion that the results of this study could in fact be transferred. The statement is made with confidence as the data that emerged was consistent and it led to the formation of a substantive theory. Although the case study research

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<sup>2</sup> Triangulation leads to a deeper understanding of a phenomenon by measuring the phenomenon using different scales (Denzin and Lincoln 2003: 8 & 187).

design refers to a 'bounded system', being linked to the grounded theory research design, allows room for the findings to be transferred to other contexts, making the findings trustworthy.

### **3.4.3 Dependability**

An 'auditing' approach is suggested by Bryman to ensure dependability of research findings. "This entails ensuring that complete records are kept of all phases of the research process" (Ibid.: 275). In this research, I kept meticulous records as well as a researcher's' journal. In addition, dependability also relates to whether or not the findings are likely to apply to other times (Ibid.: 30). With regard to the latter, it is difficult to determine whether this would be the case in this study as the research question is unique. It is unique in the sense that the usual association of successful curriculum implementation with an effective leader is not the phenomenon. Rather, the phenomenon is reflected in the research question which examines the successful implementation of curriculum where there is an absent principal. Based on the diversity of the participants, the consistency of the emerging themes and thorough record keeping I do regard the findings as dependable.

### **3.4.4 Confirmability**

Bryman (2004:276) insists that, "complete objectivity is impossible in social research." Confirmability is related to the researcher's values intruding to a large degree (Ibid.: 30). In this study, I was fully aware that my position as a school principal and instructional leader may influence my interpretations and possibly distort my perceptions of the participants. In order to ensure trustworthiness, I consciously approached the process of data collection and data interpretation with a new set of lenses. Qualitative research, warns Janesick (2004:3) is a paradigm in which "many individuals can look for something and not see what is there". It was imperative therefore, that I approached the study with an open mind and that all preconceived ideas or

notions were discounted in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the research.

In order to ensure that the findings are trustworthy, the researcher must keep in touch with the topic and the research question. During the data collection process, the aims of the research were kept foremost in my mind. I chose to ask probing and unambiguous questions and to be thorough in my collection of data from the participants.

The diverse selection of the participants contributed to the trustworthiness of the study. Each participant approached the topic from their unique perspective and contributed significantly to rich description of events. The emergence of common threads in their individual responses which ultimately developed into themes indicates that their responses were in fact an accurate reflection of reality.

The trustworthiness of the research was aided by the fact that the participants were eager and willing to participate. The participants spoke openly and honestly about their experiences and perceptions. At no time was their any reluctance displayed. The transcripts record my comments which reflect the sincerity and honesty of the participants. It was evident that the participants trusted the process and were confident that their responses would be kept confidential and anonymous. These processes contributed to making the findings of this research trustworthy and credible.

### **3.5 THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER**

An understanding of the role of the researcher is extremely important in qualitative research. Henning, et al. state that the researcher is “unequivocally the main instrument of the research” (2004:7). Bodgan and Biklen (2003:33) maintain that qualitative researchers attempt to “objectively study the subjective state of their subjects”. Bearing the rigour of the interpretive process and the researcher’s primary goal to add knowledge in mind, there is no reason for the researcher to be viewed as passing judgement on the

setting. The qualitative researcher understands that situations are complex and so, in their quest for meaning, attempt to portray reality in a multi-dimensional manner (Ibid.:33).

Furthermore, Shank (2004:49) suggests that, qualitative research can be “likened to the metaphor of a lantern”. He continues by explaining that “lanterns are used to allow light to illuminate dark areas so that we can see things that were previously obscure” and that “Once we shed light on things, we understand them better” (Ibid.:49). This metaphor can be continued by introducing the researcher as the lantern bearer. Denzin (1989:12) notes that “Interpretive research design begins and ends with the biography and self of the researcher”. As a basic description of the researcher in this particular study, the following is stated. I am a white male in my early forties with some eighteen years in primary school education. Of those, fourteen years, I have been in a management or middle management position. I have also been a principal of an independent school for the last eight years. With this background, I have, through experience and study, established a certain leadership style and opinion on school leadership and curriculum implementation.

The role of the researcher can be described as being one of “personal involvement and partiality” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The experience of the researcher in educational leadership and management may well suggest a certain degree of bias. The subjective-objective debate in qualitative research is a lively one. Henning et al. (2004:10) describe the researcher as the instrument and state that the “the instrument of research in QR (Qualitative Research) is the human mind”. Creswell (2002:49) adds that “the qualitative researcher is not an objective, authoritative, politically neutral observer standing outside and above the text”. Mehra (2002:8) concurs with this line of thinking and comments that the “Qualitative research paradigm believes that the researcher is an important part of the process”. The researcher, she continues, enters the research site with a certain amount of bias even if the researcher tries to ignore it. Of greater significance, however, is the researcher’s awareness of his bias and that the researcher ensuring that the

research actually reveals “more about the subject than about the researcher” (Ibid.:8).

### **3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Creswell (2002:13) points out that in order to conduct research in an ethical manner, the researcher must firstly respect the rights of the participants. Secondly, the researcher must honour the research sites visited and thirdly, the researcher has a duty to report the research fully and honestly. It is also essential that a relationship of trust is developed between the researcher and the participants. This can be achieved by honouring the participants’ privacy and by protecting their identity. Bogdan and Biklen (2003:45) suggest that this extends beyond the formal witting up of research. They suggest that it also includes the verbal reporting of information gained. A relationship of trust sets the participants’ mind at ease and they are more willing to speak honestly and openly. Trust is developed by the researcher paying careful attention to ethical considerations. The research was conducted within the ethical guidelines and considerations of the University of Johannesburg. An ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethical Committee. (See Appendix D). The following ethical aspects were considered and adhered to during the data collection process.

- a. All participants were provided with clear guidelines of what the study would be about and what they would be expected to do. It was stressed that participation was voluntary and that participants could withdraw at any time. This information was given to the respondents in a face to face meeting as well as in a written ‘guideline format.’
- b. Permission was sought from the relevant authority. This permission was granted and received in writing.
- c. All participants were requested to read and sign a letter of consent. This letter indicated that they had agreed to participate in the interview and the dyad (where applicable). Heaton (2004:77) argues that “informed



consent is now a fundamental principle for all research involving human subjects” and adds that, “it requires that research participants are fully informed of the nature of the work and any possible risks to themselves, and that they freely agree to take part”.

- d. Participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. This was also indicated in the letter of consent. (See point ‘c’ above) During the process of transcribing data, the names of respondents and the school itself was coded. This process is described by Heaton (Ibid.:81) as a process in which “data are usually de-identified during processing”.
- e. All individual interviews were held in private and in a sound proof room.
- f. The letter of consent asked participants to indicate if they required the services of an interpreter. This was not required and all interviews and the dyad were conducted in English.
- g. The researcher was careful and accurate in transcribing the interviews and writing up the research. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and the findings and emerging themes taken directly from the transcriptions. As indicated by Bogdan and Biklen (2003:45), the “fabricating of data is the ultimate sin of a scientist”.

### **3. 7 CONCLUSION**

When researching the perceptions of people who have experienced the change associated with the principal of the school leaving and there being an extended period of time in which there was an absent leader, calls for the researcher to be sensitive and professional. Participants were asked to search deep into their emotional state and even reveal their personal concerns, anxieties and fears. Poggenpoel and Myburgh (2005:304) point out that, “Qualitative research refers to a deep holistic exploration and description

of an identified phenomenon in the field". At the same time, the participants were dealing with the stresses associated in implementing a new curriculum. Besides the stated aim of searching for meaning, the qualitative research strategy is also one that is designed to investigate the emotions and feelings of the participants (Creswell, 1994:145). Emotions often govern the action taken. Interestingly, the curriculum implementation did proceed and the participants explained how the process was managed.

This chapter has highlighted the research design and the methodology used to gather and analyse the data. The use of qualitative research as a research paradigm was justified and the process of data collection through interviews and a dyad were outlined. In addition the process of data analysis was described as were the aspects of trustworthiness. Respect of the participants is an important feature of qualitative research and the ethical considerations involved in the research were outlined and discussed.

In the next chapter the analysis of the data and the emerging themes which ultimately result in the forming of a substantive theory will be presented.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.1. INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter 3, a close examination of qualitative research was made. As the description unfolded, the notion that qualitative research is essentially concerned with gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon was described. In addition, the use of interviews and a dyad as data collection strategies for this research were explained. In this chapter the results of the fieldwork will be discussed. This will be achieved by firstly describing the site and producing a portrait of each participant, and secondly by presenting the most significant findings. The latter will be achieved by naming and describing the themes that emerged from the fieldwork.

#### **4.2. THE SITE AND PARTICIPANTS**

##### **4.2.1. Site Selection**

###### **4.2.1.1. Rationale for selection**

The school chosen as the site for data collection was one that relates directly to the research question. The site, referred to as “School A” is one that had gone through the experience of absent leadership. The Principal had resigned and there was a period of some nine months where there was “absent leadership”. It was during this time that South African education was experiencing significant curriculum change. Furthermore, School A achieved some of its best Matric results during the time of absent leadership. This seems to suggest that teaching and learning continued successfully and that the new components of the curriculum had been successfully implemented.

#### 4.2.1.2 Description of the Site

School A is described as a well established, large boys' school. Located in Gauteng and with roots in colonial British education, one feels a sense of history and tradition as one enters the buildings from the road lined with enormous trees. The stonework and ivy bear testimony to the architecture and design of a school built over 100 years ago. Last century's Westernized ethos of pride and privilege of private single-sex schooling is also evident. The bronze plaques bearing names of old boys who have died in conflict, both in Africa and abroad, provide further evidence of the age and tradition of the school. Despite the age and tradition of the school, one gains a sense that the school has evolved and become an institution that clearly mirrors the present day demographic trends of South Africa. With 1200 learners, the boys at "School A" appear to wear their uniform with pride and there is an atmosphere of purpose and high spiritedness amongst the learners.

#### 4.2.2. A Portrait of the participants



##### 4.2.2.1. Participant 1: "Mr. R"

Mr. 'R' was the first participant that I interviewed. As the senior deputy principal, he was the man who held the position of "acting principal" during the time when there was absent leadership. In addition, Mr. 'R' could be described as the "gate-keeper" in that he assisted me greatly when I approached the school for research participants. He also assisted in setting up the respective interviews. I found him to be most co-operative and my dealings with him were friendly, cordial and professional.

Both in my dealings with Mr. 'R' as well as through the interview, it became clear that he was extremely committed to his work and to "School A". Having been on the staff of School 'A' for a lengthy period of time, Mr. 'R' displayed a sense of personal responsibility for the ongoing success of the school and for the maintenance of the school's good reputation. Mr. 'R' stated, "my goal was just to make sure the school ran smoothly and effectively until the new

headmaster walks in and I can say “O.K., you can take it over and this is what’s [sic] happened and it’s been running smoothly.” Whilst this indicates his commitment to the school, it also suggests that he did not wish to become the next headmaster of “School A”.

It has been established that Mr. ‘R’s intention was to keep the school running smoothly. In the interview Mr. ‘R’ reported that he never had any specific goals during the time when he was acting principal. It would suggest, therefore, that his main intention was, to maintain the efficient running of the school rather than to implement any far reaching or radical changes. A feature of Mr. ‘R’s commitment to the school is his full involvement in it. Besides the responsibilities associated with this role as deputy principal and teaching responsibilities, Mr. ‘R’ is also involved in the extra mural programme. The latter is an area of incredible enjoyment for him. This is displayed by his stated disappointment of having to remove himself from extra murals during the period that he was the acting principal. Mr. ‘R’ said: “I removed myself from extra mural activities”. In a nutshell, Mr. ‘R’ can be described as a committed educator, one who views his role as fully manifested through his involvement in activities within the classroom, outside the classroom and in the management structures of the school. He comes across as a professional who is driven by doing what he perceives as what is best for the school.

#### 4.2.2.2. Participant 2: ‘Mr. D’

Mr. ‘D’ is the second deputy at School A and has worked fifteen years in education, of which 13 have been at School A. As a Grade 12 teacher, Mr. ‘D’ has very specific curriculum responsibilities and he views his role as being supportive of the headmaster. On a practical level, this support is expressed through planning, discipline and overall school management. Mr. ‘D’ entered the interview willingly and gave concise answers to the questions posed. As the interview progressed, however, Mr. ‘D’ gave more detailed responses and wanted to express some personal thoughts and feelings. When dealing with the issues pertaining to the period of absent leadership, Mr. ‘D’s responses were largely of a very practical nature. Whilst he expressed shock at Mr. L’s

resignation, he added that “there is a feeling that a school like this has to carry on”. He continued by stating that “I think, generally, the response was that we’ve just got to move on”. Furthermore, the pragmatic attitude Mr. ‘D’ adopts towards the situation is explained through the statement, “but I think in order to get everywhere you just have to carry a heavier load.”

Mr. ‘D’'s practical approach in dealing with the issue of absent leadership is further demonstrated by his approach towards the implementation of the new curriculum. He states, “ ... at the end of the day we have little option other than to embrace the new curriculum and do with it as much as we can”. Response to change is a topic that Mr. ‘D’ chooses to address and explore further. He contends that there are often mixed responses to change, but then argues, “It is much easier to stay the same than to change”. He supports this statement by adding, “It is certainly much easier to teach the way you have taught for the last ten years, but this is not necessarily the best thing. In fact, I am sure it is not the best thing”. Mr. ‘D’ then concludes by making this statement: “So maybe FET is a good thing for us rather than a bad thing.”

Mr. ‘D’ gave a passionate account of the importance of relevance in times of change. Mr. ‘D’ argued that schools need to continually evolve and change in order to remain relevant. With regards to relevance, Mr. ‘D’ stated, “If we are producing clannish, cubbish young men who don’t, who either despise the outside society or see themselves as better than the outsidess society, then I believe we are no longer relevant”.

In summary, Mr. ‘D’ gave me the impression that he thought deeply about the school and was genuinely concerned about the learners. Whilst this was not evident at the beginning of the interview, he became more willing to discuss his thoughts and understandings of curriculum implementation as the interview progressed.

#### 4.2.2.3. Participant 3 – ‘Mr. H’

Mr. ‘H’ presented as a keen participant who most was willing to share his experiences. He came across very confidently and his general attitude and approach could be described as positive and motivated. With some seven years of experience at School A, Mr. ‘H’ is the senior housemaster and also serves on the executive of the school. As an old boy of “School A”, Mr. ‘H’ has a deep emotional connection with the school. This probably explains why he comes across as being very proud to be associated with the school. When questioned about career development and growth during the time of their being an absent principal, Mr. ‘H’ commented that to be an HOD or on the executive of a school like School A at twenty six is very prestigious. Although Mr. ‘H’ describes the emotions of Mr. L’s resignation as shock and disappointment, he displays an understanding of the situation by rationalizing the departure in terms of a career opportunity. The evidence of this lies in the words he used, for example “..... and it was an opportunity, obviously career path wise and I am sure financially as well..” and in the statement, “But he also had to plot his own career. Some people understood that”.

As indicated above, Mr. ‘H’ was very positive and proud to be associated with “School A”. This is illustrated further by his response to the curriculum changes being undertaken. When describing the schools approach to curriculum changes, he concludes his approach by explaining that “the school is proactive and not resistant to it” (implementation of new curriculum). In the process of exploring the reasons for the school’s successful implementation of the new curriculum during the time of absent leadership, Mr. ‘H’ made specific reference to there being clear systems and structures in place. He refers to “School A” as a “machine that grinded on” and adds, “..it shows that structures that had been put in place by the school were constantly changed, updated or tweaked in certain areas. But the systems had been in place for a long time and it worked.”

Of interest also, are the factors that support the process of change and structures as perceived by Mr. ‘H’. He states this was made possible by the

quality of relationships, co-operation and communication. Added to this, Mr. 'H' refers to a sharing of ideas and the development of a common understanding of what the school is trying to achieve. Stated in Mr. 'H's words, "It all boils down to relationships and we're all working at it."

#### 4.2.2.4. Participant 4 – 'Mrs. 'O'

The fourth interview was conducted with Mrs. 'O' a teacher with some thirty years experience, of which nine have been at "School A". Her main areas of involvement are in the teaching of Life Orientation (L.O.) and in the counseling of learners and teachers. Mrs. 'O' is passionate about the teaching of L.O. This became clear as she was very keen to discuss it, even though she was acutely aware of some of the difficulties associated with the implementation thereof.

Mrs. 'O' was prepared to present some of the negative experiences with regard to the implementation of Outcomes Based Education (OBE). In fact, she stated this quite categorically by declaring: "..... quite honestly, I am very negative about OBE". She went further, however, to clarify this opinion by adding her negativity was directed at the manner in which the education department handled the implementation of OBE, but continued by commenting that the school had handled OBE in a positive manner.

Mrs. 'O' also recognized her role as a subject head by indicating that she had to take on LO, manage the implementation and be positive about it. This occurred in spite of her personal feelings. Her own feelings about OBE are encapsulated in this statement: "But I think OBE has many, many, many disadvantages". Mrs., 'O' went on to describe herself as "old school" and yet she is able to recognize and accept that certain leadership styles can possibly facilitate change and new curriculum implementation better than others. She refers to Mr. 'K' whose style was autocratic being succeeded by Mr. 'L' who was more approachable and democratic in his leadership style. Mr. 'L' is described as a person who had an open door policy, was less of a disciplinarian and, by encouraging staff to speak to him, "softened a lot of the



changes". In this way, more people were involved in decision making and were able to continue with their duties once Mr. 'L' had left.

In summary, Mrs. 'O' presented the school's experience of absent leadership and curriculum implementation from a different angle. Despite a nervous start, Mrs. 'O' became far more relaxed and willing to express her thoughts and experiences as the interview progressed. She based many of her observations and opinions on her past experiences. The content of these experiences are drawn from the classroom as well as from teaching with different principals.

#### 4.2.2.5. Participants in the dyad

When using the dyad as a data collection method, the researcher attempts to use questions to stimulate discussion and debate between the participants. This technique is most successful when one participant takes the lead from the other and, by so doing, develops the topic further. As such there are two participants in the dyad. The narrative portrait of each participant will now be presented.

##### (i) Dyad participant 1 – Mrs. 'P'

Mrs. 'P' is a young, single teacher. Of her thirteen years experience, five have been at "School A". She was at "School A" during the time when there was an absent leader. Mrs. 'P' is a Senior Maths teacher and is also involved in the extra-curriculum programme of the school. Feelings of concern and uncertainty were expressed at the resignation of Mr. 'L'. Mrs. 'P' states that: "I was very concerned, I had huge feelings of uncertainty". Of interest also, is that Mrs. 'P' also presents a balanced perspective to Mr. 'L's resignation. She goes on to note that there is also a positive side by stating, "also on the positive side there may be, may be somebody would come in from a different angle and maybe offer the school things, um, things that maybe Mr. L didn't offer".

During the time of an absent leader, Mrs. 'P' spoke of the support given to her by the acting principal (Mr. 'R') as a major source of motivation. This form of visible leadership was also a source of encouragement. Mrs. 'P' records that, "It is encouraging to know that he was supporting you and that he was there".

As reported by Mrs. 'O', Mrs. 'P' also refers to the clear structures and procedures as the main reason for the successful implementation of the curriculum. Mrs. 'P' demonstrates that everybody has a specific role to play by describing the structure which consists of the heads of academics, heads of departments and the role of academic, sport and cultural activities in the school.

The stress associated with change is a theme that Mrs. 'P' pays attention to. She does, however, take this a step further by making reference to the changes and new policies that the new headmaster started making. This is significant because earlier in the interview, she displayed a degree of optimism and a positive attitude which now contrasts to the reality of the new experience. This is demonstrated by the following words "..... and I think a lot of other staff members felt that the tensions came when the new headmaster started making the changes".

(ii) Dyad participant 2 – Mr. 'M'

Mr. 'M' is a young male teacher with five years of experience at "School A". Having come straight out of university to "School A", Mr. 'M' teaches Maths to Graded 10 and 11 pupils.

Mr. 'L's resignation had affected Mr. 'M'. This was in the sense that he reports that he had a sound professional relationship of trust with Mr. 'L'. It was almost as if Mr. 'L' was a mentor to him. This is supported by Mr. 'M's statement that, "I had in the past gone to Mr. L with some quite like serious issues and he definitely helped me through".

During the time of absent leadership, Mr. 'M' responded to a question regarding staff motivation by indicating that Mr. 'R' kept people motivated by keeping things the same. He suggested that this meant that people would not worry. Mr. 'M' said, "He definitely kept everyone motivated and kept everyone not worrying by keeping things the same".

Leading on from a comment made regarding Mr. 'R's visible leadership, Mr. 'M' refers, with admiration, to the support given to him. Mr. 'R' made a special effort to be present at the sporting activities. This made a huge impression on Mr. 'M' and this genuine interest served as a means to motivate Mr. 'M' during the time of absent leadership.

When dealing with the matter of change associated to curriculum implementation, Mr. 'M' acknowledges that it was a stressful time. He also presents the positive side of change by commenting that a person seeks new approaches and means to introduce new things. He added, "That stops us from stagnating".



### **4.3. EMERGING THEMES**

As explained in Chapter Three, the process of data analysis led to the emergence of themes that provide further insights into the research question. The emerging themes are named and discussed below. These will be examined within the framework of the literature in chapter two. Some themes emerged which had not been anticipated in the initial lit review, and these will be referred to with new literature.

#### **4.3.1. THEME 1: Emotional reactions to the announcement of resignation**

This theme is a relevant starting point as it both introduces and exposes the situation of absent leadership. At the time of Mr. 'L's resignation, each of the participants reported an emotional response of one kind or another. Leading on from the above, an emotion that emerged from the participants was that of disappointment. This is associated with a sense of sadness. This is borne out

as Mr. 'D' reflects on the good working relationship that he had with Mr. 'L'. As such, this sadness could also be as a result of the sense of loss of a good working relationship.

Of the six participants, three described their reaction to Mr. L's resignation as one of shock and almost disbelief. Mrs. 'O' states this quite categorically. This indicates the enormity of a situation when the leader leaves and it is associated with uncertainty. Mrs. 'P' described her concerns by stating, "I had huge feelings of uncertainty". Similarly, Mr. 'D' also expressed his emotional response by demonstrating that his uncertainty was borne out of not knowing what the future would hold. Mr. 'D' reported that, "It is always a time of tension because no one knows who the next headmaster will be".

In addition to the above, an emotion that emerged from the participants was that of disappointment. This is associated with a sense of sadness. This is borne out as Mr. 'D' reflects on the good working relationship that he had with Mr. 'L'. As such, this sadness could also be as a result of the sense of loss of a good working relationship. The comments of Mr. 'D', namely, "It is always a time of tension because no one knows who the next headmaster will be." created an additional perspective to his emotional response to the situation of absent leadership. His own concerns about the new headmaster as well as his pragmatic approach regarding the sentiment that the school must carry on could possibly be described as an antidote for his feelings of sadness and shock.

Some of the participants also presented a perspective that counter-balanced their emotional response to the new prospect of an absent leader. Mr. 'R', for example, expressed his nervousness at the prospect of having to be the acting principal in a large school where leadership is absent. It is almost as if the enormity of the task, which Mr. 'R' describes as a "daunting task" overshadowed his own emotional reaction to the announcement of Mr. 'L's resignation.

#### 4.3.2 THEME 2: Isolation and abandonment

In theme one, the emotional reactions to the announcement of Mr. L's resignation were discussed. These could be regarded as initial responses. In theme two, the sentiment of isolation and abandonment, extends this emotional response further and takes it to the point of the stark reality of Mr. L's resignation. Mr. R's sense of abandonment and isolation is demonstrated through his statement, "there were quite a few aspects that were going to be quite new to me". From Mr R's perspective, the above statements seem to indicate a sense of abandonment in that he was unsure of the details and procedures in the school and uncertain how to maintain these and carry them forward. Together the prevailing sense of abandonment, questions of authority, competence and power were raised. One might have argued that in the absence of leadership there will be a due shortage of competence, authority and power. As such it could be argued that this situation could be a stress and an anxiety stimulant.

Speaking also to this theme, Mrs. 'O' states, "So yes, you have a sense of abandonment." Mrs. 'O' takes the sense of isolation and abandonment a degree further when she describes it as 'betrayal'. She states, "I think there were angry people, angry, and a feeling of betrayal, being left and how could he do this?" This is a significant statement as it speaks to the depth of the anxiety that emerged at the prospect of an absent leader and the potential impact thereof.

Further to the above, the sense of isolation features prominently in Mr. 'R's responses. Being placed in the position of acting headmaster, effectively removed him from the situation in which he felt most comfortable. He reports that the time pressures of the task forced him to temporarily suspend his involvement in the extra mural programme as well as some of his teaching responsibilities. These decisions limited Mr. 'R's daily contact with the learners. This resulted in a sense of isolation.

Of interest is the pragmatic manner in Mr. 'D' responded to the sense of isolation and abandonment. He refers to the general response as one in

which the staff felt they just had to move on. This response almost suggests a masking of the sense of isolation and abandonment by just getting on with the task at hand. Further to the above, Mr. 'D' never speaks in the first person when responding to questions related to emotional responses of staff. For example, he states, "I think there was a little bit of sadness, quite a lot of sadness as, I personally, liked, like Mr. 'L' but, you know, there is a feeling that a school like this has to carry on."

As indicated above, Mr. 'D' adapts a pragmatic approach and selects not to respond to questions that deal with emotional or personal issues in the first person. This could also be interpreted as disappointment or even jealousy at not being selected as the acting principal. Mr. 'D', does, however, justify the selection of Mr. 'R' as the acting headmaster by making reference to the fact that Mr. 'R' had been at the school for a long time and that Mr. 'L' and Mr. 'R' had worked closely together for an extended period of time.

Whilst it is clear that a sense of isolation and abandonment which emerged from the emotional response to the resignation of Mr. L was evident amongst the staff members, a sense of the need to continue with the tasks presented to them was also part of their reaction. This suggests that although not easily identifiable in a narrow, traditional form, leadership was in place. The leadership style that was present at "School A" during the time of the absent principal is discussed in the following theme.

#### **4.3.3 THEME 3: Leadership style in the absence of the principal**

The title of this theme may, at first, appear to be ambiguous or even a direct contradiction. In this research project, the research question deals with successful curriculum implementation in a context where the principal is absent and, whilst it is generally accepted that one of the primary roles of the principal is to provide leadership, this does not imply that leadership in a school is the sole domain of the principal. This theme will investigate leadership in the situation of an "absent principal".

Leadership, authority and power are often associated with an officially appointed position. By his own admission, Mr. 'R' stated that, other than just making sure that the school ran smoothly and effectively, he never had any specific goals during the time he was the acting headmaster. His sole desire was to hand over to the new headmaster and say, "O.K., you can take it over and this is what's happened and it's been running smoothly." With this main goal in mind, Mr. 'R' manifested a certain leadership style. This style was in accordance with the desire to achieve this goal. This leadership style reflects a position where the individual (in this case, Mr R), had the responsibility to lead the school but not the authority.

The responses of the participants indicate that Mr. 'R' adopted certain approaches and strategies to achieve his main goal, namely to keep the school running smoothly. The first of these is reflected in the responses of the participants which suggest that Mr. R regarded the unity and cohesion of staff members as a priority. A conscious effort was made to be visible and to be aware of the activities of the school. Mr. M reported, with admiration that during the period of absent leadership, Mr. R took the time to travel a far distance in order to support the boys and the staff at a rowing activity. This action motivated Mr. M.

**Mr. M**

I remember during rowing at Roodeplaat dam, he would first go to cricket in the morning and then drive through to me and speak to the boys at around mid day and then leave again to go somewhere else.

**And that obviously impressed you greatly?**

**Mr. M**

Ja, it was huge! Especially at rowing, it's so far to get there, it's a real effort. He could easily have just phoned and said, "how is it going, I can't come, I've got cricket". He would actually split his time up. Which I thought was really nice. He went to every single sport on the day.

**And you as the master in charge of rowing at the time, when you were busy with your boys and you knew how busy he was, he found time to drive through to rowing. What did that do for you?**

**Mr. M**

Well at first, I was nervous. But luckily when I used to do rowing we used to do quite well. It was quite nice, especially like, he'd come not only for the 1<sup>st</sup> eight was rowing, but also to see the under 15's for example. He would watch, just walk down, speak to the captain. That kind of stuff. (extract from interview 5)

A further example of Mr R's purposeful action of being visible is reported by Mrs. P. She records an occasion when Mr R displayed an interest in the under 15 water polo team. Mrs. 'P' commented, "It is encouraging to know that he was supporting you and that he was there". Mr. 'M' also reported this degree of interest in the school's sport by his presence at the different sporting fixtures on a particular day. This clearly made an enormous impression on Mrs. 'M', a young educator, with an interest in classroom activities as well as in school sport. Being visible does more than just improve educator morale and contribute to a general sense of satisfaction amongst educators, it can also lead to improvements in classroom practice

The second leadership action that Mr. R adopted was to implement the practices of participative leadership. Mr. 'R' delegated duties and responsibilities to other members of staff. On the one hand, he was required to do so out of necessity as the time demands of running a school were simply too enormous if attempted to be undertaken without shedding certain existing responsibilities. This action is supported through this statement made by Mr. 'R', "I was eventually forced to delegate a lot of things". On the other hand, Mr. 'D' reports that Mr. 'R' gave responsibility to different people. He notes that "you were given the freedom to make decisions, within limits". Mr. 'D' reinforces this statement by contending that people were given responsibility in the most complete understanding thereof. He states, "..... he



(Mr R) gave staff the right to take ownership of certain areas which is a good thing”. This would suggest that he delegated the tasks and gave the relevant degree of authority so as to enable the person to perform their duties to the fullest extent.

The delegation of responsibility and the taking of ownership are presented in a positive light. Mr. ‘D’ describes this leadership style as the ‘school being run by a group of people. The delegation of responsibility manifested itself in the staff being permitted to be involved in decision making. Mr. ‘H’ reported that, “Staff were starting to make decisions pretty much on their own without the entire time getting a directive from someone else”. Mrs. ‘O’ also refers to the delegation of responsibilities but approaches it from the perspective of Mr. ‘R’s leadership style. Mr. ‘R’s participatory leadership style as reflected by the manner in which involved and consulted people in decision making. Mrs. ‘O’ reports that, “He (‘Mr. R) did include far more people with roles in decision making”. From the comments of the participants as referred to above, it would suggest that Mr ‘R’s style of leadership was participatory.

A third leadership action that Mr. R employed was demonstrated through his ability to communicate effectively. The communication was enhanced by the climate and working environment that Mr. ‘R’ created. Mr. ‘H’ made reference to Mr. ‘R’ as an approachable person by noting that, “you know exactly where you stand with Mr. ‘R’ and there were certain issues that you could always approach him to listen to, think that, that was very, very reassuring”. Furthermore, the participants responded positively to Mr. ‘R’s communication with the staff during the time of an absent leader. Mr. ‘M’, for example, said, “He kept talking to us” Mrs. ‘O’ made reference to the many staff meetings in which Mr. ‘R’ were kept the staff up to date. She added the comment, “we stayed calm and positive”.

From the above, it becomes clear that during the period of there being an absent principal, Mr. ‘R’ adopted a leadership style in which he was visible and displayed an interest in the daily activities of the school, staff members were involved in decision making and communication was effective.

#### 4.3.4 THEME 4: Power and authority

In theme 3 it was established that Mr R lead the school during the time of an absent principal by displaying a genuine interest in the activities of the school and by involving staff members in decision making and adopting some of the practices of participative leadership. It was also noted that responsibility was delegated and that people assumed ownership of their areas of involvement in the life of the school. Whilst these actions can be regarded as appropriate leadership strategies, Mr, 'R' did not have any specific goals and, whilst there were legitimate reasons, he selected to rather maintain the status quo than to lead the school forward in an intended direction. Mrs. P's comment that 'He kept everything running virtually as it was. We all just carried on as if Mr. L was actually sitting in his office.', suggests that Mr. R succeeded in his intention to maintain the smooth functioning of the school. Mr. R states, "I was sort of informally appointed." This gives rise to whether or not Mr R felt fully authorized to take on this task.

It was established in theme 3 that staff members were involved in the decision making process during the period of absent leadership. Whilst this can be regarded as a positive management structure, when responding to a question to implementing changes, Mr R stated, "You have got to wait for the end of the year to do any changes." At the conclusion of the interview, however, Mr R comments that if he had known that he would be the acting principal for nine months, he would have done more at the school. Mr R states, "There was a lot to talk about...renovation of the school, white boards in the classrooms..." The actions that he refers to are limited to the physical appearance of the buildings. He did not refer to any initiatives with regard to curriculum or staff development.

Further to the involvement of the staff in decision making, Mr. D reports that Mr. R gave responsibility to different people who were responsible for different areas of the school. He adds that, "you were given the freedom to make decisions within limits...but you were given that freedom." Mr. D concludes, "I

think that it is also important that he (Mr. R) gave staff the right to take ownership of certain areas which is a good thing.”

Responding to the processes of curriculum implementation, Mr H explained the school’s executive which operates through a system of portfolios. Within this structure, as well as the broader functioning of the school, Mr H reported that there were certain areas in which Mr R did not make decisions as he felt that the new principal would be obliged to honour the decisions he had made. He supports Mr. R’s position by stating, “So, you know I felt quite sorry for him, in other words, he would say, ‘I can’t make a decision yet, I could, but it would be unfair as this would be a policy change.”

In spite of the position referred to above, Mr. H continued and commented that:

“Although decisions were made he had to make certain decisions and the new headmaster obviously had to live with those decisions that he had made. Yes, definitely, senior staff and younger staff wouldn’t maybe admit it, but staff were starting to make decisions pretty much on their own without the entire time getting a directive from someone, or maybe a bit of growing up, taking that responsibility making decisions instead of taking small issues to him (Mr. R).”

This statement adds to this theme in that it addresses power, authority and decision making in a context where there is an absent leader.

The presence or absence of power and authority are important factors in successful and effective leadership. During the period when there was an absent principal at ‘School A’ power and authority appear not to be clearly defined. The interpretation of this notion and its impact on successful curriculum implementation will be investigated in chapter 5.

#### **4.3.5. THEME 5: The Processes in the school in the absence of leadership**

This theme seeks to examine the processes that existed in the school during the time when there was no headmaster and during the period where there was an absence of leadership. Of interest and significance here are the structures and human interventions which enabled the school to continue functioning and for curriculum implementation to continue.

##### **4.3.5.1 Structures as processes in the school.**

The presence of structures and systems came through very strongly in the interviews as a reason to why the school continued to run successfully. Mr. 'R' stated that the school "survived because we have quite rigid structures in place" and that "they have been improved over a number of years and they actually work". He even went so far as to claim that the structures are so well established that a school could run without a headmaster! Mrs. 'O' concurs and comments that the school "was a machine that just grinded on". Although these comments do suggest that there were rigid structures in place that these structures provided the platform on which the processes of the school could continue, the participants inferred three underpinning aspects. These will now be examined.

##### **(a) Historical perspective**

The first aspect underpinning the structures in the school could be described from a historical perspective. The structures and operating systems that exist in the school have evolved over the years. Mr. 'H' when referring to the structures, comments that the structures had been put in place for a long period of time. He adds, however, that, "structures put in place by the school were constantly changed, updated or tweaked in certain areas." From these comments one can deduce that the structures and systems in operations during the time of an absent leader had been in place for some time. The

structures, although clear and established, also exhibit a degree of flexibility in that alterations and improvements were made on time.

The structures and systems in School 'A' that the Participants refer to assisted in the successful functioning of the school and this facilitated the implementation of curriculum during the time of absent leadership. Whilst rely on the existing structures and systems, the participants in this research appeared to be willing to take the initiative and strive to work collaboratively in order to ensure the continued successful functioning of the school. Collaboration emerged as a prominent theme and it is disc used in section (b) below.

#### (b) A clear understanding of roles

When dealing with the topic of curriculum implementation in the absence of leadership, Mrs 'P' reported that the implementation of curriculum changes was facilitated through the structures and hierarchy of the academic programme at School 'A'. She reported on the structure of the management of the academic programme and stated that "The head of academics and head of departments have their set portfolios and they know exactly what they are doing". She continues by stating that. "It is all very, very clear to them and they run". The role that each member is required to perform is, therefore, very clear and each person contributes to the overall efficiency of the structure.

#### (c ) Competency of staff

The third underpinning factor is linked to the two mentioned above as it is the levels of commitment and competency of the staff that will ultimately determine the effectiveness and efficiency of the structures. When responding to a question about the staff, Mrs. 'O' answered by stating, "The staff were incredible!". Mr. 'R' supports this sentiment when he notes that the staff are a "good group of people". It emerges that the staff members at School 'A' were competent and committed. This aspect will be investigated further in the next section.

#### 4.3.5.2 Collaboration as a process in the school

In Chapter 2 the concept of collaborative culture was discussed. Sergiovanni refers to each person's role. He argues that for collaborative cultures to work, each person must view their specific role as part of a "reciprocal relationship that spells out mutual obligations" (Sergiovanni, 2004:49). This links to the previous section in which it was reported that members of staff possessed a clear understanding of what their specific role entailed. In addition there was mutual benefit as staff members worked together, collaborated, in order to achieve their goal. The school culture that existed at 'School A' during the period of an absent principal possessed some of the characteristics of a 'Collaborative Culture'.

Leadership also plays an important role in the developing of a collaborative culture. Mr. M reported on an incident where Mr. R handled a situation in such a manner that he gained Mr. M's trust and respect.

**Mr. M**

Ja, personally, last year I made some stupid mistakes, I am not going to tell you what mistake I made.

**That is fine.**

**Mr. M**

A real bad mistake, not a bad mistake, you know what I mean, and Mr. R was in the interview when I got the job here and stuff and he could have been 'lank' mad about what happened to me. And afterwards, after I had been punished and stuff, he actually came to me and said, "look, you know, it's been done now, put it behind you." He like took a chance with me. I owe it to him big time. For sure, he really helped me out.

It remains the responsibility of the school leaders at each level of the organization as well as the members of the organization to contribute to the

creation of a collaborative culture and a culture of respect. This is achieved through each member striving towards the achievement of a shared vision and is strongly facilitated through effective communication. Mrs. O made reference to the many meetings that were held to keep the staff positive and up to date. She concluded by commenting, “We stayed calm and positive.”

In addition to leadership, the shared goal that staff members are striving towards is a central component of a collaborative culture. In the case of School ‘A’, which experienced a situation of an absent leader, such a shared vision was experienced. Mr, ‘H’ made a statement which suggests that the staff saw the vision and harnessed their energy to ensure that it materialized. He states, “The show went on and the show went on well!” In addition, Mrs. P stated, “I think that on the whole, the staff were quite supportive. We knew we had to work together.” This suggests that a consciousness of a shared purpose existed and that this facilitated the successful implementation of the new curriculum.

The quality of relationships is referred to by certain participants. Mrs. ‘P’ suggests this by commenting that, the staff was supportive of each other and adding, “We knew we had to work together”. Mr. ‘H’ contributed further that a relationship of trust existing between the various parties. When dealing with relationships, Mr. ‘R’ pointed out that during the period of an absent principal, the quality of the relationships carried the staff and held them together. In addition, Mr. ‘R’ also suggested that the relationships that existed were an extension of what had been experienced in the past in that sound relationships had been established over a period of time.

The responses of the participants suggest that the staff did work well together in spite of an absence of leadership. In some instances, however, suggestions of a specific focus towards a specific subject or activity are reflected. Mrs. ‘O’ for example, spoke exclusively about the Life Orientation programme. Similarly, Mrs. ‘P’ and Mr. ‘M’ referred only to the Mathematics department and Mr H drew all his examples from the school’s boarding establishment.

These responses also reflect the participants' frame of reference and do not suggest a context of disunity during the period of absent leadership.

#### **4.3.6 THEME 6: Dealing with change during absent leadership**

As described in Theme 1 above, being faced with the prospect of absent leadership is daunting and fearful. Teachers fear this, not only because of the unknown but because the situation gives rise to an eminent change. Dealing with absent leadership, a change in leadership is essentially linked to dealing with change. Mrs 'P' communicates this sentiment through the statement, "...and I think that a lot of other staff members felt that the tensions came when the new headmaster started making the changes." This theme examines how staff members reacted to, and dealt with this change.

The different participants all of whom experienced the situation of absent leadership, responded to and dealt with this change in different ways. Whilst Mr. 'R' acknowledges that there were aspects on an operational level that he had to change, there is evidence which suggests a reluctance to initiate and sustain any long-term and significant changes. When asked if he (Mr. 'R') implemented any new structures or systems, he responded by stating, "I didn't make any changes". A little further into the interview, Mr. 'R' qualified this statement and contended, "You have got to wait until the end of the year to do any changes".

Mr. 'D', on the other hand, approached the changes in the curriculum from the point of view that he possessed little power regarding the changes as they had been mandated by a higher external power, namely the Education Department. When asked about the changes contained in the new curriculum, Mr. 'O' responded by stating, "... at the end of the day we have little option other than to embrace the new curriculum and do with it as much as we can." For Mr. 'D' dealing with change presents as a function of his daily tasks, many of which are demanded through existing hierarchical structures. By implication, therefore, there is a sense of removal from these changes.



In contrast to Mr 'D', Mr 'H' and Mrs 'P' deal with change in an embracing and positive manner. Mr. 'H' notes, "...the school is proactive in that it is not resistant to it (change)." He qualifies this statement by referring to the large number of changes that have taken place at School 'A' over the six years prior to the interview. It is almost as if change has become a common occurrence which is reflected in his statement: "... so much change has happened that change doesn't scare School 'A' anymore." More specifically, Mr 'H' embraces change and reports on the courses that he has attended with regard to the new curriculum. The statement, "I don't want to be asking questions, I want to be answering them." suggests that Mr 'H' is proactive and is taking positive steps to embrace change. Similarly, Mrs 'P' reports to being a cluster leader for Maths. She adds that this involvement assisted in keeping the school in line with what was required from a curriculum implementation point of view.

The concept of leadership and dealing with change is referred to by Mrs 'O'. She comments that the effectiveness of the implementation of the curriculum was in fact a result of the preparation for change that was put in place by Mr. 'L'. Whilst Mr. 'L' may not have fully implemented the new curriculum as this took place after his departure, he prepared the school and the mindset of the staff to be open and embracing towards changes. This sentiment is reflected in this extract from Mrs. 'O's' interview.

"I do think they have now fully and I think that Mr L had played a very large part in change when he took over from the headmaster who had been here for twenty years. In the old school vein and I would say that Mr L did facilitate a lot of change and I think he was responsible for many things that may have been put aside that led to change and more of an acceptance of our new role and our place in society."

In spite of the fact that there are clear tensions and stresses associated with change, an additional aspect regarding change emerged from Mrs. P's responses. She commented that change can lead to improvement. This notion is conveyed through the statement: "Change brings about an opportunity for new things." Furthermore, Mr 'M' notes that change forces one

to think of new ideas and it stops one from stagnating. Change is also associated with time. At the end of the dyad, Mr 'M' reflecting on the changes and curriculum development said, "Yes, you can see the relevance now. We've learnt a lot."

The situation of an absent leader brings about a significant change in a school. This associated with the implementation of a new curriculum presents an additional dimension to dealing with change. This theme has examined the responses of the participants to this change. In addition the preparation for change by the previous headmaster has also been explained.

#### **4.4. SUMMARY**

In this chapter the data of the fieldwork were discussed. The site and the reasons for the site selection were outlined, a narrative portrait of each participant was presented and the emerging themes were named and described. Some themes emerged which had not been anticipated and in such cases additional references to literature were presented.

The themes suggest the most significant findings of the research as they relate to the research question. In the next chapter the findings of the research will be presented with reference to the theoretical framework in which this research is located.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1. INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter 4 the research site was described and a narrative of each participant presented. In addition, the themes that emerged from the interviews were identified, named and discussed. In this, the final chapter, the findings of this research project will be presented in relation to the research question. Reference will be made to the current literature in order to contextualise the findings within a broader theoretical framework. The limitations of the study will also be described and suggestions for further research topics listed.

#### **5.2 RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Emerging from the themes named and described in chapter 4, certain findings of this research project are concluded. I will name and describe each of these in this section.

##### **5.2.1 FINDING ONE: What good leadership provides for a school?**

As any organization or situation where a group of people are led, the leader, by virtue of his position, competence or style injects into the 'space' with certain energy. This creates the atmosphere in which people work and take on their professional duties and responsibilities. Sergiovanni (2000:1) refers to this as the "lifeworld" of the school. Effective leaders have the potential to give an organisation an impetus that leads to the personal development of individuals as well as the successful completion of tasks and realisation of the organisation's mission.

As experienced at "School A", the departure of the leader evoked a certain response from the staff. In certain instances the response was emotional whereas in other instances the response was practical, pragmatic and logical.

Theme one in chapter four made reference to an emotional response characterised by a sense of sadness and disappointment, shock and disbelief, tension and uncertainty. In times of uncertainty, two broad responses come to the fore. The first is a sense of disempowerment and stagnation whereas the other lies in the sense that effort is required to restore the equilibrium. Glickman (2003:88) writes that in times when uncertainty is a given, it is human judgment that will drive efforts forward. He adds that “in accepting uncertainty, we acknowledge that we must learn from others as we develop our own course of action” (Ibid:88).

In Theme 1, the emotional reaction to the announcement of the resignation, the feelings and reaction of the participants emerged. Their reactions illustrate some of the virtues that an effective leader provides. By expressing a sense of sadness and disappointment, one can deduce that an effective leader provides hope, is motivating and inspiring. Similarly, the expression of a nagging sense of uncertainty suggests that effective leaders provide calmness associated with stability, emotional certainty, consistency and cohesion. ‘*Gambare*’ means to “persevere; to do one’s best ; to be persistent; to stick to one’s purposes; to never give up until the job is done and done well” (Sergiovanni, 1990:9). ‘*Gambare*’ has been achieved when a general sense of certainty and stability prevails. It also implies that the organisation is purposefully led and that the goal and vision are clear. In a school situation, the principal and the teachers are collectively striving to achieve their goals and to realise the vision.

The successful daily functioning of school ‘A’ and the implementation of curriculum during the period of absent leadership implies that there were sufficient members of staff that accepted uncertainty as a way of embracing the future. Rather than uncertainty controlling and limiting their potential to implement the curriculum, uncertainty was accepted and embraced and viewed as an opportunity for improvement. In the context of the research question in which the matter of successful curriculum occurring and absent leadership, the findings below will address these very human actions and interventions that led to the curriculum being successfully implemented.

### **5.2.2 FINDING TWO: The micro-political tensions associated with absent leadership**

Theme one in chapter four dealt with the emotional response to the prospect of absent leadership. The second theme, isolation and abandonment extend the emotional responses further. Together, theme one and two, uncover and present some of the micro-political tensions associated with absent leadership. These issues lie deeper than the initial emotional responses of the participants and often exist slightly below the surface of observable reactions.

The first micro-political tension is the sense of isolation and abandonment. This is demonstrated by Mr. 'R's response to his appointment as acting headmaster. He indicates that Mr. 'L' gave him pieces of information and then goes on to state:

I will talk quite openly, Mr. L wasn't a big delegator, you have your pros and cons. So there were a lot of issues that, although I have been at this school, at that stage for nine or ten years, there were lots of issues that I wasn't really a part of.

The real significance of this sense of isolation and abandonment, as it presents as a micro-political tension, is established by Mr. 'R's statement that, "I couldn't wait to get back to my classes". The 'Peter Principle' which attempts to explain occupational incompetence may be relevant here. Formulated by L. J. Peter, the 'Peter Principle states: "In a hierarchy, every employee tends to rise to his level of incompetence" (Peter 1969:Definitions, para 1). This implies that in certain instances, individuals perform worse after being promoted and that people are often promoted to their level of incompetence. Mr R demonstrates a keen willingness to get back to the classroom, the environment in which he was the most comfortable and the most competent, which suggests that the role of educational leadership was not one that best suited him.

A second micro-political tension that emerges is anxiety. “A school losing its headmaster is a big thing!” These are the words of Mr. ‘H’ and they indicate the enormity of the impact of absent leadership. Furthermore, Mr. ‘H’ concurs with relief when he comments that, “we were happy in the sense that he wasn’t going as a headmaster or deputy headmaster at an independent school. That fact would have almost been as selling us out as such”. In spite of Mr. ‘H’ partly justifying his decision, a sense of anxiety still emerges from his statement.

A third tension associated with absent leadership is anger and jealousy. This is suggested in Mr. ‘D’s response to a question concerning the resignation of Mr. L. He stated: “Some may have thought that he had ‘sold us out’ or whatever, but I think generally the response was that we’ve just got to move on.” In this statement, anger is expressed in that certain members of staff felt that they had been, ‘sold out’. In addition, jealousy is expressed through the notion that another institution would gain the services of Mr. L.

The existence of tensions is a normal occurrence in organizations. In situations where there is leadership one of the key aspects that an educational leader is required to address are the tensions that are associated with change, rebuilding or curriculum implementation. Murphy and Seashore Louis (1994:277) refer to the balance that must be sought between working with individual groups and supporting their decentralized activities, while at the same time maintaining a coherent group of professionals and keeping the common vision in mind. In the absence of leadership, there is little management of these tensions. It therefore takes a high degree of appreciation of the overall common vision of the school as well as a form of leadership at certain levels in order to ensure that daily functionality continues and that the process of curriculum implementation is successful.

### **5.2.3 FINDING THREE: Leadership style in the absence of the principal**

As referred to in Chapter 2, “the days of the principal as lone educational leader are over” (Lambert, 2002:37). Lambert’s noting that a principal is no longer a “lone educational leader”, demonstrates that the act of leadership should not be the sole domain or responsibility of the principal. Concurring with this notion of leadership, Murphy and Seashore Louis (1994:274) refer to this as an evolution in educational leadership thinking as there is a shift from the view of the principal as the expert to that of supporter and facilitator of expertise that is more widely distributed. Most effective principals delegate power and authority to staff members at different levels of the organization. This suggests that in situations when there is an absent principal, there may be an absent leader, but it does not necessarily imply a lack of leadership in totality.

Leadership in general, and instructional leadership in particular, are activities that can be undertaken by educators at different levels in the organisation. Considering the function of instructional leadership, Glickman (2003:89 - 90) reporting on a study in three improving school districts noted that the principals “tended to function as a source of encouragement and support, allocating instructional leadership to others instead of serving as the all-knowing, ever present instructional expert” (Ibid.:90). This statement supports Lambert’s comments above. Furthermore, the notion that leadership can successfully exist and be exercised at different levels in the organisation was experienced at “School A”. It is argued therefore, that the presence of leadership at different levels “School A” created a climate that was conducive to the successful implementation of the new curriculum.

Despite the absence of the principal who is regarded as the leader of the school, the research found, rather paradoxically, that leadership was the reason for the efficient daily functioning of the school and the effective implementation of the curriculum. The significance, however, was that the

leadership manifested itself at different levels of the school's organizational structure and in different forms.

The structures as processes in the school are dealt with as a section of Theme 5, "The Processes in the School in the Absence of Leadership". This section reports on the responses from the participants in which the efficient daily functioning of the school and the successful implementation of the curriculum are attributed to established structures and systems. The established structures and systems mentioned above created the scaffolding on which certain leadership positions could be placed. The educators appointed as subject heads or grade heads could, within the hierarchical structure of the school lead certain departments and sections of the school. In the absence of a principal as the instructional leader of the school, certain staff members were sufficiently skilled and competent enough to either take up this responsibility or continue functioning in a previously determined capacity.

Besides the structures and systems, which could also be seen as defined and organised, a further reason for the successful implementation of the curriculum in the absence of leadership was that the staff placed in strategic leadership positions clearly understood their role and purpose. This participant reported that the staff members accepted the responsibility delegated to them and that they were sufficiently competent to fulfill the requirements of the role assigned to them.

Further to the above and when one considers the role of instructional leadership in curriculum matters, McFarland (2005:42) challenges this as an absolute statement by noting that, "What makes a leader isn't a title it's a handful of attributes, attitudes and habits that set him apart from the others." The leader's personality and inter-personal skills together with the structured procedures are not sufficiently powerful enough to provide the leader with the appropriate authority for leadership success (Sergiovanni, 2000:167). The presence of authority, therefore, is an important ingredient for successful leadership. In a situation of absent leadership it is quite likely that a certain amount of confusion exists with regard to the amount and the extent of



authority a person in an 'acting position' may possess. This significant aspect of successful curriculum implementation in the presence of absent leadership will be examined in Finding four.

#### **5.2.4 FINDING FOUR: Cultivating power and authority**

The absence of the leadership does, however, suggest that if an individual assumes a leadership role, he/she possibly lacks the necessary skills, competences, power and authority to successfully fulfil the requirements of the said role. Whilst competencies and skills may be learned and acquired, the same may not always be true for power and authority. In a situation of absent leadership, it is likely that a certain amount of confusion may exist with regard to the amount and the extent of authority that a person in an 'acting position' may have. Mr R was not the officially appointed principal. He conveyed this by stating, "I was sort of informally appointed." The research found that certain actions were undertaken to 'cultivate authority and power'. These actions were the human interventions required to provide leadership which lead ultimately to the successful implementation of the curriculum.

Within the contemporary view of leadership, power and authority are no longer vested in an individual by the sole virtue of their position or title. Effective leaders pay close attention to their actions, their methods of handling conflict and inter-personal relationships. In the situation of an absent principal, one of the greatest difficulties faced by Mr R was the dilemma presented by being placed in a position where he was responsible of the running of the school and yet, he did not have and/or was not given the appropriate authority. When considering this situation, McFarland (2005:41) suggests that, "issuing direct orders is part of the problem, not part of the solution" and continues to recommend an approach of "lateral leadership" in such situations. Lateral leadership is synonymous with leading from the side, leading from the middle. It may also be regarded as an interpretation of participative leadership.

Participative leadership is a recognised and well documented style leadership. It is often recommended as an alternative to rigid hierarchical structures. Mr. 'R' was effective in the delegation of duties and responsibility. In addition he gave individual educators the necessary authority to fulfil their tasks. Mrs P. was placed in charge of the Grade 8 and 9 Mathematics curriculum implementation. Mr M commented that the introduction of the portfolio section of the new curriculum was handled very well. When staff members have responsibilities delegated to them, it is important that they feel "authorized" to carry out the task.

In chapter 2, participative leadership was described as "the process of involving subordinates in the decision making process" (Anthony 1978:3). It was noted that participative leadership uses the expertise and creativity of subordinates to address and solve managerial problems (Ibid:3). Lachotzki and Noteboom (2005:61) extend the concept of participative leadership further by describing it as an approach where leadership takes place from the middle. They contend that besides formulating strategies and monitoring results, for leaders to be effective, "leadership activity has to be evident 'in the middle' where most of the action takes place and the company's key personnel are operating" (Lachotzki & Noteboom 2005:62). Hartsock (1981:116) referring also to the concept of leading from the middle suggest that a leader should be at the centre of the group rather than in the front. Therefore when a person employs participative leadership approaches and strategies, he/she is more likely to rally support and so cultivate power and authority.

Furthermore, by employing the practices of participative leadership, Mr. R connected the hierarchical structures to a leadership style. These structures provided clear lines of communication. This, together with the competent people in place, gave rise to an ideal opportunity that could be successfully used to embrace the curriculum changes. A participative leadership style, delegating responsibility and allowing freedom to make decisions not only gave individual staff members authority, but in turn cultivated authority and power for himself.

An alternate dimension to the notion of participative or shared leadership and the distribution of leadership tasks and responsibility to educators at different levels of the institution is the concept of 'Leadership as Entitlement'. Sergiovanni contends that "This leadership isn't indiscriminately distributed but distributed to those who have a legitimate entitlement to claim it" (2005:43). He argues further that the entitlement to lead is "often legitimized by expertise and commitment". This links to the cultivation of power and authority in that when educators are entitled to positions of leadership, the associated power and authority is also theirs to harness.

Both the premise of the research question and indeed the responses of the participants, "School A" successfully implemented the new curriculum. For this to have occurred, one could argue that the educators at "School A" not only respected Mr. R but that they accepted the power and authority from Mr. 'R'. Power and authority were cultivated by involving the educators in the process of curriculum implementation, communicating effectively and by leading from the middle.

**5.2.5 FINDING FIVE:            Creating a school climate that facilitates curriculum implementation and manages change**

In chapter four, theme five, identified structure and collaboration as processes that existed in "School A" at the time when there was absent leadership. The successful implementation of the curriculum was largely as a result of these two processes interacting with devolution of leadership and the cultivation of power and authority.

As discussed in theme five, the participants commented on the value of the structures in place at the school and their contribution to the efficient daily functioning of the school during the time when there was an absent principal. Whilst this was the experience of "School A" at the time of an absent principal, rigid and clearly defined school management structures may also be synonymous with a bureaucratic style of school governance and

organizational structures. Tyack (2005:76) records that bureaucratic school structures have featured in the history of school systems with particular reference to the mid-nineteenth century when most American school systems in urban areas were characterised by bureaucratic practices (Ibid:76). Within these systems, the structures and routine create an environment of order and an atmosphere that places academic endeavours in high regard (Ibid.:78).

Further to the above, Tyack (2005:78) warns that schools must actively guard against orderly grooves developing into ruts. The danger with this occurrence, he argues, lies in a dependence on systems and routine rather than developing individuals to assume responsibility for the teaching and learning processes. The significance of this aspect of Finding Five is that it was the structures that created the scaffolding in “School A” for the successful implementation of the curriculum and yet, almost paradoxically, a participative leadership style was established within a collaborative school culture. The collaborative school culture will be examined in the second part of this finding.

Evidence that a collaborative school culture existing at “School A” at the time when there was an absent principal is referred to in theme five of the previous chapter. The responses of the participants support the main characteristics of this culture as recorded in the literature. In addition to characteristics of a ‘Collaborative Culture’ as discussed in Chapter 2, the managing of interpersonal relationships is viewed as a central task of effective leaders. Raffoni (2005:136) suggests a communication strategy simply entitled, “Managing One to One”. In essence, the task of this strategy is to build interpersonal relationships. The interest and attention that Mr. R paid to individuals would suggest that a collaborative culture existed and that it was this school culture that contributed most significantly to the successful implementation of the curriculum during the period of an absent principal.

From the above description, it is clear that collaboration has the power to connect people. However, unforeseen in my literature review was an alternative ramification of collaboration. Hargreaves (1994:213) sounds a word of warning by suggesting a kind of collaboration that can divide. This

occurs when teachers are separated into “insulated and often competing sub-groups within a school (Ibid.:213). This form of teacher culture is termed “balkanization”. Described in a school context, balkanised cultures occur when teachers work neither in isolation, nor with the majority of their colleagues but rather in smaller sub-groups that exist within the larger school community (Ibid.:213).

In certain cases, elements of “balkanization” emerged. Mrs. ‘O’ for example, spoke exclusively about the Life Orientation programme. Similarly, Mrs. ‘P’ and Mr. ‘M’ referred only to the Mathematics department. I would suggest, however, that balkanization could become divisive if not carefully monitored. There is, however, more compelling evidence provided by the other participants to suggest that within their departments at least, a strong collaborative culture existed. Regarding the school as a whole, it is the prevailing collaborative culture and the associated benefits which contributed to the successful implementation of the curriculum.

Finally, in Chapter one it was argued that curriculum implementation is essentially associated with change. Fully collaborative cultures are characterised by their ability to deal with change and their ability to overcome the failures and pitfalls associated with the process of change. Dealing with change and implementing changes are closely associated with power and authority which, in turn, are linked to leadership. The six themes in the previous chapter examined the manner in which the participants viewed change. Mr. D, for example, expressed his lack of authority to implement change. It may be argued that he does not feel that he can be held fully responsible for them.

In the absence of leadership, the approach towards change and the ability to cope with change is almost left up to the attitude and personality of each individual person. “School A” embraced the new curriculum and implemented it successfully. This could be attributed, in part, to the carry over of the leadership provided by Mr ‘L’ prior to his departure.

In this section the findings of the research project were identified, named and discussed. The findings present the most significant items that emerged from the themes in Chapter 4. In response to the research question, the findings describe and interpret the human actions and interventions that facilitated the successful implementation of the curriculum at a time when there was an absent principal.

### **5.3 SUBSTANTIVE THEORY FINDINGS: Implications for leadership**

In Chapter 3 it was recorded that the research design for this study was a grounded case study. It was noted further that in the grounded theory approach there are no theories to prove or disprove but rather that researcher set out with a topic to investigate and that which was relevant was allowed to emerge. In addition it was recorded that the manifestation of the grounded theory approach is realised as the study unfolds and a substantive theory is formed. Substantive theories are unlike grand or formal theories and have reference to everyday-world situations (Merriam, 1998:17).

To complete the circle and to bring the research project to its intended point, a substantive theory emerges from the findings above. This substantive theory comprises of the following aspects.

#### **5.3.1 Leadership is essential**

Despite the fact that there was an absent leader, the research found that leadership activities were taking place. Duties and responsibilities were delegated to certain educators who assumed roles of leadership in order to ensure the efficient daily functioning of the school and the successful implementation of the curriculum. As such, these educators were leaders in their own right with regard to the functions they performed at the respective levels of the organisation.

It could also be argued, however, that leadership functions at the various levels in the school are more concerned with management activities that

leadership per se. Recording the responses of participants in a study on school effectiveness, Day et al. (2000:64) quotes a deputy principal from secondary school. He states:

Leadership and management overlap, but the prime responsibility for leadership rests with the Head-when she is absent an experienced deputy can do the management.

As a counter argument, the various levels of the schools are characterised by certain unique contexts. This provides room enough for an educator to exercise leadership as well as management tasks.

### **5.3.2 Power and authority are essential for leaders to succeed**

For an educator in position in which they are responsible for certain actions or tasks, appropriate and adequate authority and power are essential for the successful execution of the duties and tasks for which they are being held accountable. The research found that in the absence of a leader, power and authority could be cultivated. By employing leadership techniques that are participative, people centred and sincere, sufficient authority can be cultivated to enable the successful daily functioning and even the successful implementation of new policies. It must be added that it is unlikely that such a situation is sustainable unless legitimate authority and power are established.

### **5.3.3 Collaborative school cultures enable success in schools**

Considering the complexities of teaching and learning as well those of school leadership, it would be simplistic to assume that by merely establishing a collaborative school culture will necessarily be sufficient in dealing with the challenges and reforms that schools face. Issues such as resources, educator training and competency, socio-economic factors and political climate are just some of the aspects that influence the successful implementation of new policy and curriculum.

Despite the factors listed above, the research found that the establishment of a collaborative culture greatly enhances the potential for success. In situations where leadership is absent or frail, collaborative cultures serve to facilitate the process of dealing with change. This is particularly true when management structure of internal policies and procedures are well established, accepted and understood.

## **5.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE**

The findings of this research project reveal and present items that could be considered when developing policies and improving educational leadership and curriculum practice. I will list and briefly describe the items below:

### **5.4.1 Sustainable School leadership**

Continuity and smooth transition are important components of successful curriculum implementation. They serve to reduce the debilitating effects of the anxiety and uncertainty that is often associated with change. It is essential that policy makers introduce a purposeful programme that seeks to train and develop future school leaders. Not only will this serve as training for future leaders in education, but it will assist to retain suitable educators in the profession.

Examples of parallel programmes exist in other parts of the world. The National College for School Leadership in England (Available from [www.ncsl.org.uk](http://www.ncsl.org.uk)) serves of an example of the need that exists for adequate and meaningful preparation for potential principals and educational leaders.

### **5.4.2 Linking policy to implementation**

Regarding the implementation of curriculum, the disjuncture between policy and practice is possibly the most significant hindrance to success. In order to bridge the gap between the two, policy writers and policy makers must pay closer attention to the following aspects:



- (i) The levels of proficiency and curriculum literacy of the principals and educators that will be required to implement the policy.
- (ii) The amount of support that will be required in the development of educator guides and learner material. Practicing educators and school principals must be made part of the process of implementation if success is to be achieved.

### **5.4.3 Dealing with issues of power and authority**

In democratically governed countries such as South Africa, highly rigid and autocratic governance structures will find it difficult to remain relevant. Relevance will be achieved when school structures mirror those virtues that are regarded as most important for an economically productive and integrated society where differences are tolerated and celebrated. Policies on school governance should therefore consider and promote leadership styles that embrace the principles of participative leadership and the development collaborative cultures in schools. At the same time, however, education departments must delegate sufficient power and authority to school principals so that they are able to manage their schools efficiently and successfully implement change.

### **5.4.4 School cultures**

This research project found that collaborative school cultures are highly conducive to the development of individual talents, the management of change and the implementation of curriculum and other education reforms. Furthermore, collaborative school cultures transcend social cultures and serve to unify school communities and to encourage such communities to set differences aside and strive for a common good. In practice, the diligent pursuit of a collaborative school culture will not only facilitate the practical processes in a school, but will also enhance relationships, which are essential for the successful functioning of schools. It is therefore imperative that

principals and educational leaders give due consideration to the development of collaborative school cultures in their institutions.

## **5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH**

Every effort was made to be as thorough as possible and to deal with each aspect as carefully as possible. The following limitations to this research are recorded:

- (i) Only one site was selected for data collection. This is limiting because had the data been collected from more than one site a wider range of responses and additional perspectives could possibly have been obtained.
- (ii) The participants were diverse with regard to age, gender, experience in education and the position held in the school. The participants were selected on a volunteer basis and regrettably the participants did not reflect diversity with regard to race. This is limiting as the student population at “School A” reflects the diversity of the contemporary South African population.

## **5.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

In Chapter 2 it was recorded that the literature does not contain a great deal of information on school communities where there is an absence of leadership. Considering that only a small portion of principals of South African schools have a formal qualification in Educational Leadership and Management, one might suggest that a cause for under performance in schools is linked to the absence or to poor leadership. In light of these comments, I believe that there is a great deal of scope for future research on this topic. Possible suggestions for future research include the following:

- (i) School sustainability in the absence of leadership.
- (ii) The emergence of power bases and the use of power and authority in the absence of leadership.

- (iii) The establishing of legitimate and genuine power and authority in schools and the contribution of these aspects to sustainability in school leadership.
- (iv) Legitimate collaborative leadership implies giving power away. An investigation into the role of the principal with regard to the releasing of power and authority is a topic for further research.
- (v) Progressing from an individualised or balkanised school culture to a fully collaborative school culture requires strong leadership and very clear intentions. The practical actions that are taken in order to achieve and sustain this are a topic for further research.

## **5.7 CONCLUSION**

This research project considered the human actions and interventions which occurred in order to ensure the successful implementation of the curriculum in a context of absent leadership. Whilst the value, purpose and effect of good leadership as well as leadership strategies are well represented in literature, it is implied that success in schools where there is absent leadership is unlikely. The findings of this research revealed that whilst there are tensions in the absence of leadership, success is possible in a context where there is a clear intention to pursue a collaborative school environment and where power and authority are not the sole privilege of the principal.

Finally, schools are essentially concerned with people and the relationships that exist between them. The value of sound inter-personal relationships and a guiding moral purpose can never be over-stated. Productive, mature and inter-dependent relations are the bonds that will sustain a school in times of change, failure and success.

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# **APPENDICES**

## **APPENDIX 'A'**

Letter of permission from the Independent Schools' Association of Southern Africa to approach schools in order to conduct the research.

## **APPENDIX 'B'**

Letter of permission from 'School A' to interview staff and use their premises to conduct the research.

## **APPENDIX 'C'**

Letter of invitation and guidelines for participants.

## **APPENDIX 'D'**

Letter of ethical clearance from the University of Johannesburg.

## **APPENDIX 'E'**

Interview transcript that indicates the data analysis process using colour to identify codes and emerging themes.

