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**2015-08-13**
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# PATHWAYS TO PRINCIPALSHIP: WOMEN LEADERS OF CO-EDUCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOLS IN SOUTH AFRICA - A LIFE HISTORY STUDY

Caroline Jane Faulkner

A thesis submitted to the Wits School of Education, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Johannesburg

February 2015

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a qualitative, longitudinal study conducted in South Africa which, through the use of narrative enquiry and life history methodology, examined and explored the personal and professional pathways to co-educational high school principalship of four South African women. This is a role that, in gender terms, remains a minority position in South Africa, and internationally. The study sought to understand why women would want to become principals of co-educational high schools, particularly in a deeply traditional and patriarchal society such as South Africa: it also considered what barriers and enablers, both 'external' and 'internal', might have impacted upon their progress to principalship

Life history is the preferred methodology in feminist research, where the voices and perspectives of women are foregrounded, and this study is firmly rooted in feminist theory and practice. The four women participants in this respondent-led study were from different mother tongue language groups and ethnic backgrounds, and were purposively selected on the basis of the interesting and varied stories which I thought they had to tell, given my brief knowledge of them from the professional courses they had attended with me in the past.

The data collection involved the gathering of the personal narratives and stories that unfolded from my interaction with the participants. The research instruments, of both a semi-structured and unstructured nature, were designed to promote and encourage, not lead, our "conversations with a purpose" (Ribbins 2007). This narrative enquiry process enabled a full exploration of the personal and professional pathways of the four women from which, their life histories were developed, the data analysed, grounded theory emerged, and my conclusions were drawn.

The study revealed that the women's personal agency was a strong enabler to their progress: as a result, they were not constrained by societally imposed stereotypes and prevailing discriminatory attitudes. This manifestation of their personal agency was also clearly interwoven with their deep spiritual faith. The study shows that it was the combination of these powerful forces and beliefs, personal agency and a deeply held belief that they were doing 'God's work', which enabled the four women to achieve principalship.

**KEYWORDS: Co-educational High Schools, Feminism, Life History, Patriarchy. Principalship, Women Leaders,**

# DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university

Signed

Caroline Jane Faulkner

Date: … day of February in the year 2015

# DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Olive (1921 – 2011), a truly kind, generous, inspirational woman and teacher whose daughter I am fortunate, and proud, to be: her love and support for me has been, and will remain, the mainstay of my life.

# PUBLICATIONS EMANATING FROM THIS RESEARCH

Faulkner, C. (in press). Women's experiences of principalship of two co-educational high schools in South Africa in multiply deprived rural areas: a life history approach. *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership,43(3).*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to the following people:

My unbelievably patient supervisor, Professor Tony Bush, whose knowledge, wisdom, advice and support I have greatly appreciated: his belief in me and the merit of this life history research has been of inestimable value on the long journey I have taken to the completion of this thesis. Thank you for helping me to complete this marathon academic journey: with the sprint to the finish that you always anticipated.

The women principals who have made this research possible and whose commitment to the process over several years is a mark of their professionalism, their desire to contribute to educational knowledge in all areas, and a gesture of solidarity with me . I came to know and share so much about and with them; of their lives, their families and their work: the funny, the sad, the traumatic and the times and events in between. I remain humbled by what they have achieved and what they continue to do against the many odds stacked against them. Their contribution to my life in, and knowledge of, my adopted country will remain with me always.

The friends and colleagues in the School of Education who have given me advice, support and encouragement on this long journey; particularly my good friend, Professor James Stiles, who also introduced me to the work of Sara Lawrence - Lightfoot and portraiture; Dr Kerryn Dixon and Professor Jane Castle whose understanding and compassion during the difficult times that I faced during the research process because of family bereavements and ill health was truly helpful; to my colleagues in ELPS, Professor Felix Maringe and Dr Zakhele Mbokazi for their insightful comments on the thesis in progress; and to Dr Francine DeClercq, Ms Hanchen Koornhof, Dr Martin Prew and Professor Brahm Fleisch, who spurred me on when the going got tough, with humour and helpful anecdotes.

My family and the many kind friends who have cheered me on in a multitude of ways towards the completion of this thesis, but special thanks are due to Dr Shirley Mahlase, who in addition to encouraging me onwards, also introduced me to some very useful research in gender and leadership, the field to which she has contributed so much; to Dr Cathy Pickering and Mrs Shelley Seiler for volunteering their time to read the chapters: a gesture above and beyond the call of friendship.

My very dear husband and best friend, David Lea, whose unfailing support, kindness, patience and interest in this research has kept me on track even in the most difficult of times, of which there have been many, over the course of the six years: always maintaining his good humour even when I lost mine. His belief in me and my capability to succeed in completing this marathon task in pursuit of what has been almost a lifetime’s goal has been of immeasurable help. He truly is a very lovely man.

# GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| ACE | Advanced Certificate in Education |
| ANC | African National Congress |
| DET | Department of Education and Training (for black children pre-1994 in South Africa) |
| DCSF | Department of Children, Schools and Families (UK Government department between 2007 and 2010 following de-merger of Department for Education and Skills) |
| Employment Equity Act (SA) 1998 | See **Appendix 1** |
| ERA | Equal Rights Amendment to the US Constitution – passed by US Congress in 1972 but not yet ratified by state legislatures |
| GDE | Gauteng Department of Education |
| HED | Higher Education Diploma |
| HoD | Head of Department |
| Labour Relations Act (SA) 1995 | See **Appendix 1** |
| NGK | Nederduitse Gereformeerede Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa) |
| SADTU | South African Democratic Teachers Union |
| UNISA | University of South Africa |
| WAAF | Women's Auxiliary Air Force (UK: 1939 – 1949) |

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# CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

*Time present and time past*
*Are both perhaps present in time future,*
*And time future contained in time past.*
*If all time is eternally present*
*All time is unredeemable.*
*What might have been is an abstraction*
*Remaining a perpetual possibility*
*Only in a world of speculation.*
*What might have been and what has been*
*Point to one end which is always present.*

(Extract from T.S Eliot's *Four Quartets: Burnt Norton)*

## Introduction

### The Narrative Approach: a Personal Perspective on the Study

This is a study rooted in the voices of women principals, reflecting on a past that brought them to this present time and situation, whilst contemplating the possibilities of a future time both as women and as educationalists. Within this study a declaration of my partiality is necessary. Although my voice is muted, this partiality is disclosed in the personal perspective provided in this section. This serves the interests of a deeper explanation of why this study was undertaken; its significance to my life, as a woman, a feminist and an educational leader. It elaborates on the general significance of the research in investigating, through narrative enquiry and a life history approach, the personal and professional paths of a sample of South African women high school principals. This study utilises the life history approach as a means of enabling the women to tell their stories through autobiography, both in verbal and written discourse, thus providing a potentially rich data source.

Narrative research techniques in the qualitative paradigm increasingly show

> ... a growing trend towards employing technologies of self–disclosure in an attempt to indicate researcher positionality (Perumal, 2004, p. xi).

The nature of this study therefore encourages me to disclose a brief autobiographical account of the personal and professional paths which have brought me to this point, and which underpin my personal philosophy and a deeply–held conviction *vis a vis* education leadership and social justice: the former a means to achieving the latter, a socially desirable and

necessary end. As Curry (2000, p. 35) asserts, there is strong indication from life history studies that women as social justice leaders, work to change undemocratic cultures and the structure of institutions and society, improving the lives of those who have been marginalised or oppressed.

I am a white English woman, born and brought up in a traditional working class family in post- Second World War Britain; one of the million babies born in 1947 and thus one of the 'baby–boomer' generation. This was a generation which benefitted from the fruits of a newly established Welfare State, free health care, and free education to university level. As the second child in a close knit and happy family of mum, dad and older brother, I also enjoyed the many benefits of the proximity of the extended family of maternal grandparents, uncle, aunt, cousins, and also great aunts and uncles living in the mining community which defined the town of Midsomer Norton, where I was born. All the men of the family worked underground in the coal mines of north Somerset, with the exception of my father and maternal uncle: a salesman and a builder respectively. The women were all full-time housewives, and were stalwarts of the church and women's community groups: I remember them as strong and uncomplaining and can recall vividly the uproarious laughter that accompanied their women's gatherings, which we youngsters were often permitted to join.

The legacy of the war was still much in evidence as I grew up. The talk amongst the older generations was still of war time and what they had experienced as men and women who had seen active, or home front, service: the miners unable to fight as they were in a restricted occupation. The community was a Labour party stronghold, and my family were party members so the politics of the left, and of the working class struggle for economic rights and freedoms in the new era of a post war Britain was just an accepted part of general discourse: a politicisation process which undoubtedly helped to shape my own philosophy. The talk was of how the country would fare now, and how the situation of the poor and the working classes would be improved given that so many had fought for freedom and justice. In a traditional mining community it may seem strange that this talk of justice and economic freedom was part of women's discourse too, but it was here that I imbibed a very strong sense of both the strength and resilience of women, and the importance of their views and opinions. Yet, I was also beginning to understand the injustice of women's subordinate position in society and the

inequality of their status on many fronts given that they had so many responsibilities, not least holding their families together against the many odds which faced them in the 1950s.

It was also, as a child growing up in a small terraced cottage in a rank (row) of identical cottages built to house miners' families, that I witnessed the effects of the 'miners' disease', silicosis, on the men and their families. The men would sit together talking in the evenings in the communal back yard, after they had spent the last daylight hours tending their vegetable plots, and the sound of their coughing, as they seemed almost literally to cough their lungs up, is an abiding memory. This, among the many things learnt from my grandparents, undoubtedly helped me to understand that life is not fair, that it could be very unjust and that it was an individual's responsibility to try to make things better for everyone, but especially those worse off than oneself.

This early exposure to social and gender injustices greatly influenced me, albeit at an unconscious level in those early years. But as I grew up, and other circumstances impacted, so this awareness of societal prejudice and injustice became strong and overt, and a particular path was set. The untimely death of my grandfather from silicosis and lung cancer came almost immediately after the sudden breakup of my parents' marriage, and the consequent loss of the cottage they rented. The landlord would not transfer the tenancy to a woman, and my mother was forced to find a 'live-in' domestic job to support and house us, which necessitated moving us to another town. This brought into sharp focus, even at that early age, the problems for women in the 1950s, in establishing economic freedom, and enjoying equal rights on issues such as housing tenancy, mortgages (bonds), equal pay, and social acceptance as a divorced, single mother.

There is no doubt that my commitment to feminism, albeit not understood as such then, stemmed from these early experiences and became firmly embedded in my consciousness. My mother has been a role model in so many ways: a strong, resolute and always optimistic woman who achieved against the external social and gender odds that were stacked against her to become financially independent. She had 'bucked' the system in the 1930s by attending grammar school. Her parents had made huge financial sacrifices for her to attend, as they had a total commitment to education and the opportunities it would provide for a better life, and that this was the entitlement of girls as well as boys. This belief in education as a means to end, and an end in itself, permeated our extended family lives and was my

mother's mantra. Although her ambition to attend university was thwarted by the outbreak of the Second World War, she enlisted in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) in November 1939 aged 18, as one of the first radar operators; a position made possible because of her education.

Through my late childhood and teenage years, both in school and in the wider social context, I was aware of the prejudice which my mother encountered through factors outside of her control. The experiences of social disadvantage, legislative frameworks that worked against women, educational segregation (the tripartite system of secondary schooling was in place in much of the UK until 1965 and the introduction of Comprehensive schools), and prejudice about children from 'broken homes', served only to deepen my sense of social injustice. Aged 11, I had the educational experience of being relegated to a secondary modern (third tier schooling in a Shire county which had adopted the tripartite system). This relegation was done on the grounds of my social acceptability at a grammar school, not on academic ability as I had passed the 11 plus examination. This inequity undoubtedly instilled the will to fight back from within the system, encouraged always by my mother and grandmother: to change what it was possible to change, as they had always done.

The headmaster of my secondary modern school told the assembled new pupils on our first day, that we had 'missed the boat,' that we were 'not clever' but if we worked hard, the boys would get good manual jobs and the girls secretarial work, when we left at fifteen after our four compulsory years of secondary education. It was clear to me then that this was not how things should be, and that these words were meaningless and should be challenged. I knew, (albeit not in the words now used) that it was possible to transcend the artificial boundaries of sexism and class, and the educational limitations imposed by policies of academic segregation based on Burt's spurious scientific data from the 1930s relating to IQ determinants (data which was used to re-enforce race, gender and class differentiation in education systems in many countries including South Africa: data that was later discredited). So I determined that the best way to challenge was to prove that the headmaster was wrong. With the support of, and the financial sacrifices made by, my mother I would achieve academically, pass the necessary exams (by another route, as secondary moderns did not hold school leaving exams at that time: 1962), would attend university, become a teacher and one day be a leader of a mixed secondary school, and tell 11 year pupils what they could achieve, not what they couldn't, irrespective of gender, race, class or academic ability.

The rest is, as is said, history: I became a teacher, as did my mother who at the age of 48 finally went to college and spent the next 20 years as the primary school teacher she had always aspired to be. My whole career, now spanning forty six years, has been spent in education: teaching in, and subsequently leadership of, schools, in many contexts ranging from hugely disadvantaged inner city schools to more affluent suburban schools in UK; to my work with school principals in all types of South African schools, and as a lecturer in educational leadership at the University of the Witwatersrand. The espousal of feminism underpins everything that I have worked towards, coupled with the desire to lead for social justice and the redress of inequities imposed through prejudice and bigotry.

This brief autobiographical portrait serves to explain the underpinning values and beliefs which will inevitably inform this narrative enquiry and the interpretations which the analytical research process may draw from the autobiographies and life histories of the women principals participating in this study. Morrison (2007), in defining the process and place of reflexivity in research, states that this "requires researchers to consider that 'the sense' they make of the world is reflected in, and affected by, the norms and values that have been absorbed as part of life experience" (Morrison, 2007, p 32). I concur with this and re-iterate that my intention in this self-portrait is not to pre-empt the research process and the theories which may emerge from the data, but to set out my position and partiality, in part to explain the passionate interest in this research area of why women become principals of co – educational high schools.

## Background of the study: a general perspective

This research, through the use of a life history approach and narrative enquiry, examines and explores the personal and professional pathways to high school principalship of four South African women principals. The focus of the research is on female principals of co-educational high schools: a position which in most countries is often achieved despite many barriers and difficulties (Coleman, 2002; Evetts, 1994; Gronn, 1999; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011).

The under-representation of women at principalship level is an international issue, and the situation is manifested clearly in both developed and developing countries (Grogan, 2005; Lumby et al., 2010; Sperandio & Kagoda, 2001). "Women in educational management are in the minority in the UK but they are also in the minority in most other countries (including) those that constitute newly emerging economies" (Coleman, 2002, p. 27).

Research in the developing world, though still very limited, raises the issue of social justice and redress, and the potential impact of this gender imbalance on sustainable country wide involvement and development at all levels and in all spheres. A shortage of women in influential educational positions means that women will not be contributing fully, within the education arena, to the social and economic development of their communities and the wider society, through the full emancipation and participation of females. "…it is not just in the interests of girls for women to hold on to educational power; it is in the interests of the progress of democratic and radical education as a whole, for both sexes" (Davies, 1996, p. 61).

In the light of this advocacy for power balance in leadership, it is interesting to note that whilst 'management', as an employment category, has grown in number over the last few decades and women have increased their share of managerial positions, Wirth (2004) states that "this progress is, uneven and sometimes discouraging for women faced with barriers created by stereotypes in the workplace" (Wirth, 2004, p.14).

It would seem that, despite the equal opportunities legislation introduced in many countries in the last three decades, traditional stereotypes of women's roles, position, characteristics and abilities continue to exist, (Chisholm, 2001; Coleman, 2002; Duff, 1990; Grogan, 2005; Lumby et al., 2010; Mogadime, 2010; Moorosi, 2007; Smith, 2011a; Smulyan, 2000; Uwamahoro, 2011). This stereotyping emanates from a deeply entrenched 'enculturation' process, which traditionally begins in the home, is overtly, or covertly, continued through the schooling process, and into the workplace and wider society. That there remains an inherent belief in the veracity of these stereotyped roles is evident in the attitudes towards women exhibited in the home and the workplace, and also in the self- limitation of women

themselves in achieving against these perceptions (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Evetts, 1994; Hall, 1993; Heron, 1985; Shakeshaft, et al., 2007). As Smith (2011a) notes on the observation from her life history study in the UK of one female participant, "Looking back over her life and career she reflected that, if she had not been a wife and mother, she could have become a headteacher" (Smith, 2011a, p.517).

That there are still so few women in educational leadership positions across the world, particularly in co-educational secondary schools, despite the large numbers of women in the teaching workforce, remains an issue for schooling systems everywhere. This has a consequent impact on gender equality in reality, rather than as enshrined in many countries' constitutions, and the inequalities that this situation may perpetuate. Smith (2011a, p.8) states that in England and Wales, the most recently available statistics from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), showed that only 37 per cent of secondary headships were occupied by women, despite 57 per cent of the secondary school teaching workforce being women. However, these statistics do not demarcate between single sex and co-educational schools, which is likely to mean that the some of the women heads in these figures are leading single sex schools, which is a traditional role occupation. That it is difficult to establish with any accuracy the numbers of women occupying school leadership positions, in any country, is well known, as Education Departments do not tend to issue figures differentiated by gender. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) refer to this issue in the USA, "documenting women's representation in formal leadership positions in schools is difficult because of the absence of reliable and comparable data either nationally or within and across states" (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p.270).

However, from the sources available, it is well established that there remains an under-representation of women at this level of leadership internationally, and specifically in secondary schools (Coleman, 2001; Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Lumby et al., 2010). In South Africa, Wolpe, Quinlan & Martinez's (1997) report showed that although 64 per cent of educators were female and 36 per cent were male, it was males who occupied 58 per cent of the principalship posts in both primary and secondary schools. More recent research by Bush & Heystek (2006, p.74) stated that "there is an under-representation of women in senior management positions in South African schools" with only

10 per cent of principalship positions occupied by women in the former 'black' secondary schools, despite women comprising 71 per cent of the teaching force. The difficulty of accessing more recent national statistics in South Africa than those found in Narsee's study (2006), and the inaccuracy of those that were available, was highlighted following a Commonwealth project to map gender and leadership (Lumby et al., 2010). In more recent gender studies conducted in the Gauteng province (Naidoo, 2013; Mai, 2014), only statistics from the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) were available, showing that in 2012, women held only 33 per cent of the GDE's principals' posts across all school sectors.

This paucity of women leaders would appear to be rooted in many factors. The most common of these are the accepted or traditional norms and behaviours associated with, and often required of females; the widely held 'beliefs' in innate female characteristics, and the traditional roles and responsibilities linked to the view of leadership being a more masculine domain, and therefore unsuited to females. It has been the case in the past that women who aspire to, or achieve, leadership positions are regarded as, "deviant from the female norm" (Duff, 1990, p.38), and acting in a directly contradictory manner to conventions of gender-appropriate behaviour. She argued that, given the expectation of the nurturing and eventual wife and mother roles which women would undertake at the time that the South African women in her study had become teachers and aspired to management positions, "... it takes a brave woman to break away from the accepted pattern of a culture that has been indoctrinated over generations" (Duff, 1990, p. 45).

The designating of these traditional roles and responsibilities demonstrably impacts upon the schooling and career aspirations of girls, the organisational characteristics of the educational system and the expectations and preparation of teachers for leadership positions (Coleman, 2001, p. 76; Sperandio & Kagoda, 2001, p. 25) This is patently evident in both the developed and the developing world, though it clearly affects the latter in more overt ways. This is apparent in many developing countries, where females often only gain access to education at an older age than their male counterparts, and either drop out of, or complete only, primary schooling. This contributes to their under-representation in secondary schools and their very limited take up of opportunities to access higher education (Oplatka, 2006). These factors clearly impact upon the aims and objectives of the United Nation's Millennium Development

Goals, which have at their heart the intention to shape, and focus, the efforts of countries across the world to the achievement of a more socially just and equitable future for all. Of particular significance to this study is the third Millennium Goal which seeks to promote gender equality and empower women; its primary objective to eliminate gender disparity in all levels of education by 2015.

There has been considerable research over the past two decades on gender imbalances in educational leadership in developed countries such as the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, Canada and New Zealand (Shakeshaft et al., 2007). However, in South Africa, which occupies the unique position of being both a developed and a developing country, very little research has been done, though this situation is slowly changing (Greyvenstein, 2000, Lumby et al, 2010; Mogadime et al., 2010; Moorosi, 2010; van Deventer & van der Westhuizen, 2000). From the literature analysing a similar dearth of women in school leadership in western countries (Brown & Irby, 2005; Bush & Kaparou, 2007; Celikten, 2005; Coleman, 2001; Coleman & Fitzgerald, 2008; Gardiner et al., 2000; Smith, 2011a) and in developing countries (Lumby et al., 2010; Oplatka, 2006; Sperandio & Kagoda, 2001; Moorosi, 2010), three possible explanations for this situation present themselves: few women have the minimum qualifications needed for application for leadership positions; there is a lack of interest by qualified candidates in leadership positions, and there are hidden barriers to women applying for, and being appointed to, leadership positions.

Although there is a growing body of research on the personal and professional pathways of principals, (Earley & Weindling, 1988; Gronn, 1999 & 2007; Ribbins, 1997) this remains limited, and relates primarily to the developed world, and male leaders' perspectives: an androcentric view of the world. Hall (1993, p. 73) defines androcentrism as, "viewing the word and shaping reality through a male lens". It appears to have been the norm in research into leadership roles to extrapolate from male perspectives and experiences, the applicability of these to women aspiring to, or achieving, leadership positions.

Shakeshaft's (1989) study of research in educational administration in the United States, asked the question, "… does this research or theory include or explain the experiences of women?" The answer then was 'no ', and Hall (1993, p.73) subsequently states that this question when applied to UK would also produce a 'resounding no'.

It is therefore the female perspective of the experiences that led them to leadership positions that will be the central focus of this research. It will build upon what we know from recent research that may be generically applicable to principalship but, as Gunter (2001) says, "…although we may know a little more about where principals, generically, have come from; we still know very little about why" (Gunter, 2001, p. 97).

This is particularly relevant given that, in many developed countries, England included, the post of principal is increasingly difficult to fill, at both primary and secondary school level, with many factors identified as reasons for this problem which impacts upon succession planning initiatives. According to figures published by the DCSF (2009), 2.1 per cent of secondary headships in England and Wales were filled by acting or temporary heads (Smith, 2011a, p. 8) There is an increasingly pessimistic view held by many practitioners that the job is 'a poisoned chalice', and therefore one to be avoided. Gunter (2001) notes this as an increasingly important issue for headship planning, referring to this when she addresses the necessity of an understanding of

> Lost aspiring leaders and those who may not aspire because of the power structures in which they live and work and, in particular, how the post of headship…as they see it being lived by role incumbents, or described by policy texts, puts them off (Gunter, 2001, p. 79).

These factors, therefore, raise the question of why anyone, irrespective of gender, is drawn to a school leadership position in the context of the political, social, economic and technical factors which impact upon schools, those who work in them, and their 'work/life balance' (Coleman, 2002; Evetts, 1994; Gunter, 2001; Hall, 1996; Mogadime et al., 2010; Shakeshaft, 1989; Smulyan, 2000; Smith, 2011a). These factors also underpin the more complex nature of the 'work/home life balance' of women teachers aspiring to, or achieving, leadership positions, and how support can be provided (Adler et al., 1993), given that traditionally

women balance more roles than men. An understanding of these factors may be of critical importance within the overall focus of the study, in discovering why some women, despite the multiplicity and complexity of their many roles (Coleman, 2002; Grogan, 1996; Lumby et al., 2010; Smulyan, 2000; Uwamahoro, 2011) do decide to surmount these known obstacles to the position.

## Women's aspirations and status: an historical overview

*I want to be something so much worthier than the doll in the doll's house*

Bella Rokesmith in *Our Mutual Friend* by Charles Dickens.

For a woman in Charles Dickens' 19th century England, as in other countries across the world, Bella's chances of achieving a professional career and independent status were slim (Bennet, 1890; Brittain, 1960; Wollstonecraft and Mill, 1955 (Reprint); Kamm, 1965). However, this situation is most well documented in the novels and readings of the 19th and early 20th centuries, a vital source of understanding of the lives and conditions of women in their social groups and families. In addition to the literary and social polemics of Dickens, writers such as the Bronte sisters, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Elliott, Thomas Hardy, D.H. Lawrence and William Faulkner painted graphic depictions of the lives of women across the social classes and of the conditions in which they lived. This was also the case in the influential South African novel, '*The Story of an African Farm* '(1888) by Olive Schreiner (initially published under the male pseudonym of Ralph Irons).

However, these depictions of the lives and roles of women in many contexts were not always tales of misery and denial of self, (i.e. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, 1891; *Wuthering Heights*, 1847) but of the passive acceptance of 'the way it is', and of a patriarchal society which was 'taken for granted' in most countries, (*Odour of Chrysanthemums*, 1909; *As I lay Dying*, 1935) This acceptance was notably the case before the social upheavals of the Great War (1914-18) and, later, universal enfranchisement and growing emancipation through educational opportunities for women, (Brittain, 1960; Kamm, 1965). The question that arises from this knowledge of society, societal patterns and conditioning, past and present, is what enables some women to be something more than passive players on a socially and artificially

constructed stage, where labelling and barriers to women's careers and life chances exist (Heron,1985; Holdsworth, 1988; Walkerdine, 1985).

During the 20th century, the many societal and legislative changes to provide equality and improve women's status and employment opportunities made more opportunities possible: of specific impact were, in the UK for example, the Equal Franchise Act 1928 – voting rights at age 21 were finally given to all women - and, in 1975, the Sex Discrimination Act was passed and the Equal Opportunities Commission established. Yet as the last century drew to a close and the 21st was heralded in, little had really changed for many women in the UK, at least in terms of the take up of opportunities, and the removal of barriers, in women's domestic and professional life (Adler et al, 1993; Coleman, 1996; Coleman, 2002; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Heron, (Ed.) 1985; Holdsworth, 1988; Smith, 2011a, Weiner et al, 1997). "Women are not it seems progressing to secondary headships in great numbers, either because there are still too many barriers to progression for women or because they are opting out, choosing not to pursue senior positions" (Smith, 2011a, p.517).

Research into gender issues has shown that the odds still exist against success for women, globally, in attaining leadership positions in many professions (Coleman, 2002; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Smulyan, 2000; Wirth, 2004). The opportunities are there as a result of legislation and non–discriminatory workplace policies, but take up is still small in comparison to male leadership incumbents This lack of take-up of opportunities is therefore not because of legislative or policy practices, in the majority of democratic countries at least, but may be attributed to the lack of mentoring and support for women in achieving these positions in the workplace, (Coleman, 2002; Evetts, 1994; Hall, 1996; Moorosi, 2007 & 2010), a lack of confidence and experience, lack of support and assistance with child care and domestic responsibilities from families, spouses and others, and the lack of flexible working conditions for women specifically. The need for women especially to balance work /life tensions may be a cause of lack of progress, or motivation, in achieving leadership positions in many employment arenas. A decision not to undertake a leadership position may then be one based on pragmatism, given women's individual situations, rather than a preferred career choice. "…my personal ambitions have also been balanced, as they are for so many women, by deep commitment to my family" (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p. xi).

Research suggests that this lack of achievement of leadership positions remains the pattern in other developed countries, including the United States (Coleman, 2001 and 2002; Grogan, 1996; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Hall, 1996; Shakeshaft, 1989; Smulyan, 2000). The research in developing countries during that period is limited and, in South Africa certainly, gender issues were sublimated to other more pressing issues of struggles against the racial inequality of apartheid and subsequently to matters of racial inequity redress (Chisholm, 2001; Greyvenstein, 2000; Mahlase, 1997; Moloi, 2007; Moorosi, 2007 & 2010).

## Context of the study: gender and leadership issues in South Africa – pre- and post-democracy 1994

The educational practices inherited from the era of apartheid; identified by Mahlase (1997) and Moloi (2007), include poor teacher involvement in decision making at schools, under-representation of women in management positions and an over-emphasis on the management of day to day activities. It is clear, therefore, that educational leaders, especially those in the disadvantaged areas, were faced with school communities dealing with the repercussions of the social segregationist and discriminatory practices of the past. Research has revealed that many schools in South Africa have no skills or equity plans that redress the gender and cultural imbalances of their educators' profiles. This despite the fact that the principles of democracy, non-discrimination, respect for and acceptance of diversity are enshrined in the South African Constitution (Chisholm, 2001).

It has been observed that diversity in South African schools was not promoted and managed in alignment with legal and policy foundations for school diversity growth. As equal opportunities and affirmative action legislation was introduced to address the past imbalances, it would seem that the attention was given to issues of women's rights and empowerment, pay equity and sexual discrimination. Research on discrimination against women within the education system uncovers the seriousness of continuous deterrents to women being promoted to management positions, especially in secondary schools (Bush & Moloi, 2006; Chisholm, 2001; Moorosi, 2007 & 2010; Lumby et al., 2010): and the research

in gender equity seems to endorse the view that there is a disproportional under-representation of women at senior management level in secondary schools (Bush & Heystek, 2006).

The legacy of gender discrimination against women therefore has resulted in such legal imperatives as the Labour Relations Act (Republic of South Africa, 1995) and Employment Equity Act (Republic of South Africa, 1998), but the effectiveness of these measures to change mind-sets, through implementation and acceptance of such policies, requires further examination. Recent research shows that gender issues remain marginalised or overlooked in the workplace, both in South Africa's corporate world, private and public sectors, and also dominant in its educational system. The barriers preventing the progress of women in leadership and management are typically, white male domination in management and decision-making, stereotyped gender roles and racism. Research studies on South African career women have found that, in spite of being talented, educated and committed to their careers, the barriers that keep these women from being promoted relate to the perceptions of the role of women: and these deeply embedded traditional views hold greater sway in a predominantly patriarchal system (Lumby et al., 2010; Mahlase, 1997; Moorosi, 2007 & 2010; Mogadime, et al., 2010).

The understanding of the context for the societal and educational transformation, enshrined in the much-lauded Constitution of the Republic of South Africa is therefore of critical importance for this research study. South Africa now has a population of approximately 52 million people (census 2011). The population consists of approximately 79.7 per cent Black African, 8.7 per cent White, 8.9 per cent Coloured and 2.6 per cent Indian. Females outnumber males, as the census 2011 statistics show that the population is made up of 51.3 per cent female and 48.7 per cent male.

South Africa's policy of apartheid (1948-1994) was characterised by huge social and economic inequalities for the non-white population. But, as previously noted, the struggle for democracy, and the issue of racial equality for all, was of greater importance than gender equality (Mahlase, 1997, p.2). Pre-1994, the position of South African women, across all

racial and class groups, was subject to the same issues of patriarchy, oppression and subjugation, often enshrined in legislation, that afflicted societies globally (Blackmore, 1999; Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Bozzoli, 1991; Coleman & Fitzgerald, 2008; Hall, 1996; Middleton, 1993; Shakeshaft, 1989; Uwamahoro, 2011). In this climate of oppression and inequality on all fronts in South Africa, various women's organisations were formed.

In 1948, the African National Congress (ANC) established a Women's League. As a political organisation (banned until 1990), this provided a voice and platform for women members in the struggle for freedom, and racial and gender equity. Another platform was the resistance organisation, the Black Sash. This was formed in 1955, primarily to oppose the legislation to remove coloured voters from the roll in the Western Cape. Though initially a white women's organisation, it championed the rights of all women and subsequently campaigned against apartheid. At this time, the Federation of South African Women was formed. The constitution of the Federation was ground-breaking in its declaration:

> To bring the women of South Africa together to secure full equality of opportunity for all women, regardless of race, colour or creed; to remove social and legal and economic disabilities; to work for the protection of women and children of our land.
>
> (Federation of South African Women)

This Federation organised the march of 2,000 women of all races to the Union Buildings in Pretoria in October 1955, as part of the protest against the introduction of pass laws for African women. This march was remarkable in its racial inclusion, and it united women across race and class. During this march to the Union Buildings, the women sang a freedom song in Zulu which has passed into South African gender consciousness: "*wathinta abafazi-wathinta imbokodo:* "You strike a woman, you strike a rock, you strike a boulder, you will be crushed".

But post-apartheid South Africa (since 1994), still has one of the most unequal societies in the world in all aspects of social and financial structures Makoro (2007) states that,

> Although South Africa has one of the largest and most advanced economies in Africa, yet it remains a highly unequal society, what President Thabo Mbeki defines as "two

> economies." This refers to a vibrant first world economy on the one hand, and a much larger, informal rural and urban economy on the other in which poverty is still rife (Makoro, 2007, p. 54)

One of the major challenges for the post-apartheid government of South Africa remains the redress of these inequalities through social and educational reforms. Entrenched in this redress are the goals of social and educational transformation, primarily to achieve equity in race and gender. Of importance to this research focus is the Bill of Rights (1996) when all women in South Africa received formal recognition as equal citizens. Previously, women of all races and cultures were under the legal and social control of their fathers or husbands. Black women were disadvantaged on two fronts, race and gender; and customary law in the black communities gave women the status of minors excluding them from rights regarding ownership of property and guardianship of children.

The late Nadine Gordimer, the South African activist, novelist and Nobel Prize winner, asserted that,

> Black women were subordinate not only to the apartheid law, but to the traditional law that your father, your brothers, your uncles could order you about and tell you what to do. So they were doubly oppressed.
>
> Gordimer, (2010) quoted in *The Mail and Guardian* newspaper, Nov 19th. p7.

Although not disadvantaged in terms of race, the patriarchal structures of the country meant that white women in South Africa, particularly those from traditional Afrikaans communities, were also disadvantaged by the common law of the country, which deprived them of guardianship of children and financial rights. (See **Appendix 1**)

Globally, the barriers which exist to women achieving leadership positions are well known and researched. And in patriarchal societies where traditional patterns are linked with broadly hegemonic masculinities, these barriers may be greater in terms of customs and expectations of the male and female roles, which preclude or discourage women from seeking senior positions. Gunter (2001), Hall (1996), Evetts (1994) and Smulyan (2000) argue that the linear career model towards leadership positions, based on clear goals and professional

development access, does not take account of the realities of women's lives. These 'realities' are shown to be part of the societal conditioning, context and ideologies which determines behaviours of women, through unchallenged and/ or tacit participation by males and females, across the divides of generation, class and race in all societies and cultures (Bozzoli, 1991; Entwhistle, 1978; Holdsworth, 1988; Mahlase, 1997; Smith, 2011a).

> …in the case of the women of Phokeng, these ideologies contained notions of gender, age, royalty, property and patterns of deference and assertion … and their presence has had a substantial impact upon the structural position, experience and consciousness of the women as a result (Bozzoli, 1991. p. 14).

This 'conditioning' and 'consciousness' may also be linked to a set of held beliefs. These beliefs will probably have resulted from learned behaviours, assumptions and values (Bozzoli, 1991; Coleman, 2001; Holdsworth, 1988; Mahlase, 1997; Smulyan, 2000; Walkerdine, 1985). They may well be determined by family circumstances, prevailing attitudes at home, school or work, or through the media and advertising. These beliefs may well manifest themselves in stereotypical attitudes, which are known to be hard to change: individuals often feel powerless to change something especially when there is an acceptance of the 'correctness' of that belief and of the deeply entrenched view that this is 'the natural order of things' and as Mahlase (1997) states, "because they [beliefs] are usually buried at the level of unconscious assumptions" (Mahlase, 1997, p. 96).

The expression of this belief, as an opinion or an entrenched viewpoint, will depend upon the context (societal) and the immediate audience. In patriarchal societies, and many African countries fall into this category, there is a traditional division of labour that is promulgated: women's place is in the home, and concerned with domestic matters and child rearing. The tasks that the patriarchal society has assigned to women usually have no extrinsic status or financial value attached outside of the home. Class and religious issues and values all play a role in how deeply entrenched these beliefs are; beliefs held by both men and women. Whilst legislation and equal opportunity workplace policies demand compliance, these may be actioned only at a minimal level in some societies, as the policies are often deeply unpopular, mistrusted and covertly opposed (Chisholm, 2001; Parsadh, 2001; Moorosi, 2007 & 2010).

In terms of patriarchy which, as stated earlier, is particularly applicable to African countries, there is clear indication that many women are accustomed to being subordinate because they have been brought up to be that way, and changing this position is very difficult for many. The traditional image of a female character is one who possesses mild and sensitive virtues rather than bold ones, and is obedient and docile (Russell & Fitzgibbons, 1982). It is likely that assuming leadership roles may be opposed because this will increase women's workload which will eventually reduce the time they spend on their traditional roles. This may result in forfeiting the approval of society and those around them (Parsadh, 2001).

## South African women principals – attitudes and expectations

> It is vitally important that all structures of government….should fully understand…. Freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression…unless we see in visible and practical terms that the condition of women in our country has radically changed for the better and that they have been empowered in all spheres of life as equals...
>
> (President Nelson Mandela, inaugural speech, April 1994, from *South Africa's National Policy framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality*)

It is important to acknowledge and therefore understand the context in which women leaders work in South Africa and the legacy of apartheid which has shaped and influenced their experiences and personal life and career choices within education and society in general (Bozzoli,1991; Mahlase, 1997; Moloi, 2007). Most of today's black school leaders, males and females, began their careers under the apartheid regime. Under the Native Land Act of 1913, the Native Affairs Act of 1920 and the native Act of 1923, Black South Africans teachers were forced to live and work in designated communities that were separated along racial lines. Mahlase (1997) and Moloi (2007) have stated that these three Acts led to black marginalisation in South Africa, and also had an effect on educational infrastructure and subsequently the *Bantu* education system imposed in 1953 by the Nationalist Government (the Bantu Education Act later renamed the Black Education Act). This resulted in ineffective leadership and management practices in many of these public schools, particularly in the historically black areas. At that time, many gross inequalities, based on racial lines, were apparent. The schools that operated under the auspices of the Department of Education and Training (DET) were schools for black learners only, and these were characterised by under-funding, high teacher-learner ratios with mainly unqualified teachers, inadequate

infrastructure and lack of resources, especially schools in black townships. Thus, the major challenge, for the post-apartheid government of South Africa, is to redress these historic inequalities, and the negative legacy of these, through social and educational reforms.

This is the context in which the women's lives and their life histories are located: the apartheid past and the post-apartheid present, both of which have impacted upon them personally, directly or indirectly; upon their professional pathways, and the principalship posts they have achieved.

## Aims of the study

This research builds upon a gender focus to explore the career and life experiences of women principals in South Africa. It attempts to answer the question, posed in much of the existing gender research, as to what motivates or drives women to undertake the role of co – educational high school principalship. It explores the research into barriers and constraints applicable to women in South Africa. The research interrogates, primarily, the life experiences and the career/ personal pathways of four women principals, through the telling of their life stories in autobiographical form.

It is intended that this research will contribute to the body of knowledge of gender and leadership in the South African educational context: an equality area which has been overshadowed by the imperative of understanding and addressing racial inequity. It is also intended that the research will contribute to the body of knowledge nationally and internationally on female leadership of co-educational secondary schools. More specifically, it will contribute to an understanding of the nature of principalship and the driving or motivating factors which draw, or might tend to draw, women to this role, against the odds.

## Conceptual framework

This study is located within a theoretical framework which encompassed narrative enquiry and life history within the concept of feminism, and feminist theory, where the perspectives of women are foregrounded and central to the research focus. As feminist theoretical

positioning requires; women leaders' voices need to be heard, and their experiences expressed: not through a 'male lens' and an 'androcentric view' of the role (Hall, 1993). This is a key tenet of feminist theory, but, it is evident that the reality of women's lives, and the experiences specific to their gender, remain missing areas of focus in much of the gender and leadership research, as is noted by many research studies (Coleman & Fitzgerald, 2008; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Gunter, 2001; Mahlase, 1997; Middleton, 1993; Smulyan, 2000; Weiner et al., 1997).

Grogan & Shakeshaft (2011) have posited, it is not that women "… in [leadership] situations … have to do anything to make change, they are the change" (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p.25).The desire to change things 'for the better' is held to be the *leitmotif* for women who have aspired to, and those who have achieved, principalship (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2011; Smith, 2011a; Smulyan, 2000). This belief is rooted in the tenets of social justice and equity, and the knowledge that the provision of quality educational opportunities has a direct bearing on life chances, and therefore choice and greater opportunities of achievement for most (Halsey & Young, 1997).

It is this notion of change and change agency, coupled with the concepts of life chances and choice, which is introduced in feminist research into women's career pathways to principalship, as an integral element of social justice and of ways in which social justice is viewed and pursued; (Curry, 2005; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Mogadime, 2010). I believe that issues of social justice, and women's motivation to become principals against the known barriers and odds as outlined here, are probably strongly linked. This belief derives partly from my own educational opportunities, teaching career and educational leadership experiences. But it is also based on the available research on women into leadership, and feminist theory in general (Adler et. al., 1993; Coleman, 2001 & 2002; Curry, 2005; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Heron, 1985; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Holdsworth, 1988; Moorosi, 2010; Smith, 2011a; Weiner et al., 1997).

However, this respondent-led research will allow theory to emerge through the use of the life history approach. It will not provide overt theoretical scaffolding in an attempt to prove, or

disprove, the social justice theory within a feminist framework. Although not generalisable from such a small sample, the research may provide reasons why women would want to achieve principalship, both in the developed and developing world, in what is still widely regarded as a male leadership preserve: co-educational high schools. It is intended that the theory that emerges may help to answer the key research question and sub questions:

## Research questions

The main research question is: *Why do women become principals of co-educational high schools in South Africa?*

There are also two sub questions:

1. *What are the barriers to women in achieving this position?*
2. *What are the enablers to women achieving this position?*

## Overview of the study

The study is presented in nine chapters. It is structured as follows:

**Chapter One: Background and Context of the Study**

This chapter introduces the study which is rooted in the voices of four women principals reflecting on a past that brought them to this present time and situation, whilst contemplating the possibilities of a future time as women and as educationalists. It explains how the study has utilised the life history approach as a means of enabling the women to tell their stories through autobiography, both in verbal and written discourse. The chapter elaborates on the general significance of the research in investigating, through narrative enquiry and a life history approach, the personal and professional paths of this small sample of South African women high school principals. It also provides a deeper explanation of why this study was undertaken, and its importance to school leadership and gender issues: its focus is on female principals of co-educational high schools and how their principalships were achieved. This remains a position which, in most countries, is held only by a small minority of women: it is still considered a male preserve and, therefore, is achieved against this prevailing belief,

particularly in deeply traditional, patriarchal societies, which is the case in South Africa, despite its progressive gender equity legislation post - apartheid. The chapter explores the background and context to the study's focus, introducing national and international debates and research to locate this research within both the specific and the wider contexts of women's pathways to principalship against the known odds. It poses the main research question, and the two sub questions, which underpin the study.

**Chapter Two: Literature Review**

This chapter examines the research into, and literature emanating from, gender studies in leadership, and theories and studies of feminism pertinent to the focus of the study. Much of the literature examined for this research into women pathways to principalship in co-educational high schools emanates from the United States of America, Canada, Britain, New Zealand and Australia. A limited, but growing, number of research studies from South Africa, and the region, has been drawn upon including Lumby et al., (2010); Mai (2014); Mahlase, (1997); Mathipa & Tsoka (2001); Mogadime, (2010); Moorosi; (2007 & 2010); Naidoo, (2013); Uwamahoro, (2011). This indicates an increase in the awareness of the importance and centrality of this area to mainstream school leadership issues in South Africa which, perhaps uniquely, constitutes both a developing and a developed country. However, the 'Western' literature base does have intrinsic merit in providing a basis of research knowledge in this specific gender and school leadership focus area, and this chapter shows that there is much resonance in the thematic issues emerging from the international research with the South African context of gender equity redress, and the barriers to achieving this. Chapter Two demonstrates how many of these studies seek to establish why, despite legislation for gender equity, there appears to be only limited impact on the numbers of women occupying senior leadership positions in education, and indeed in other occupations. This is particularly the case for women aspiring to, or achieving, principalship of co-educational high schools which, unlike primary schools or girls' high school leadership, is not traditionally viewed as a female preserve, and the literature available in this specific domain remains limited.

**Chapter Three: Methodology**

This chapter sets out the rationale for the qualitative research design and methodology chosen within an interpretivist paradigm. It provides reasons why the life history approach was of particular interest to me, and considered the most appropriate for the research focus: the personal and professional pathways of a purposive sample of four women principals of co-

educational high schools in South Africa. The chapter details the methods and instruments used in the data collection of the female participants' life stories, and how my transcription and analysis of these stories was rooted in grounded theory. It was through grounded theory generation, that I was able to present and analyse the data collected from each of the four women. From these life stories I subsequently identified and categorised the emerging theory. This chapter also illustrates the dilemmas which are presented to the individual researcher using life history methodology, and the ways in which these were managed, if not actually overcome, in the lengthy process which was involved in the collection, and transcription, of the data.

**Chapters Four to Seven: Data Presentations – the Women's Stories**

These chapters provide a detailed presentation of the data collected and drawn from the narratives of the four women participants which have revealed their personal and professional pathways to principalship. Each of the next four chapters presents the individual's life story, as each has told this to me over the course of our lengthy engagement in this study, and the findings which have emerged from my interpretations. The four chapters represent and reflect very closely what the participants have told me in these very personal and in depth conversations between us. The findings are presented through the transcription of their stories and some researcher commentary, including the use of direct quotes to illuminate and support key thoughts, incidents or experiences as related by the women.

**Chapter Four:** Amelia's Story - *Go big or go home!*

**Chapter Five**: Maropeng's Story – *Fly with the eagle, fly high above the storm*

**Chapter Six**: Elanie's Story –*Teaching was in my blood*

**Chapter Seven**: Phumla's Story – *Following in my father's footsteps*

**Chapter Eight: Discussion and Analysis**

This chapter sets out the analysis of the data collected from the life stories of the four women principals. These provided the narrative exposition of the women's personal and professional pathways to principalship. As life history methodology requires of the researcher, I have interpreted these stories, created the life history accounts and, from these narratives, I have identified the emerging themes: a grounded approach (Dimmock & Lam, 2012; Elliot, 2005). This provided the basis upon which to present the analysis of the themes which have emerged

and which have been categorised as I compared the stories and identified the key areas that were evident from the data collected. This process of identification and comparison was continuous from the commencement of the research process, and throughout the time spent together, as the women's narratives were fleshed out over the two to three years of interactions and 'conversations with a purpose' that constituted the substance of this study.

**Chapter Nine: Conclusion**

This concluding chapter addresses the original research questions showing how these have been answered and also considers the significance of the study in theoretical and practical terms. In addition it will provide my recommendations for further research in this critical field of women's access to high school principalship, and practical recommendations for this in practice rather than in the rhetoric of equal opportunities legislation. It is clear that the four women's experiences of the pathways to principalship have been adversely affected by the prevailing and entrenched patriarchal attitudes within the communities in which they have lived and worked. As research shows, these attitudes will not easily be changed simply because policy and legislation has. This is particularly so in South Africa where patriarchy continues its hold with regard to power over, and subjugation of, women (Bozzoli, 1991; Chisholm, 2001; Lumby et al., 2010; Mahlase, 1997; Mai, 2014; Mogadime, et al., 2010; Moorosi, 2007 & 2010; Naidoo, 2013; Perumal, 2007). Liberal feminism has, through the provision of equal opportunities legislation and other measures, failed to bring about real change. It would seem that a radical feminist approach is more appropriate in the prevailing circumstances, given the need to change attitudes to women's rights to hold positions of leadership and authority, and their competence to do so.

## Chapter overview

Chapter One has sought to explain how, and why, this life history research is located within the context of gender issues, school leadership, and global trends and change in education, but specifically within the South African context of educational transformation, redress and equity, post-1994. It also indicates researcher positionality as is accepted practice in life history qualitative research studies and also locates the research within a broadly feminist perspective. The research explores the life experiences and career paths of four South African women leaders who are co-educational high school principals.

Chapter Two will present a review of conceptual and empirical literature on this topic, drawing on international, South African, and regional, sources

# CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

## Introduction

This chapter examines the research into, and literature emanating from, gender studies in leadership, and theories and studies of feminism pertinent to the focus of the study. Much of the literature examined for this research into women's pathways to principalship in co-educational high schools is drawn from the United States of America, Canada, Britain, New Zealand and Australia. It is clear that from South Africa there is still a limited, though growing, body of research in this field, and particularly of studies focusing solely on women high school principals (Lumby et al., 2010; Mai, 2014; Mogadime, 2010; Moorosi; 2010; Naidoo, 2013). This indicates an increase in the awareness of the importance and centrality of gender in mainstream school leadership issues in South Africa which, perhaps uniquely, constitutes both a developing and a developed country.

However, the 'Western' literature base does have intrinsic merit in providing a basis of research knowledge in this specific gender and school leadership focus area. It is evident that there is much resonance in the thematic issues emerging from the international research, with the South African context of gender equity redress and the barriers to the full implementation of this laudable and constitutionally enshrined intention (Chisholm, 2001; Moorosi, 2010). Many countries in the developed world have recognised the need for research into the field of women in education leadership, and significant studies began to emerge in the 1980s and 1990s in this increasingly important area (Acker, 1989; Bell & Chase, 1993; Blackmore, 1999; Coleman, 1996 & 2001; Edwards & Lyons, 1994; Evetts, 1994; Grogan, 1996; Hall, 1999; Middleton, 1993; Shakeshaft, 1989; Weiner, 1997). These earlier studies undoubtedly paved the way for a more mainstream approach to, and recognition of, the importance of, this research field in the 21st century. All these studies were linked to the advent of gender equity through equal opportunities legislation in both the developed and developing world, and the increased societal and political awareness of the importance for any country's economy of the reform of gender inequities (Davis, 1996).

Many of these studies sought to establish why, despite the policies and legislation to redress gender inequity, there appeared to be only limited impact on the numbers of women occupying senior leadership positions in education, and indeed in most other occupations (Bowles, 2012; Chisholm, 2001; Coleman, 2002; Schein, 1994; Wirth, 2004). This is particularly the case for women aspiring to, or achieving, principalship of co-educational high schools which, unlike primary schools or girls' high school leadership, is not traditionally viewed as a female preserve (Coleman, 2005; Edwards & Lyons; 1994). Hall (1993) argued that the research literature in the main is still focused on leadership from a male perspective, and viewed through a male lens. Grogan & Shakeshaft (2011) and Gunter (2001) argue that this androcentrism fails to take into account the voices of women, whose lives and experiences are very different from their male counterparts, and it is their stories that need to be researched to gain a more composite picture of women in, and aspiring to, leadership. Smulyan (2000), in her study of three women elementary school principals in the United States of America, argues that in educational leadership

> There have been few studies of women … in part because women have been underrepresented in positions of educational leadership and in part because traditional patterns of research in the field have reflected the male dominated nature of school administration (Smulyan, 2000, P.16).

The research emphasis that she refers to would clearly then reflect the much criticised androcentric view (Hall 1993) within leadership studies of women high school principals' career paths and traits, as this is still, predominantly, a male occupation and women's progress and aspirations to leadership within this school context remains relatively unknown and understood (Coleman, 2005). This, though lamentable, is unsurprising given that most female principals are located in primary schools (Coleman & Fitzgerald, 2008. P.120). Traditionally, this is where it is widely regarded that women, who make up the majority of the teachers in that context, possess 'mothering' attributes that are more suited to the principalship role in what is widely regarded as a caring, nurturing environment.

But, as this review of the available literature makes very clear, despite the limited research with a specific focus on female co-educational high school principals and their career pathways, there are generic issues that emerge from the gender literature that provide insights for this study. This literature review, therefore, draws upon work from international and

national research within the broad frame of gender and leadership studies. It does, however, focus specifically on those studies which have explored gender stereotyping, including discriminatory practices and attitudes that manifest themselves in societally and organisationally imposed, and accepted, external and internal barriers to women's potential progress to principalship.

The review also explores the small, but growing, body of research on how women's personal agency, and agentic behaviours may inform their pathways to senior leadership roles, in previously traditional male domains, and the choices that they are able to make against the many known odds they face. Underpinning this review is feminist research literature which is a key component of the conceptual framework for this study. In the field of gender and leadership, research, and in the use of life history specifically, feminist ideology and theories are central to the ways in which women's aspirations and progress into leadership can be identified and understood. It is this focus which has informed the development of the conceptual framework for this gender based study. I re-iterate that although there still remains limited research and literature available from South Africa, particularly within the specific context of female principalship of co-educational high schools, there are some very valuable, and more recent, sources on which to draw from the field of educational leadership and gender generally in the South African context (Greyvenstein, 2000; Lumby et al., 2010; Mai, 2014; Mathipa & Tsoka, 2000; Mogadime, 2010; Moloi, 2007; Moorosi, 2007 & 2010; Naidoo, 2013).

## Women into educational leadership: concepts and debates

As Smith (2011a) makes clear, the body of literature on career paths of women in education and into principalship is primarily concerned with barriers, external and internal, which are considered to inhibit their career progression. These barriers are constantly referred to as both societally engendered and 'imposed' on women, and self-imposed by women themselves (Coleman, 2001; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Mahlase, 1997; Mogadime, 2010; Smith, 2011a; Smulyan, 2000). This notion of barriers is generally clustered into areas of focus which include the shaping of, and motivation for, women's aspirations; childhood influences, overt and covert; discrimination and prejudice against women both in society and in the

workplace; and the overall gendered socialisation of girls and young women which may impact negatively upon their idea of self, and on the life and career choices open to them (Adler, et al., 1993; Coleman & Fitzgerald, 2008; Grogan, 1996; Hall, 1996; Middleton, 1993; Moorosi, 2007 & 2010; Shakeshaft, 1989; Walkerdine, 1985).

Research into pathways to education leadership, for men and women, indicate that women have had restricted access to leadership and principalship positions in the past (Adler, et al., 1993; Coleman, 1996 & 2002; Evetts, 1994; Grogan, 1996; Shakeshaft, 1989). This restricted access has been shown to include social attitudes which would seek to deny women leadership positions: this includes the influence of patriarchy, gender stereotyping, class issues and religious beliefs (Hall, 1993 & 1996; Gunter, 2001; Moorosi, 2007 & 2010; Parsadh, 2001). It is also argued that false predictions based on gender and class may impact on an individual's sense of self and become part of that person's identity, influencing expectations and confidence (Coleman, 2001 & 2002; Smulyan, 2000; Smith, 2011a).

As I have stated earlier, of major significance to this study is that early research into educational leadership and management roles, styles and approaches, and subsequently into career pathways for principals, was conducted primarily through male perspectives, affording only male voices and perceptions. Shakeshaft (1989) argues that leadership research was culturally biased towards a masculine view of leadership, and of leadership as a masculine activity. This perpetuated what Hall (1993) has referred to as an androcentric view of leadership, which implied that management and leadership positions were for men and that male characteristics were presumed to be the most suitable to enable effective leadership to be enacted in schools. This androcentrism was undoubtedly one of the most pervasive barriers to women in the pursuit, and achievement, of management positions. It was clear that male characteristics deemed, for example, to include authority and strength, self - discipline, single-mindedness, rationality and ability to control emotions, were held to be most appropriate for the position of school principal, particularly in a high school environment, (Adler, 1993; Coleman, 2002; Evetts, 1994; Grogan, 1996; Shakeshaft, 2007). It must be emphasised that this view on desirable leadership qualities, deemed to be held only by men, applied not only to the education world, but to management positions in the corporate world (Bowles, 2012; Wirth, 2004).

The persistent stereotyping of both men and women is considered to be a significant factor in the slow growth of women applying for, and obtaining, principalship positions in primary or secondary schools. This is despite legislation in many countries to introduce equal opportunity policies, equal pay and conditions of service which helped to mitigate the problems experienced, primarily by women, of domestic and child-care responsibilities. The need for women to balance the competing, and often conflicting, demands of career and home, to achieve what is termed 'a work/ life balance', is generally held to be greater than for men, as well as much more difficult. This again has much to do with the way women are expected to hold multiple roles and responsibilities, particularly in more traditional communities and societies. This expectation of holding a multiplicity of roles is rarely applied to men, and therefore creates few, if any, work/life balance issues (Coleman, 2001, 2002; Moorosi, 2010; Shakeshaft et al., 2007; Smulyan, 2000). It is evident that the titles of much of the research, represented in books and articles, into women's pathways to principalship indicates this view of the multiplicity of women's roles very strongly:

'*Women Principals at Work: Balancing Acts'; 'Women as Headteachers: striking the balance'; 'Women as educational leaders: Opening windows, pushing ceilings', 'Career and Conflict: A Woman's Guide to Making Life Choices*'; '*Women in management: Glass ceilings or slippery poles?*'.

But there is also the contention that, although there are significant barriers to women's career chances and choices, women are not simply passive recipients of gendered socialisation; as Smith (2011a) argues *"*They can, and do, make decisions for themselves, and take steps to shape their own lives and careers" (Smith, 2011a, p.8).

Coleman (2002) states that feminists of the liberal tradition argue it is equity and equality of opportunity which will eradicate the 'barriers' to principalship that are rooted in societal conditioning and stereotyping. This promotes the view that women can and should 'take control of their destiny' through availing themselves of the opportunities that have been created through policies of equity and redress. However, she argues that, "this view does not take into account the distribution of power in society" (Coleman, 2002, p. 9). In patriarchal societies, political structures and power, including economic power, are primarily held by men, but this may also be the case in other societies which are not overtly patriarchal. Feminists argue that knowledge, truth and reality have been constructed androcentrically, and that men's experiences were held to be the norm: women's lives, careers, experiences,

characteristics and worth were therefore measured against this artificially constructed norm. Feminist theory is grounded in women's lives, and women are considered to have the responsibility for taking decisions about their lives "… feminism places women at the centre, and gives us ways of analysing, understanding and relating to the world" (Adler et al., 1993, p. 35). This understanding enables women to take control of situations and circumstances which impact upon them, and upon on their life choices and chances (Blackmore, 1999; Heron, 1985; Holdsworth, 1988; Walkerdine, 1985; Weiner et al., 1997; Weiler & Middleton, 1999).

It is therefore clear from research internationally and nationally that women face various challenges when accessing leadership positions. Their status and position as women is still, in many societies, usually associated with caring, nurturing and supporting, and therefore in these traditional societies they are deemed to be more suited to domestic duties, not the demands of leadership (Mathipa & Tsoka, 2000, p. 329). These challenges to access and acceptance include sex-role stereotyping and socialisation, issues of impact of context and tradition, overall discrimination, lack of self-confidence, work/life balance problems and tensions (Coleman, 2001; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Shapira, Arar & Azaiza, 2011; Smith, 2011a; Smulyan, 2000). This is particularly the case in the education context, where the under-representation of women in leadership and management positions is evident at all levels; in primary and secondary schools as well as in higher education (Coleman, 2001; Kaparou and Bush, 2007; Lumby et al., 2010; Perumal, 2007). As Shapira et al., (2011) posit

> In practice, even before women are appointed, they experience social opposition … this opposition is not professional … but stems from what is perceived as the threat posed by women's entry into the public sphere and positions of central authority in the community (Shapira et al., 2011, p. 39).

However, it is now increasingly evident that the value of women's roles in the workforce at senior levels is gradually being recognised as providing a major contribution to the social and economic development of a country. As argued by Cubillo & Brown (2003) the female workforce represents huge potential in increasing a nation's economy

> Women now become viable and valuable contributors to the workforce, not only on the sticky floors doing low-paid, menial but often essential jobs,

> pushing through the glass ceiling and pushing outside the glass wall to become leaders in their own right (Cubillo and Brown, 2003, p.278).

In attempting to determine general societal aspects which have impacted upon women in the past, and in many instances continue to do so, researchers have described the barriers to accessing careers in education management and leadership as 'external' and 'internal', (Coleman, 2002 & 2005; Hall, 1993 & 1996; Lumby et al., 2010, Moorosi, 2010). While individuals can overcome 'internal' barriers when they change their behaviour, 'external' barriers require social and institutional change, which liberal feminists would argue will be achieved through greater provision of equality of access and equal opportunity legislation. It is further argued in much research, that some barriers may be 'hidden' or covert, and that there is a critical need to identify, and thus address, those covert barriers which impact upon women's ability and/or desire to gain access to senior level posts via management experience, and development of management competence (Colman & Fitzgerald, 2008; Kaparou & Bush, 2007; Smulyan, 2000; Sperandio & Kagoda, 2001).

However, whilst this is incontrovertible, research has indicated that some of the 'external' barriers which can influence the lives and career paths of women, at both a personal and professional level, are societally imposed and accepted as a result of very deeply held notions, possibly at the unconscious level (Blackmore, 1999; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Mahlase, 1997; Mogadime, 2010; Perumal, 2007; Smulyan, 2000).These notions may be revealed in the spoken, or unspoken, beliefs in women's 'unsuitability' for leadership, which are related to gender stereotyping and societal conditioning, not to any proven aspect of performance or ability (Kaparou & Bush, 2007; Sanal, 2008; Shapira et al., 2011). But this conditioning also relates to the ways women may perceive themselves and accept the stereotypes. Therefore these barriers may be both external and internal as a result of entrenched and traditional societal attitudes regarding gender roles, and can be regarded as existing because of the passive acceptance of socialisation and gender stereotypes, which are known to have a major impact and influence upon the attitudes, behaviours and aspirations of women. It is around this contention that Smith (2011a) posits the notion of women's agency as being the way that these barriers are overcome, and that women can exert positive agentic behaviours that enable them to choose their personal and professional pathways, even though

this may mean flying in the face of traditional and cultural expectations of women's place in society. Tallerico (2000) describes this as individual agency and it is clearly evident in those women who display the known agentic characteristics of self-confidence, self-belief, ambition, aspiration and assertiveness.

Personal agency and agentic behaviours is a key issue in the debate on motivating factors for women to achieve principalship in any educational setting (Grogan & Shakeshaft 2011; Smith, 2011a). These are enabling factors and are often strongly linked to women's inclination to work for social justice, especially in the education context. Blackmore (2006) states that social justice in the gendered arena was understood at the turn of the 20th century as access to mainstream educational institutions on the same terms as men: as equals and as gender neutral citizens. Therefore, women teachers could become principals of girls' schools (a feminine domain) but not of co-educational or boys' schools. Both approaches effectively positioned women's leadership capacities as complementary to dominant norms (Blackmore, 2006).

Blackmore (2006) also contends that feminist scholars in educational administration focus on the shortage of females in leadership and on issues of leadership (teaching and learning) as well as on context (the cultures of leading and learning). She further argues that these scholars have viewed schools as institutions for citizenship formation in social democracies: and that the concept of social justice is viewed as the means of addressing issues of inequality, power, responsibility and ethics. Research examining social justice in the field of education has typically framed the concept of social justice around several issues including race, diversity, marginalisation, morality, gender, and spirituality: it is also accepted that age, ability and sexual orientation should be added to the discourse. Normone & Gaetane (2007) found that the socialisation experiences of the women leaders in their study included critical reflection about issues of inclusion, social justice, diversity, and how this reflection can shape and influence possibilities and desires for careers in education and educational leadership. Lee et al., (1993) assert that there is a renewed interest in social justice and many women in leadership can advance its cause

> As women achieve positions of influence and participate in policy decisions, they have opportunities … to alter the undemocratic culture and structure of institutions and society, improving the lives of those who have been marginalised or oppressed (Lee et al., 1993, p. 1).

The analytic and critical discourse on the impact of all these factors on the lives of women within the societies in which they live and work has become the cornerstone of the feminist debate. This, I believe, has significant relevance to the study of women's pathways to principalship with regard to the impact of feminism on their lives and careers. The various feminist theories have partially framed the theoretical context of the study, as outlined in chapter one, and these theories are now presented; their direct, or indirect, relevance to the critical debates on factors influencing women's lives, career progression, barriers and enablers to women in accessing leadership positions will be discussed later in the study.

## Feminism

"Feminist educational theorising and practice now provides … many of the 'domain' assumptions we use in talking about gender issues in education" (Arnot, 1993, p.2). It is widely acknowledged in feminist literature that the term 'feminism' was coined in the USA (Friedan, 1965).Women marched through the streets with signs reading 'Equal Pay for Equal Work', 'The Personal Is Political,' and 'Pass the ERA [Equal Rights Amendment]'. These images, however, do not do justice to the complexities of the feminist social movement. Feminism, as an academic focus, continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s, its task being to influence research in the humanities and social sciences (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Weiner, 1997). Feminism, in its broadest form, is the movement for the political, social and economic equality of women and men. However, there is greater reservation about the label 'feminist' than about the actual goals, values and achievements of feminism. This movement essentially embodies an active commitment to equality and respect, specifically between men and women, and is against oppression and discrimination of any human being on any grounds. Primarily the movement is seeking for women the same opportunities and privileges that society gives to men: asserting the distinctive value of womanhood against patriarchal denigration (Weiner, 1994).

Within the parameters of the definition of feminism as shown above a feminist is an individual who will challenge all forms of discrimination against women, is focused on women's rights, as well as their promotion in society to positions which are not gender specific or determined by societal influence or traditionally-held beliefs. Four main types of feminism were originally categorised: viz. *liberal feminism, socialist feminism*, *radical feminism* and *cultural feminism*, and two other categories have been added in more recent years; *womanism* and *post- structuralist feminism.* All six categories, as described by Coleman (2002); Hesse-Biber (2007) and Weiner (1997), are similar in that they focus on the experiences in women's lives, their conceptual understanding of marginalisation and the oppression, or potential for oppression, of women within their own primary cultural, and sub-cultural, contexts.

**Liberal feminism**

Liberal feminism concerns itself with equal access to resources and opportunity in society. The liberal feminist advocates such reforms as legal equality between the sexes, equal pay for equal work, and equal employment opportunities, and does not accept that complete equality requires radical alterations in basic social institutions. Many of the key issues raised in the 1970s women's movement (e.g., the Equal Rights Amendment) were strongly influenced by liberal feminism. The societally imposed differences between men and women were seen as the product of a mystique that could be erased, or an imposition that must be overcome through various efforts including legal activism. Women could be seen to be as capable as men of combining a career with family. Liberal feminist theory manifests itself in three themes namely: equality, stereotyping and discrimination, and liberal feminism takes the view that inequity could and should be eliminated by developing policies of equal opportunities for women (Middleton, 1993; Weiner, 1997: Coleman, 2002).

**Socialist feminism**

Socialist feminism focuses on the belief that societal economics and class structures (Marxist 'class-ism') lead to multiple forms of oppression, and pays less attention to issues of racism and sexism. In the 1970s, women within the socialist movement were influenced by the liberal feminists' focus on gender, resulting in socialist feminism (Middleton, 1993, p.43). Socialist feminists remain focused on the inequalities created by capitalism more generally, rather than male power and privilege, and build coalitions with other humanist groups who share their critique of the capitalist system. Socialist feminism further asserts that class has an

impact on gender formation. The combination of notions of the negativism of sexual labour division, including class difference, the oppression of women by men and sexual subordination through education; e.g. gender class groupings which are formed within the school (Weiner, 1994, p.68), indicates that patriarchy and capitalism have to be eroded. Patriarchy emanates from a materialistic and historical foundation, while capitalism emanates from the patriarchal division of labour (Weiner, 1994, p.67). Schools, therefore, may play a hugely negative role in exacerbating gender and class inequalities by sending strong messages, encoded in practice, concerning traditional stereotyped notions of the inferiority of females.

**Radical feminism**

Radical feminism asserts that classism and racism intersect with sexism, but stipulates that the systematic marginalisation of women is the fundamental form of inequality. It distinguishes itself from other forms of feminism by drawing central attention to gender oppression and calling for restructured social institutions. In contrast to socialist feminism, which identifies capitalism as the primary source of oppression, radical feminism recognises sexism as the fundamental problem. Unlike liberal feminism, which accepts the general social structure of society but not its rules for resource allocation, radical feminism argues that the entire social order must be re-examined and re-defined. Freeman (2002, p.45) argues that radical feminists rely on revolutionary analysis and politics along with high- profile events to call attention to the oppression of women; to demand changes in women's place in society and changes in relationships between women and men. Patriarchy, in short, entails male domination over women in a hierarchical social system, in which women are subjugated, in a subordinate position, compared to men's super-ordinate position. Thus women, especially in overtly patriarchal societies, may experience difficulties in acceptance as leaders by both men and women subordinates, and by society in general.

**Cultural feminism**

This category of feminism examines the difference between men and women, elevating feminine qualities of personal strength. Underlying cultural feminism is a matriarchal vision of strong women guided by female concerns and values of pacifism, cooperation, non-violence, settlement and the harmonious regulation of public life. This theory argues that women possess qualities superior to men, which are of value in the public world and that, despite constraints imposed by systems of domination, women have often resisted their

oppressions (Acker, 1987). Further to this point, it is argued that even when they operated within abhorrent systems of domination, such as slavery, women found ways to care for themselves and their families and to contribute to their communities.

**Womanism**

Womanism has emerged as an explicit race critique of liberal, radical, and socialist feminism: also known as Black Feminism, it sets out to highlight that black women are doubly disadvantaged by their race and their gender. The motivating factor was the consideration that existing feminist theories did not acknowledge or address the 'black woman's position' Therefore, marginalised within the women's movement, black feminists created Womanism to examine the intersections of race, gender, and class oppression. Clearly this strand of feminism is closely linked with both Intersectionality Theory and Critical Race Theory (Blackmore, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Moorosi, 2014), but it provides a platform of specificity for race and gender for black women whilst acknowledging the interplay of other social factors. Womanism shares the structural analysis of radical and socialist feminism, but calls for more attention to the differing experiences among women of various classes and racial/ethnic groups (Campbell & Warso, 2000). In common with radical, socialist feminists, womanist feminists advocate changing the system entirely in order to eradicate all forms of inequity and oppression."

**Post- structuralist feminism**

Post-structuralist feminism challenges the opposition of masculinity and femininity (Weedon, 1987). Feminist theorists point out that by using the distinction, preference is given to masculinity over femininity, but that the meaning of the concept of women and feminism changes as a result of cultural transformation and changes in historical events (Weiner, 1994, p.65). In gender and leadership scholarship, Adler et al., (1993) Blackmore (1999 & 2013)) and Fuller (2013 & 2014) regard this masculine/ feminine preferential distinction as adding to the disconnect between biological sex and gender performance, which consequently impacts upon the way leadership is viewed and enacted in policy and in practice. Post-structuralist feminism thus provides new possibilities for understanding women's socialisation in a way that goes beyond viewing girls and women as being disadvantaged. These mechanisms will help women cope with changes, sometimes favourable and sometimes unfavourable. Women have the possibility to decide on priorities and to pursue them at will, with access to promotion and job security assumed. This type of feminism seeks to attack hierarchies, fights

against closure and limiting of options and argues for giving women more opportunities to gain ground with increased access to, and provision of, development opportunities (Weiner, 1997).

These feminist theories, as presented here, have translated into various policies, practices and legislation in many countries, as consciousness of gender inequalities has been raised: the strength and efficacy of this consciousness raising may be seen as dependent upon how deeply entrenched is patriarchy, gender stereotyping and discrimination within the women's communities and the society. In the education context Arnott (1993) argues that there is a complexity of issues involved in "… attempting to democratise educational systems within advanced industrial economies. Struggles for social justice cover the structure as well as the shape and content of education" (Arnott, 1993, p. 8). The complexity to which Arnot (1993) refers will undoubtedly be far greater in developing countries , such as South Africa, where the policies and legislation since 1994, which have grown out of liberal feminism ideologies, are not having the intended impact on changing entrenched discriminatory attitudes and behaviours (Chisholm, 2001; Moorosi, 2010; Perumal, 2007).

## Internal barriers

### Women's perceived lack of confidence in aspiring to leadership positions

Research has shown that lack of confidence is often considered to be a barrier to women applying for promotion, and has been identified as a major hindrance to women aspiring to educational leadership positions in secondary schools (Coleman, 2002 & 2005). It is referred to as an 'internal' barrier, that is, self-imposed or self-constrained due to the fear of success or failure, and also to the lack of aspiration which has been characterised as women's attitudes in some research studies (Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Lumby et al., 2010, Mogadime, 2010, Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Coleman (1996) reported that the majority of women in this study had doubts when applying for headship. However, Coleman, (2002) claims that in the later study, whilst more than half of her respondents, 57.2 per cent did not doubt that they would achieve headship, the 42.8 per cent who did have doubts explained these in terms of their lack of confidence, as well as their negative attitudes to career planning. Clearly in these studies there is a pattern of lack of confidence even though there are other factors introduced in more recent research studies which tend to point to the lack of preparation and

development for principalship: either because these opportunities do not exist, are not well publicised or are simply not taken up by women (Coleman & Fitzgerald, 2008; Ribbins, 1997). There are other militating factors, which may place women more as active agents in the decision making process, even though the end result may be the same: possibly this is located within the domestic lives and responsibilities of many women, where their take up of the opportunities provided is limited because of the times when development and training programmes are offered (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Lumby et al., 2010; Smith, 2011a; Smulyan, 2000).

This 'external' barrier to career access and progression is experienced more acutely by women in developing countries where the long-standing cultural tradition of male dominance, stereotyping of roles, and socialisation is a major inhibitor or barrier (Mogadime, 2010; Moorosi, 2007 & 2010; Oplatka, 2006). Socialisation of both men and women into believing that male leadership is the norm and their abilities in this position are superior, has resulted in women's lack of confidence in their ability to lead schools. This belief, held by some women, that men's leadership attributes are superior, contributes to their lack of confidence and causes some women to postpone their aspirations until later in their career stage, while men aspire to leadership positions much earlier in their careers. There is certainly much evidence that women who have achieved principalship do so at much older age than their male colleagues, for the many reasons shown here resulting from both internal and external barriers to female career progression (Coleman, 2002; Moorosi, 2007 & 2010; Mogadime, 2010; Smulyan, 2000). Culture and tradition have a big impact on women's lack of confidence. It has been noted that women who are used to being subordinated by men and play a supportive role, probably will not include leadership as part of their career planning (Celikten, 2005; Mathibe, 2007; Mathipa & Tsoka, 2000; Uwamahoro, 2011). For women in a male-dominated society, which is more likely to be the case in the developing world, this lack of confidence will, in all likelihood given the evidence from research studies, be exacerbated by a lack of supporting infrastructure, poor quality of, and limited access to, education, and to women's traditionally subordinate status in the society (Celikten, 2005; Oplatka, 2006; Shapira, 2011; Uwamahoro, 2011).

## Fear of success

Gender research, nationally and internationally, has indicated that women in general have been conditioned to avoid success in what is often believed to be roles which are suited only to men: this is even more acute in developing countries, such as South Africa, which are deeply traditional and patriarchal. Women may feel that, if they were to attain success, they would be in danger of being rejected by men, who may themselves feel threatened by this (Lumby et al., 2010; Manamela, 1994; Uwamahoro, 2011). Fear of social rejection is an 'internal' barrier that is consistent with traditional sex-role stereotyping (Duff, 1990). Some women even feel that intellectual achievement, which could mean greater opportunities to achieve at work, is incompatible with the female role (Greyvenstein, 2000; Lumby et al., 2010; Moorosi, 2007 & 2010).Therefore, for a woman to have a self- image which allows for the assumption of a leadership role, she must come to terms with the widely held societal interpretation in many countries, that in so doing she may be denying her femininity: that she is not feminine but rather is aping masculine tendencies and the traditionally perceived male leadership attributes. In addition to this societally induced fear of loss of gender identity, women may become anxious about achieving success and may back down if they think that there will be too much conflict between their domestic and their professional roles, and that competing with men for promotion could place them in a position detrimental to the accepted cultural traits of 'femininity'. This does not imply that women, consciously, or subconsciously, want to fail: it means that the will to achieve is influenced, and affected negatively, by anxiety about the detrimental social and domestic consequences that might occur from achieving the desired success.

## Career paths and planning

Moorosi, (2010) argues that "…women would particularly benefit from training that addresses the gendered issues which they face. However, in order for women to actively pursue training, principalship has to become visible to them as a career option" (Moorosi, 2010, p.552). This accords with many research studies, which have found that the career paths of women often indicated tension between personal aspirations, and family or society's expectations. Women would need to assess their career goals and interests in greater depth to establish plans for the future, but the fact that they often take career breaks to have a family may help to explain the differential achievements in the profession between men and women (Coleman, 2002 & 2005; Coleman & Fitzgerald, 2008; Hall, 1999; Lumby et al., 2010;

Moorosi, 2010; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). As these research studies have found, there is substantial evidence that many women do not plan their lives for a career. The personal life goal for most women may be to become a wife and mother, which is a natural intention, but this may be self-limiting for those who do not plan beyond this goal (Coleman, 2002 & 2005; Hall, 1999 & 2006; Lumby et al., 2010; Smulyan, 2000). Researchers have suggested that it would be in women's own interest to review 'family orientated' goals and spend time considering what they would like their ultimate career position and role to be. Oplatka (2006) recommended several steps that would be needed in the planning of a career for a woman, in the developing world particularly; this research suggested that women need to take more initiative and should actively seek recognition and status. In the pursuit of this goal they should have access to and achieve in higher education. But these suggestions hold true for women in all societies, not just those which are overtly patriarchal, and they also apply to women, and men, in black and ethnic minorities, as the research by Bush et al., (2006) has indicated.

## External barriers

### Mentoring

Extrinsic, or 'external', barriers include environmental factors which influence the entry and progress of woman into the management hierarchy of the teaching profession. These are barriers imposed on the individual by various external factors, such as institutional structural practices and patterns that restrict woman's access to administrative positions. These barriers cannot be viewed in isolation since they are, in the main, inextricably linked to the intrinsic barriers already discussed of societal conditioning and expectations of male and female roles. All the research studies cited previously have suggested that of those women who achieve principalship, few have had access to female role models and mentors in the workplace, and all have had to deal with the male standards upon which access to education management is largely defined. Duff (1990) maintains that

> Personal and professional mentors can help women overcome society's imprints of self-doubt and poor self-esteem. Because there are few women in educational management, a mentor may be male or female. Because there are insufficient women to provide mentorship to aspiring women, the job probably will fall to a man (Duff, 1990, p. 76).

This situation still holds true today, as very little seems to have changed in the intervening years since Duff's (1990) research study of women aspiring to leadership positions in the last years of apartheid South Africa.

The lack of female role models and mentors highlighted by Duff (1990) is noted in all recent research studies as an inhibiting factor for women in South Africa who are aspiring to the principalship role, and also for those newly appointed (Greyvenstein, 2000; Lumby et al., 2010; Mogadime, 2010; Mai, 2014; Moorosi, 2010; Naidoo, 2014). As has been previously argued, this factor is probably a greater hindrance to women in the developing world, as their access to role models and mentors from other spheres, such as the corporate and business world, may also be limited. There is also more likely to very limited numbers of women in that sector at senior levels who would be able to act as a mentor; given that women's access to these positions will be constrained by the same cultural and societal barriers which are imposed upon women in education. This would make the suggestion, as posited in some research studies, a non-viable option in countries such as South Africa (Greyvenstein, 2000; Mathipa & Tsoka, 2000; Mogadime, 2010; Moorosi, 2010).

**Gender stereotyping and socialisation**

As research studies, nationally and internationally, have highlighted, a primary reason for the under-representation of women in school leadership is due to gender-role stereotyping and early socialisation. Women, traditionally, have been associated with child rearing and household chores, and men with earning money and public administration (Coleman, 2001; Cubillo & Brown, 2003, Moorosi, 2007; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). The socialisation of women and stereotyping are intertwined in all cultural contexts. Coleman (2001) asserts that socialisation involves a complex set of human relationships within an organisation that includes all the people in their relationships to each other and to the outside world. As a result of the socialisation process, women have developed values and beliefs that translate into specific behaviours, which may limit their career paths, aspirations and achievements in the leadership field. Feminist research clearly posits that gender stereotyping begins at the birth of a child and continues through early childhood into adolescence as a result of differing treatment, and behavioural expectations, of boys and girls, both in the family and wider

society. Such practices may limit girls' careers to gendered stereotypes of suitable female occupations which 'fit in' with their domestic responsibilities which it is assumed they will undertake: these practices and attitudes perpetuate the societal norms and the constraints imposed, both as internal and external barriers (Acker, 1993, Coleman 2001; Celikten, 2005; Shapira et.al., 2011; Middleton, 1993; Moorosi, 2007; Smulyan, 2000; Weiner, 1997).

The evidence in the research studies clearly demonstrates that there remains a commonly held view of women being passive and supportive, while men demonstrate stronger and more decisive characteristics which are traditionally viewed as a necessary for leadership. It would seem that these characteristics of strength and decisiveness, when applied only to men, preclude women from roles and responsibilities which this androcentrism suggests require aggressive and firm approaches to decision making and management practices. These views conform to the stereotypes of women as not being fit to lead, where leadership is seen as being a more authoritarian, aggressive and, by implication, a masculine role. Furthermore, a large and growing body of literature suggests that gender stereotyping for women in developing countries is experienced to a greater extent than women in developed nations, due to the cultural expectations of gendered roles (Oplatka, 2006). The difficulty for women in these developing nations in achieving an educational leadership position is intensified by the high prevalence of patriarchy, constraining women generally and relegating them to their expected traditional roles within the private sphere (Celikten, 2005). The detrimental impact of traditional views on women's suitability to undertake leadership roles is clearly indicated in the research. This suggests that very little has changed between these late 20$^{th}$ century studies and, the most recent, in the 21$^{st}$ century, despite legislation to enshrine women's equal rights, in many countries, including South Africa (Chisholm, 2001; Moorosi, 2010; Uwamahoro, 2011).

## Gender discrimination

Gender discrimination is cited as a very pervasive barrier to women's aspirations and progress to school leadership. Gender discrimination occurs when there is unequal treatment or favouritism based on gender (Coleman, 2002). Women leaders and aspirant leaders experience discrimination based on their gender in different ways. In her study of women leaders in education, Coleman (2001) reported that, in spite of the fact that gender discrimination is illegal in UK, there is evidence that it still exists, although mainly in a

covert form, and this has been reported in other studies within Europe (Kaparou & Bush, 2007). It has also been shown that women in general management in many countries, including the United States of America, report experiencing the existence of bias against them (Bowles, 2012).

In the categorisation of liberal feminism and its three themes, as outlined and discussed earlier in the feminism section, gender discrimination is the third theme within liberal feminism theory, embracing aspects of discrimination such as rights, justice and fairness, Acker (1993). This may involve acts such as sexual harassment, and offers of professional enhancement in the workplace in return for sexual favours from women by male colleagues, Court (1994). The contention by Acker (1993) is that liberal feminists confine change to that of individuals and their rights, rather than their societal rights. As a result, oppressive acts and behaviour may remain unnoticed. Discrimination exists in the attitudes and sexist comments of colleagues and peers (Coleman, 2002), and can occur as covert or overt male 'gate-keeping' (Tallerico, 2000), particularly in the recruitment and selection processes (Coleman, 2005; Moorosi, 2010). Discriminatory comments from male governors and interview panels are often made which relate to a woman principal not being able to handle her job and family responsibilities: the probable duality of her roles highlighted as an impediment to her capabilities and competence.

This 'gatekeeping' is also noted in South African gender research as a significant barrier, and Moorosi (2010) highlights the selection for, and access to, promotion panels as being a major barrier to women as a result of the prejudiced attitudes displayed by the officials responsible for supporting promotion applications. It is clear that women who aspire to senior management positions in education do face high levels of discrimination: this being fuelled by stereotypes that include the identification of women primarily with what are still perceived as traditional domestic roles and responsibilities. In many countries, senior education post selection boards are often comprised of male governors and businessmen, the latter who seem to adopt very traditional and patronising attitudes taken from the business and corporate world on women's suitability for leadership roles; and this appears to impact negatively on women aspiring to promotion in education contexts. This situation, as evidenced in much of the research, implies widespread stereotyped gender perceptions of women into leadership

positions across contexts, particularly in more traditional and patriarchal societies within the developing world (Celikten, 2005; Lumby, et al., 2010; Moorosi, 2007; Parsadh, 2001; Uwamahoro, 2011).

In a study of women principals in Kenya, this patriarchal view was very evident: Barng'etuny's (2008) research found that there are many negative gendered socio-cultural attitudes facing women principals. The study showed how women are viewed as 'unsuitable' for leadership due to the widely held perceptions of their innate feminine characteristics, their traditional role, and the demands of their domestic responsibilities (Barng'etuny, 2008, p.12). This belief perpetuates the stereotypical attitude and cultural norm that the ideal school principal is male, particularly in high schools. Blackmore (2006); Coleman, (2001) and Tallerico, (2000) suggest that the selection panels are the 'gate-keepers' to women's advancement. The selection panels have the authority to promote women into educational leadership positions but they neglect to do so. 'Gate-keeping' is a term widely used in the literature to refer to the way women are often hindered from taking up leadership positions by those ostensibly in a position to advance them (Lumby et al., 2010; Mogadime; 2010; Moorosi, 2010;).

**Glass ceilings and glass walls**

The term 'glass ceiling' generally refers to transparent cultural, organisational, and attitudinal barriers that maintain rigid gender segregation in organisations. Promotion beyond a certain level becomes impossible for women due to the organisational structures and hierarchies in place. The politics of the glass ceiling are commonly attributed to the closed-ranks mentality and fraternity of a generalised male bureaucratic and organisational culture (Bowles, 2012). Wirth (2004) outlines the notion of both the 'glass ceiling' and 'glass wall' as metaphorical barriers which block opportunities for promotion for women, and/or minority groups in organisations. The 'glass wall' is slightly different; it represents a barrier which works laterally, taking away the very opportunity for women or minority groups to be promoted by preventing them from moving to a position that has a promotional ladder attached.

Cubillo & Brown (2003), consider that the concept of a 'glass ceiling' has limited explanatory power. Shakeshaft (1989) argues that general notions of 'glass ceiling' politics

have been postulated with little regard for cultural differences within institutions, or across socio-cultural, political and economic contexts. For the most part, however, 'glass ceilings' are assumed to have a uniform structure across culturally diverse contexts, and to have uniform effects on women.

The 'Concrete Wall' is a term used to describe the lack of promotion within the female and ethnic minority demographic. According to this effect, being both in an ethnic minority, and being a female impacts upon the individual's ability to reach a job with promotional potential and makes the achievement of such a position vastly more difficult than for Caucasian women (Bush et al., 2006)

Traditional, male domination of senior leadership positions and the appointment and selection process, the 'gate keeping' discussed in the previous section, may create a situation that discourages, or actively deters, women from aspiring to school leadership. It is this factor, exacerbated by the lack of female role models in senior positions in the workplace that will contribute to the perception of a 'glass ceiling'. The research also suggests that where women perceive this barrier to be too difficult to break through, then the 'glass wall' effect will become more apparent: women will remain in workplace roles from which it is nearly impossible to move onto a promotion ladder (Bowles, 2012).

**Family responsibilities and work/life balance**

Work-life balance tensions are generally more complex for women principals as they often spend long hours at work and less time with their family .The concern raised is that, given the current context of schooling and its association with increased stress and workload, the achievement of a work-life balance has become increasingly problematic for school principals (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Coleman, 2001). Married women principals often struggle to find a balance between their careers and their roles as wives and mothers Coleman, 2001; Court, 2004). It is clear from research studies in the developed and the developing world, (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007, Coleman, 2001 & 2002; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Lumby et al., 2010; Mogadime, 2010; Moorosi, 2010; Smulyan, 2000), that women, married or unmarried, do have many responsibilities over and above their professional duties: this may include taking care of children, taking care of elderly relatives,

domestic responsibilities and other family commitments. Mahlase (1997) argued that unmarried women, and /or those without children may experience fewer difficulties in achieving promotion, as married women had many more barriers to overcome in terms of the multiplicity of their traditional roles and responsibilities.

Coleman (2001) posits that for many women there is a feeling of guilt because they may have to put more time into their work than their family (Coleman, 2001, p.81). This research also showed that spousal and/or family support is necessary for women leaders' success (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Coleman, 2002). Support offered by a spouse and/or other relatives is helpful and lessens workload pressures for women principals (Coleman, 2001). However, this support network may be dependent in part on a spouse's attitude towards household chores and child care. This will be different in each context, depending greatly on the cultural expectations and traditions of particular groups or societies (Coleman, 2005; Lumby et al., 2010; Moorosi, 2007), as well as the financial position of the family regarding the provision of paid help and support. Coleman (2001) states that a work/life balance may not be as problematic for women principals in the UK, given that household chores may be shared with the spouse and/or other family members. In Turkey however, which is a strongly patriarchal society, women are traditionally regarded as unsuited for managerial jobs and so are not supported by their husbands; they are largely relegated to their ascribed traditional roles (Celikten, 2005). Even if they do occupy leadership positions in schools, women principals in other predominantly patriarchal societies, such as South Africa, are still expected to maintain their traditional roles as mothers and wives, in addition to their work related roles (Moorosi, 2007).

Relocation and geographical mobility can be another contributing factor to home/work balance. Women are often constrained in their work place stability in that they would be expected to relocate to another place when their husbands transfer or are promoted. This contributes further disruption to their career, while also indicating the superiority of the husband's job and re-affirming the traditionally held view of the husband's role as that of the main bread-winner in the family (Manamela, 1994). Brown & McLeay, (2000), Coleman, (2005), Grogan & Shakeshaft, (2011) review a number of different barriers to women's progress, both overt and covert, as well as constraints from other causes such as taking a

career break to have a family. Women, more often than not, experienced demotion on returning to work after a career break, whereas men did not, even when they had worked outside teaching. This clearly could impact on women's aspiration to the role, as this constitutes a major barrier, at least to traditional linear career pathways which would be the pattern generally applied to male principals' career trajectories.

## Women principals in co-educational high schools

It is widely recognised that women are under- represented in principalship positions in co – educational high schools (Coleman, 2001 & 2005; Evetts, 1994; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Mogadime, 2010; Moorosi 2010; Smith; 2011a; Uwamahoro, 2011). This situation may be, in part, because, as Coleman (2001) argues, it is difficult for women to achieve in this domain against the odds which appear to be stacked against them: these 'odds' have been identified in this section. Yet it has been argued that women in senior leadership positions surpass male principals in terms of enhancing learners' learning and education performance (Coleman & Pounder, 2002, p.127), yet past practices still deter them from being open in acknowledging their capabilities. This is particularly relevant given the emphasis on leadership for academic performance and pedagogical excellence in high schools, and the benchmarks for the achievement of this in most education systems. This would appear to be the result of the stereotyping of roles and the prejudice which exists covertly and overtly towards women in leadership.

Mathipa & Tsoka (2000, p.130) define prejudice as an act of forming an opinion about a particular condition without gathering facts, and this can be applied in situations where posts are offered according to stereotypical views of feminine or masculine traits (Al Khalifa, 1992). Women should overcome gender differences by overcoming patriarchal obstacles, and the most viable way for women to validate successfully the fact that they are equally as competent as men, is to challenge the stereotypes. However, where females are school leaders, they are often faced with many challenges of resistance such as insubordination and sabotage, from male and female staff (Brown & McLeay, 2000).This resistance, particularly from men, is linked to power and status within societal conditioning and preconceptions of appropriate roles for men and women, as has been discussed in previous sections.

Such deeply entrenched views require female managers to balance their interests and aspirations with external factors arising from these deeply entrenched traditional and patriarchal attitudes (McLeay, 2000). Coleman (2001) and Kaparou & Bush (2007) consider a career path to be important for women's management and leadership development. Women must be pro-active in considering their career plans and pathways, and must be able to transform and make changes in their management and leadership performance. Personal agency is the enabler for women to achieve more than the passive roles that are expected within the traditional attitudes and assumptions of their communities. Research suggests that to help achieve this, they need to have clear knowledge of, and insight into, 'external' and 'internal' barriers that prevent them from attaining their goals.

## Chapter Overview

This chapter examined the research into, and literature emanating from, gender studies in leadership, and theories and studies of feminism pertinent to the focus of the study. Much of the literature examined for this research into women pathways to principalship in co-educational high schools emanates from the United States of America, Canada, Britain, New Zealand and Australia. There is still only limited, although growing, research available on South Africa (Lumby et al., 2010; Mai, 2014; Moorosi; 2010; Naidoo, 2013). This indicates an increase in the awareness of the importance and centrality of this area to mainstream school leadership issues in South Africa which, perhaps uniquely, constitutes both a developing and a developed country. However, the 'Western' literature base does have intrinsic merit in providing a basis of research knowledge in this specific gender and school leadership focus area, and this chapter has shown that there is much resonance in the thematic issues emerging from the international research with the South African context of gender equity redress, and the barriers to achieving this, both 'external' and 'internal'.

This literature review focused specifically on those studies which have explored gender stereotyping and practices; the discriminatory attitudes manifesting in societally and organisationally imposed, and accepted, external and internal barriers, all of which impact

upon women's potential progress to principalship. The review also explored the small, but growing, body of research on how women's personal agency, and agentic behaviours may inform their pathways to senior leadership roles, in previously traditional male domains, and the choices that they are able to make against the many known odds they face.

# CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

> *Everyone has stories to tell. No life can truly be considered as uneventful or boring: and life history helps to remind us of this, as it also shows how individual lives are affected by when, where, how and by whom (in social positioning terms) they are lived.*
>
> (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 4)

## Introduction

This chapter sets out the rationale for the qualitative research design and methodology chosen within an interpretivist paradigm. It provides reasons why the life history approach was of particular interest to me, and considered the most appropriate for the research focus: the personal and professional pathways of a purposive sample of four women principals of co-educational high schools in South Africa. The chapter details the methods and instruments used in the data collection of the female participants' life stories, and how my transcription and analysis of these stories was rooted in grounded theory.

> Theory is emergent and must arise from particular situations; it should be 'grounded' in data generated by the research act. Theory should not precede research but should follow it. Investigators work directly with experience and understanding to build their theory on them (Cohen, et al., 2007, p.22).

It was through grounded theory generation, that I was able to present and analyse the data collected from each of the four women. From these life stories I subsequently identified and categorised the emerging theory (Dimmock & Lam, 2012; Floyd, 2012).

This chapter also illustrates the dilemmas which are presented to the individual researcher using life history methodology, and the ways in which these were managed, if not actually overcome, in the lengthy process which was involved in the collection, and transcription, of the data. That this would constitute what could be regarded as a longitudinal study was not apparent to me when I initially chose life history methodology. In addition, the first participant, Amelia, became a 'de facto pilot', in that this initial foray into the research process enabled me to reflect immediately upon the methods undertaken in the data collection, which provided me with an unplanned evaluation opportunity. Therefore, I was

able to refine and restructure the instruments and data collection methods at this early stage, and also more accurately predict the time lines that were involved in this process for both researcher and researched.

This refinement of the data collection methods was done to minimise the problems which I found to be inherent in life history research: a methodology which must pay due regard to the impact on the research process of the 'relationship' that inevitably develops between researcher and researched (Yow, 2006). This 'relationship' is due to the 'intimacy' engendered by the informal conversational process adopted, and the often very personal nature of the data being provided through the telling of a life story, mainly in face to face encounters. The ethical issues pertaining to the research focus, the protection of the participants and their anonymity in this very sensitive process are explored at the end of this chapter.

In presenting and detailing this methodology chapter, I have relied heavily on illuminating both the reflective and, more importantly for this study, the reflexive stance which I have adopted throughout the research process, as I indicated in chapter one (Morrison, 2007). Elliott (2005), states that in life history research, analysis is informed by the interest in narrative, and is, "frequently accompanied by a more reflexive methodology" (Elliott, 2005, p. 152). This has assisted me in seeking to achieve clarity and understanding on all aspects of the study. This includes the problems inherent in the collection and analysis of life story data, and the overall significance of this methodological approach within the research focus to address the overarching research question:

> *Why do women become principals of co-educational high schools in South Africa?*

## Research paradigms

> …the central endeavour in the context of the interpretative paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience. To retain the integrity of the phenomena being investigated, efforts are made to get inside the person and to understand from within (Cohen, et al., 2007, p. 21).

Morrison (2012) states that in research we draw upon paradigms, which she defines as "a set of beliefs or epistemological assumptions" (Morrison, 2012, p. 19). This life history research into the personal and professional pathways of a small sample of four women co-educational high school principals is a qualitative study, espousing the interpretivist paradigm. The study was based on data-theory generation as an interpretivist research position, rather than theory-data generation as in positivist research. The latter paradigm is more usually associated with quantitative research, and large scale, potentially generalisable, studies: Cohen & Manion, (1995) state that positivist research "... fails to take account of our unique ability to interpret our experiences and represent them to ourselves" (Cohen & Manion, 1995, p. 25).

This study was rooted in the life stories of the small sample of women principals, and I was intent upon making meaning of their narrated experiences through a life history approach, which was respondent led. Quantitative, positivist research would never have been considered as appropriate because it is researcher led and, in general, places heavy reliance on instruments and procedures (Cohen et al., 2007; Elliot, 2005; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Morrison, 2012).

As qualitative research literature indicates, the espousal of the interpretivist paradigm is located within what is known as the hermeneutic tradition; inherent in which is the belief "…that the social world must be understood from within not explained from without" (Elliot, 2005, p. 201).

Qualitative research is concerned with exploring and describing phenomena of interest, its samples are often small and sometimes only a few individuals or a single setting is used. This is specifically the case in life history studies where it is argued that the primary purpose of this type of interpretivist research is to understand social phenomena from the perspective of the participants and their narratives. The researcher, as narrator, interprets these narratives, analyses and then reports the findings as a life history account (Bryman, 1998; Cohen et al., 2007; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Morrison, 2012; Scott & Morrison, 2006).

> Social actors negotiate meanings about their activity in the world. Social reality therefore consists of their attempts to interpret the world. …Thus interpretivists subscribe to a realist ontology ... (they) insert themselves into this continual process of meaning construction in order to understand it" (Scott & Morrison, 2006, p.130)

Furthermore, it is recognised that in the social domain, conversation is known to be the basic mode of human interaction. This aspect has undoubtedly formed the basis of my research interaction with the participants, through which an interpretive analysis of the life stories collected was made (Cohen et al., 2007; Floyd, 2012; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Goodson & Walker, 1991; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

As a life history study with my own position openly declared in chapter one, the overarching factor in locating this within the interpretivist paradigm was that it is rooted in the understanding of social reality being associated with human beings, and the meaning they make of this as individuals. Interpretivist research

" … needs to be grounded in people's experience … reality is not 'out there' as an amalgam of external phenomena waiting to be uncovered as 'facts' but a construct in which people understand reality in different ways" (Morrison, 2012, p.20).

## Research approach

It is the view, as expressed above, of qualitative, interpretivist research being primarily a way of understanding social reality, and the role that conversation plays in human interaction, that influenced me to adopt a life history approach. Whilst life history may be a full length book about one person's life, in his or her own words, it may also be a series of short narrative accounts which are descriptive, highly personal and relate to specific periods or episodes in life which hold most meaning for that person. Essentially the life history approach can be regarded as one that requires the direct involvement of the researcher through co-operation and interaction with the participants of the study (Cohen et al., 2007; Elliot, 2005; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Plummer, 1983).

It is accepted in life history studies that accounts of the perspectives and interpretations of people in a variety of educational settings are both significant and pertinent, as they can

provide insights into how people in many contexts come to terms with the constraints and conditions in which they work, or wish to work. It is this aspect which life history researchers have asserted may potentially make an important contribution to an understanding of the links between 'personal troubles' and 'public issues' (Ball & Goodson, 1983; Elliot, 2005; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Middleton; 1993; Plummer, 1983). I would concur with this assertion, as within this study these links are of critical importance to the life history researcher when attempting to relate the personal to the general, or link the individual to her societal context. This is especially so with respect to the social and political contexts and times in which these South African women participants now live, and have lived, and from which experiences their life stories are drawn.

Life history research uses an exploratory methodology, relying on semi-structured to unstructured, open-ended questioning which is participant rather than researcher led. Grounded theory aims for "…the systematic generating of theory from data, that itself is systematically obtained from social research" (Glaser, 1996, p. 2). It therefore provides a flexible research methodology, and avoids preconceived ideas from the researcher being foregrounded or influencing the data analysis and theory generation (Cohen et al., 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory uses theoretical sampling and within the interpretive paradigm, the researcher collects, codes and analyses the data. The decisions concerning what data to collect next are then based on the emerging theory and the interpretation of the meaning deduced from the data. Some researchers suggest starting with as diverse a sample as possible, and then possibly increasing the diversity of the sample as categories emerge through the theory, (Cohen et al., 2007)

However, this increase in the diversity of the sample was not considered a feasible or necessary move given the nature of the sample selected, or the focus and scope of the research. Arguably this could have been useful if there had been the intention of making the research more generalisable or representative of the overall population being studied, but that would have precluded the use of a life history approach. The emerging theory from the data collected and analysed from this small but purposive sample of women principals enabled a picture to emerge which gave insight into the various ways in which principalship pathways were known and followed assiduously, or merely stumbled upon. This, therefore, added to

the body of knowledge and literature on this under researched field both internationally and within South Africa.

## Choosing a life history approach: methodological musings

My interest in life stories, and therefore, life history, stems from my early life experiences, as related in chapter one, and the declaration of researcher positionality (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997; Perumal, 2007). But more than this, it is based on my continued interest in people and their lived experiences, which inform their actions, their choices, and their understanding of the social milieu in which they live. Life history is regarded in research literature as the preferred choice in feminist research studies (Cohen et al., 2007; Elliott, 2005; Goodson & Sikes, 2001). I am a feminist within the liberal persuasion. I believe that equality of opportunity and the means by which the take up of opportunities can be facilitated through changing structures and policies, is the way to enable full emancipation of women in all societies. However, in many societies, particularly those where patriarchy continues to have a hold with regard to power over, and often subjugation of, women, as in South Africa (Lumby et al., 2010; Moorosi, 2007 &10; Perumal, 2007), then I would regard a more radical feminist approach to be appropriate in trying to achieve a more equitable society. This is undoubtedly the case in many countries where prevailing and entrenched patriarchal attitudes will not easily be changed simply because policy and legislation has. (Acker, 1989; Arnot & Weiner, 1987; Coleman, 2002; Davies; 1996; Goodson & Walker, 1991; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2010; Mahlase. 1997; Middleton, 1993; Moorosi, 2007; Uwamahoro; 2011). Undoubtedly my espousal of feminism was a factor in the research approach chosen, but it was not the *leitmotif*. I would emphasise that with regard to my ontological position, and thus the choice of methodology best suited to correlate this with the epistemological position relating to the generation of knowledge, the following accurately delineates the reason for the informed choice I made.

I like to consider myself as,

*"*... a penetrating observer of the human scene …"

Robert Bolt (1966) *The Thwarting of Baron Bolligrew*

I am what is commonly referred to as ‘a people person’ and have always been regarded as someone to whom others will willingly talk and share their stories, whatever the nature of these: I have the ability to listen and to empathise. These attributes are regarded by qualitative research methodologists as essential in using a life history approach,

> …if you have not got the right sort of personal characteristics, then you cannot do this type of research. …life history is an approach best suited to people who are able to listen attentively and beyond what is actually being said, and who can ask pertinent questions in a non-threatening manner. It demands the willingness to share one’s own experiences, if this seems appropriate, and, of supreme importance, it requires the researcher to be the sort of person that people want to talk to (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p.20).

There is little doubt that any research methodology can be applied to a focus area of interest and then learned and improved upon from the experience of the approach, and also that of others’ experiences in the field. But, life history methodology requires of the researcher a very specific interest in the details of people’s lives. This is a curiosity that requires satisfaction through knowing about how people experience their lives; what choices they make and why; what happens to them, and how they make sense of the world they inhabit (Elliot, 2005; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Goodson and Walker, 1991; Sikes et al, 1985).

This necessary author interest in the detail of people’s lives can best be explained by using an analogy drawn from the world of classic English fiction. Two specific writers who engaged in the exploration and interpretation of lives spring to mind: Chaucer and Jane Austen. Their literary works were inextricably bound up with the minutiae of people’s lives; indeed were rooted in the minor and seemingly irrelevant details of their characters’ lives and the society they inhabited. The writers, in their different ways, tell, for example, the story of ‘The Wife of Bath’, in *The Canterbury Tales*, and of Catherine Moorland, in *Northanger Abbey*: two diametrically opposed female characters in terms of their age, background, experience and demeanour. Through narrative and conversational devices, these literary stories provide the reader with an opportunity to experience and thus understand the complexities and the realities of lives lived in the context of the times: each reader is able to interpret the data provided by these fictional accounts to enable his/her own theories to be generated in addressing the questions of the what, why, how variety, in relation to these women.

In including the above literary examples I have attempted to make clear that, as I was a teacher of English for many years, the use of storytelling and narrative exposition has been a major part of my classroom teaching, and my life interests. This has helped me to grow my awareness of people's lives and times, real or fictional. My undergraduate studies in English Literature, and subsequently the teaching of this subject to secondary school pupils through novels, plays, poetry and auto/biography embedded in me a strong sense of what the oral and written word could tell us of people, societies, historical period and social context, and the links between these. Studies of literature and history are essentially just two sides of the same coin, and an understanding of each broadens an understanding of the whole to enable the composition of a complete picture by the reader.

This I say, with the proviso that the reader's interpretation will depend on the perceptions of the writer as to where the emphasis will be placed and no two writers of fiction or history will view, present or judge the same event in the same way. This lesson learned from English Literature and historical studies on the issue of subjectivity versus objectivity of writers, and the need for an understanding of this on the part of the reader, proved a valuable one. It was a lesson I heeded as I began my journey into life history as a research methodology, and the construction of life history accounts from life stories told to me as a researcher.

All story-teller's positions and personal values are inextricably bound up with the life history account that is produced from the individual narratives. That is why it is necessary to state clearly one's position, values and possible partiality, as I have done in chapter one, before , subsequently analysing, the data generated (Floyd, 2012; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997; Perumal, 2007). This helps to ensure the production of an authentic and theoretically valid conclusion in this type of interpretive research. More will be said in later sections of this chapter on the issues of validity, reliability and authenticity emanating from a life history approach.

I was introduced to life history methodology in educational research by Stephen Ball, my lecturer on the Master's programme at Sussex University in the 1980s. This included research by Ball & Goodson (1983) and Sikes et al., (1985); their work specifically related to the impact of people's experiences, and their perceptions of these life experiences and choices, on their work in education.

I was also influenced by the oral history work of Humphries (1981), Thompson (1987), and by the Personal Narratives Group (1989). The latter research I encountered as part of the feminist methodology and research in this field to which I was exposed in the Women's Studies course that was part of the Master's programme  This course, and the feminist literature on the use of life history in understanding women's lives, (Heron, 1985; Oakley, 1981; Sikes et al, 1985; Walkerdine, 1985), unquestionably provided the springboard for my deep interest in this methodological approach generally, and in feminist research specifically. This was to prove invaluable in my career, and certainly inspired me in the design, and the completion, of my master's research on education and life chances. It has subsequently provided the basis for the focus and methodological approach chosen for this doctoral research.

As Goodson and Sikes (2001) state, and I concur,

> Although we are perfectly able to construct academic justifications for using the approach, we know full well that the motivating force is that we are both incurably and insatiably curious about other people's lives. Nothing interests … us more than listening to life stories, considering them in the various settings in which they occurred, then teasing out and exploring possible influences and explanations, interpretations and alternatives, silences and significances. This … is the essence of the approach: life historians examine how individuals talk about and story their experiences and perceptions of the social contexts they inhabit (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p.21).

## Scope and focus of the research

This research was focused on the personal and professional pathways to principalship of co-educational high schools in South Africa that each of the four women participants had taken. These pathways and the achievement of principalship, whether it was consciously planned or

uncharted chance, are described through the telling of their life stories. These narrative accounts highlight some fundamental human questions, such as; *"*Why do you think, believe, do, make sense of the world, and the things that happen to you, as you do? Why has your life taken the course that it has?" (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 1).

The research was not concerned with leadership styles, the effectiveness of the participants' leadership in their schools nor of the schools' responses to the leadership of the principals. The focus was not on the ways in which leadership is enacted nor did it seek to explore the way leadership is experienced by these women. The study was designed to address the research questions as set out in chapter one and shown again here:

**The main research question:**

*Why do women become principals of co-educational high schools in South Africa?*
Two sub questions:

1. *What are the barriers to women in achieving this position?*
2. *What are the enablers to women achieving this position?*

However, it was not assumed that the women had personally experienced any barriers, or that the barriers that may be identified, as the women tell their stories, would be the same as those identified in existing research (Coleman, 2002; Duff, 1990; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Hall, 1996; Lumby et al., 2010; Moorosi, 2007 & 2010; Shakeshaft; 1989; Smith, 2011a; Smulyan, 2000). The individual stories were drawn out from the participants in an attempt to determine what common factors, if any, these women had experienced on their respective journeys to principalship: this included both barriers and enablers, historic and current.

## Sample selection

The sample of principals was purposive having been determined by their gender and position, women leaders of co-educational high schools in South Africa. It was opportunity based, in that I knew the participants professionally, and that they were willing to agree access for the extended process involved in a narrative enquiry. Initially I had also looked at stratification as a determining factor for my sample selection. One type of stratification would have been a

sample selected on the grounds of race, based on their racial representivity of South African society. However, I decided that racial classification, as a means of selection in the pursuit of diversity was too limiting and rooted too much in the apartheid past. Therefore, I chose to move away from this, and to select women principals on the basis of the interesting and varied stories which I thought they had to tell, given my knowledge of them from the professional courses they had attended with me. The four women who participated fully throughout the study, included two black women and two white women who were from different mother tongue language groups and ethnic backgrounds.

However, I did make use of stratified sampling criteria, on the basis of age range (between 44 and 60). This I considered an important factor, as all were brought up within their own apartheid segregated communities, educated and taught initially in the apartheid era in the different racially grouped schools. Whilst I had dispensed with the notion of broad diversity of a racially representative sample, as explained earlier, I considered that the age and schooling experiences of the women might assist in determining whether commonalities and/or differences could be seen in the experiences of the women, and the possible impact of these factors upon their personal and professional pathways during, and post, apartheid.

The selection, and the sample on which this study is based, was however made more difficult for me during the first year of the data collection. Two of the originally invited principals withdrew from the research process, citing reasons of personal and work stress, domestic or health difficulties. One resigned from her post, with immediate effect and left the area; the other decided to take early retirement from her post. This impacted on my intended timetable, as not only did I need to find and invite two other women principals to participate; I also needed to build up a trusting relationship with them, as with the other participants.

Fortunately, my work on leadership programmes with principals made the task of finding and inviting replacements willing to tell their stories relatively easy, and was still based on the original criteria as outlined earlier. I accepted that the time line for data collection was altered and I worked around this. As life history researchers emphasise, there is nothing linear in qualitative research and for the life history researcher this factor, and the consequent

problems of data collection over a longer period than originally planned, is also compounded by the unpredictable nature of respondent led, narrative enquiry (Armitage & Gluck, 2006; Chase, 2005; Elliott, 2005; Floyd, 2012; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Goodson & Walker, 1991; Sikes et al., 1985).

The purposive sampling of the final four principals involved in the whole research process was therefore based on the primary factor of their positions as women leaders of co-educational high schools. This was decidedly the key factor, as this is a position still not widely held by women, as recent research and statistics indicate, neither in South Africa nor internationally (Coleman, 2002; Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2011; Lumby et al., 2010; Moorosi, 2007 & 2010; Smith, 2011a). My intention was to explore if there were shared or similar patterns of experience for these women, given that they had in common that each had achieved the role of principal, and may also have characteristics or/or attributes which could be construed as a commonality. Therefore, the sample size and population was considered to be acceptable. Research methodology literature indicates that in life history studies, adequacy of sample size is not dependent upon the quantity of data acquired, but rather on the richness of such (Elliot, 2005; Floyd, 2012; Goodson & Sikes, 2001). The participants were therefore limited to four to gain depth of individual response not generalisability across any racial groups which may have been possible through a larger or more diverse sample (Cohen et al., 2007; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Goodson & Walker, 1991; Lumby et al., 2010; Plummer, 1983).

## Data collection and research instruments

The data collection was done through the gathering of the personal narratives and stories that unfolded through the interaction with the participants: this type of interaction was the *leitmotif* of the research design and methodology chosen. The exploration of the personal and professional pathways and experiences of the selected co -educational high school women principals was conducted primarily through unstructured discussions and conversations following the life history approach through narrative enquiry. I initiated and encouraged this narrative enquiry with the respondents individually; engaged with and listened to their conversations, all the while interpreting and documenting their stories. The research

instruments used to facilitate this process were of a semi-structured (brief biographical questions) and an unstructured nature, designed to promote and encourage, not lead, the conversations.

The methods of data collection involved an initial meeting to initiate the conversations, and which enabled the participant to provide brief biographical information on questions such as age, place of birth, schools attended qualifications, marital status and whether a parent (Appendix 4). This questionnaire loosely drew on the instruments used in Coleman's (2001) study of UK women secondary headteachers. The questionnaire was then followed by the presentation of three broad areas for discussion which invited the women to:

Tell me about your

- Family and home experiences (from childhood)
- Own school life, and subsequent school teaching career
- Process of achieving principalship

The research instrument can be found in **Appendix 5**.

This instrument was to prompt deeper conversations, enable me to probe the initial biographical responses from the questionnaire, and yet still allow for the follow up free ranging conversations on areas of interest to the participants, and as initiated by them. All the meetings were held in a neutral space, usually a local coffee shop, and this approach was deliberately chosen to ensure that the women would feel more comfortable in discussing their personal and professional lives away from school and home surroundings, or in my office.

As the life history approach is respondent-led, the instruments provided opportunities for what has been termed by researchers as 'conversations with a purpose' to take place between me and the individual participant (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Ribbins, 2007). However, following the initial interviews with the 'de facto pilot', Amelia, the first principal I engaged with, and a review of her responses, other instruments and collection methods were then utilised to improve upon the data collection process, as I now explain. I had been influenced at this time by a body of life history research which involved the participants being invited to write an autobiographical account of their life stories, in addition to the face to face

conversations (Grogan & Shakeshaft 2010; Middleton, 1993; Perumal, 2007; Smulyan, 2000). This could help to overcome the problem of the timelines for both the researched and the researcher. I also considered that it may lessen 'the counselling factor' which had begun to concern me in the initial participant interviews with Amelia: an issue I explain later. I would provide nine broad areas on which the participants could construct their autobiographies (see **Appendix 6**).

I discussed this with the 'de facto pilot' principal, Amelia, who was enthusiastic at this idea, and also offered to provide me with a journal which she was keeping. I had considered suggesting the use of diaries or journals (Elliot, 2005; Morrison, 2012) as another instrument for obtaining more data, but the complicating factors of this, given the probable variability of the participants' experiences of this practice, decided me against it. So, although I did not use this method with the other three participants, the journal provided insight into the life experiences of this initial participant, and she then used this as a vehicle to present her 'written' autobiography, rather than writing anything more. This focus from the 'de facto' principal, Amelia, may have been linked to her being keen to stress that the face to face conversations were the best part of her involvement in the process, that she had come to regard these as a positive aspect in her professional life, and also saw me as 'a friend and confidant'. I was both touched and concerned by this latter statement, as it was an unintentional consequence of the process adopted. This was, therefore, a critically important revelation for me in respect of the listening and empathetic skills required by a life history researcher coupled with willingness to share own experiences as appropriate with the participants (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Elliot, 2005; Smulyan, 2000; Yow, 2006). This factor also applied to the dynamics of being a woman interviewing women where issues of shared gender and the similarities of some shared professional progression can be viewed as both a helping and a hindering factor as Oakley (1981) has argued from a feminist research methodology perspective.

It was becoming very clear to me that this 'researcher willingness and its appropriateness' must be tempered with judgement on the degree to which this sharing and empathy becomes an inhibiting factor in the process rather than an enabling one. This applied also to the way in which all the participants, as they became more comfortable in the conversations, took the

view that this empathetic and listening process provided a sort of counselling function. However, I was able to lessen this factor in terms of its impact on me, as I developed coping strategies to minimise this 'confidant' role whilst not jeopardising the data collection process. More researcher detachment was necessary, and I also recognised that I needed to curb my tendencies to be too empathetic in the listening and sharing process (Anderson & Jack, 2006; Elliott, 2005; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Middleton, 1993). This realisation helped to ensure that I did not compromise my objectivity as the life history researcher, whilst being presented with these life stories, and their very personal and often emotional content. I was mindful of a statement by Covey (1989),

> Seek first to understand involves a very deep shift in paradigm. We typically seek first to be understood. Most people do not listen with the intent to understand they listen with the intent to reply. …they're filtering everything through their own paradigms, reading their autobiography into other people's lives (Covey, 1989, p. 239).

In life history research which is dependent upon conversations and storytelling, there is this tension which makes Covey's statement both a negative and a positive factor in data collection and subsequent analysis. The negative factor is that it is too easy for the researcher to empathise over much with the participant, in the way that conversation and interaction at the everyday social level of interchange and discourse often occurs. This is where the 'listening' individual will then relate his/her own story, using the platform of the 'story telling' person to enable his/her autobiography to take precedence. This can be a means of trying to show understanding , but it is more often a way of imposing personal experiences on to that of others', and does not actually take into account the feelings involved in, or the perceptions of, the experiences told by the original story teller ,"Empathy is the recreation in the mind of the researcher of the feelings and motivations of the objects of the study… empathy is a basic process of human observation…" (Elliott, 2005, p. 200).

Yet for the life history researcher, the positive side of this "reading their autobiography into other people's lives" is that showing sufficient empathy is critical when the participants are relating experiences and choices within a particular field which attunes with the researcher's. But the latter's experiences must never intrude or dominate. This empathetic sharing of common experience must be a means to invoke confidence in the participant and encourage

further elaboration and development of her story, as the relationship between the researcher and the researched develops over time. But, as I learned in the process of this research, this relationship must never be as counsellor and counselled (Anderson & Jack, 2006; Armitage & Gluck, 2006; Elliott, 2005; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Goodson & Walker, 1991; Yow, 2006).

## Transcription of the data

The participants' life stories have been transcribed from notes and, in some cases, the use of voice recordings of conversations. While there are very strong reasons for the use of this type of audio recordings, (Floyd, 2012) as it provides an accessible source for clear data recollection when transcribing, it is not without its own problems and constraints (Elliott, 2005; Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Also, whilst these voice recordings do provide a means of supplementing notes for the researcher, it can be a restricting factor for the participants. They can feel intimidated by speaking into a machine, and concerned that the recording could be heard by other audiences, and they would have no control over this. Their anonymity could be compromised through voice recognition and other factors, which would not be the case with transcriptions from the researcher's notes or from their autobiographical writings (Cohen, et al., 2007; Goodson & Sikes, 2001).

As life history research methodologists suggest, (Elliott, 2005; Goodson & Sikes, 2001) the use of voice recordings can also create technical problems for the researcher. In this research, the problem included the deletion of a two hour taped conversation at a coffee shop, when the erase button on the digital recorder was pressed in mistake for the volume control button. The participant was keen to hear replayed the last section of the conversation, but the background noise in the café made this difficult so she attempted to increase the volume (I had given the small recording device to her). This was a situation that could not be remedied, caused the participant great distress on my behalf and involved more time together that afternoon on revisiting the very brief notes I had made during that conversation.

Though I was convinced of the overall merits of voice recording, I decided that the problems outweighed the advantages, especially as I usually met with the participants in coffee shops with much background noise; which interestingly was not intrusive until the recordings were played back. It became clear that we all felt more comfortable without the voice recorder. So I relied on my memory, my notes with their aide memoires re body language and other non-verbal indicators observed during our conversations, and finally their written autobiographical accounts. This process enabled me to tease out issues and understand the data that was being collected, thus assisting with the final presentation and analysis of the data at a later stage.

All the stories were revisited with the participants individually over a period of time to ascertain accuracy of my interpretation of these, as the life historian. The problems inherent in the use of this conversational approach, and of the transcription process itself, are well documented in qualitative research literature in general and life history research specifically: and I was aware of the need to ensure accuracy of my interpretation as much as possible (Borland, 2006; Cohen et al., 2007; Elliott, 2005; Goodson & Sikes, 2001). For example, Maropeng corrected me on the date of her second marriage and the circumstances of its termination; Elanie corrected my interpretation of her work in the Cape, and the time span of this prior to her embarking on a teaching career: all of which was very important in ensuring total accuracy of the data collected.

## Presentation and analysis of data

> … we all have different stories to tell…. Each story belongs somewhere inside the general pattern, yet none of them quite fits; just as individual lives can never be… wholly explained by the social and economic realities that circumscribe them (Heron, 1985, p.1).

The findings have been determined through the interpretation and analysis of each life story and a comparison of the themes drawn from across these four data sets. This provides the basis for the presentation of the theories which have emerged from the research study. To ensure clarity I presented each life story in its own chapter, and the final discussion, analysis, and comparison across the four data sets in a separate chapter, chapter eight.

It was clear to me from early in the data collection process that there were some common themes that were emerging. Not all of these themes were ones which I had expected to discover, and this demonstrated clearly to me how important the respondent- led basis of this study was. They challenged, though did not eliminate, any preconceptions which I might have had given my own life story, and my personal and professional pathway as a female school leader. This process also enabled any possible biases that I held to be declared through a 'researcher biography' as written in chapter one. Thus, having declared these, they would not affect the perceived rigour of my analysis (Dimmock & Lam, 2012; Perumal 2007; Middleton 1993; Smulyan, 2000). It would be naïve to assume that in a life history study the researcher would be free of expectations or assumptions. It was certainly the case that the nature of the conversations over the lengthy period of time we talked together, and the readings of the women's autobiographies, provided opportunities for me to present, check out and possibly verify the themes emerging and the interpretations which I was drawing as the process continued, rather than wait until the final analysis was underway. This proved to be a strength of the research approach, and a benefit for the process of discussion and analysis of the data.

Goodson & Sikes (2001) state that

> Narratives select the elements of the telling to confer meaning on prior events – events that may not have had much meaning at the time. This is a narrative transposition of Kirkegard's famous statement that we live life forwards but understand it backwards. In understanding ourselves, we choose those facets of our experience that lead to the present and remain our life study coherent (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p.35).

## Validity, reliability, authenticity and trustworthiness

> …reliability and validity may be regarded as constructs within the positivist research tradition. However, authenticity remains an important issue for qualitative researchers. This may be achieved through alternative concepts such as trustworthiness" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) or "through modification of the positivist concepts to enhance their applicability to interpretive … research (Bush, 2007, p.102).

Qualitative research literature demonstrates that life history studies specifically pose challenges for the generally accepted measures of validity and reliability as demonstrated in quantitative methodology (Cohen et al., 2007; Elliott, 2005; Macmillan & Schumacher, 2001). Goodson and Sikes (2001) define reliability as, "…the replicability or stability of research findings", and validity as, "the ability of research to reflect an external reality or to measure the concepts of interest" (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p.22).

> The criteria in life history research therefore sits more easily in terms of validation and reliability when the researcher considers whether the findings can be considered truthful and trustworthy and are, "…'accurate' or 'valid' representations of reality (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p.21).

Research studies (Cohen et al., 2007; Elliott, 2005; Goodson and Sikes, 2001) show that there are several validity checks which can be applied to life history research. In my study, the most relevant was considered to be a comparison of the themes arising from the data following the individual participant data analysis. "Essentially, the validity of any life history lies in its ability to represent the informant's subjective reality, that is to say, his or her definition of the situation" (Cohen et al., 2007, p.200).

I was therefore satisfied that the research was valid through what I perceived to be the authentic, trustworthy and truthful responses that underpinned each participant's life story and the comparison of the emerging themes and theories that had come from these accounts and the data sets comparisons. As life history researchers have shown, the veracity of the participants' stories must be assumed, as it is their perception and understanding of their life events that they are telling through these accounts and are, therefore, the participants' realities. The data analysis I have presented though the individual life histories and the comparisons is based on this premise, and is therefore to be presumed as trustworthy in research terms (Cohen et al., 2007; Elliott, 2005; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Middleton, 1993; Plummer, 1983).

## Ethical considerations

Life history research imposes its own set of conditions for the protection of the participants involved, over and above the accepted practices of ethics in any human subject research, in

any paradigm. As "… a penetrating observer of the human scene …" (Bolt, 1966), I was also a guardian of the information which I elicited through this ontological position. I had been privileged to hear, and to read, very personal accounts of the life journeys and events which had shaped these women, and fuelled their determination to become school principals. I had complied with the University of the Witwatersrand's Ethics Committee's requirements for ethical research practices (see **Appendices 2 & 3**) which included the research focus information and consent letters to participants, the emphasis on voluntary participation and their right to withdraw at any time. But over and above these required good practices, I was aware that the required condition of confidentiality and anonymity for the participants in the presentation and analysis of the data provided was of paramount importance in this particular research context.

Life stories involve the naming and description of others who are close to the participants (family members and friends), the places and institutions in the past which could be easily identified, and the meanings which are attached to these. It also details the events, and significant others, that are related to the journeys the participants have taken, and their views on these, whether positive or negative. Therefore, in line with the required ethical practices, but with added precautions to preserve confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, I put in place various measures. Names were changed to pseudonyms and in addition, participants' places of birth, family personal details and areas where they grew up and where they worked and lived, were altered slightly. "…although researchers know who has provided the information … are able to identify participants from the information given, they will in no way make the connection known publically; …" (Cohen et al., 2007, p.65).

I have also, where employment descriptions, colleagues' actions and school/home events could easily identify the individual, altered these to be a fictional representation of the actual reality. This is a technique common to life history research and does not affect the data analysis, the themes identified or the theory which has emerged (Cohen et al; 2007; Elliott, 2005; Floyd, 2012; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Middleton, 1996; Smulyan, 2000).

## Chapter overview

This chapter has detailed my methodology in the light of the research study from inception to completion. It has provided insight into the rationale and motivation for the life history approach which I deemed most appropriate within an interpretivist, qualitative research paradigm. The chapter emphasises the positive and enlightening aspects of narrative enquiry that I have experienced as a researcher. However, it has also highlighted the dilemmas which this approach posed for me as the research study unfolded. All of this I have presented here in narrative form as a result of the reflective and reflexive process which has been my constant companion throughout the 'conversations with a purpose' (Ribbins, 2007) in my interactions with the women principals. The following chapters present the stories of each of the women, and the life history accounts of each which I have created from my interpretation and analysis of the data elicited from my interactions with them.

# CHAPTER FOUR: AMELIA'S STORY

*Go big or go home!*

## Introduction

This chapter, and the three that follow, provide a detailed presentation of the data drawn from the narratives of the women participants which have revealed their personal and professional pathways to principalship. Each of the four chapters presents the individual's story, as each has told this to me over the course of our lengthy engagement in this study, and the findings which have emerged from my interpretations. Life history researchers are always faced with the question of how best to present the findings in "… turning a life story into a life history and in crafting a representation of informants' experiences and perceptions …" (Goodson and Sikes, 2001. p. 37). To address my intention to represent and reflect very closely what the participants have told me in these very personal and in depth conversations between us, I have presented the findings through my transcription of their stories and some commentary on this, with the use of direct quotes to illuminate and support key thoughts, incidents or experiences as related by the women. However, I have not presented all the very personal and intimate details of their lives, or their experiences of principalship, which each has revealed gradually over the course of our conversations, and as trust was built between us. The principalship experiences were outside the focus of the research, and the specifics of the intimacy of their domestic lives I have judged to be more to do with their need to divulge in a 'safe environment' both the serious and the humorous aspects, rather than that these were significant to their pathways to principalship, or of direct relevance to the life histories I was writing.

Thus to provide clarity in my approach, chapters four to eight are presented narratively in a chronological sequence of their lives, the *'time past'* of T.S. Eliot's poem that brought them to this *'time present'*. This chronological sequencing also loosely corresponds to the phases of their lives as shown in the semi- structured research instruments, (see **Appendices 4, 5 & 6**) which were designed only to assist and inform, not determine, the 'conversations with a purpose' that formed the backbone of this study.

I have also chosen to follow, loosely, Lawrence-Lightfoot's (1997) portraiture approach, through the provision of a brief, subjective pen portrait of each of the women, as I observed and came to know them over the course of the research study. My intent in placing this portrait at the beginning of the main body of each of the four chapters is to illuminate and render the reality of the research participants as I saw them: to position them in their *'time present'.*

# Time present

Amelia is 59 and the principal of a large co-educational, mixed race suburban high school, located close to a major city. She became the principal in 2005, as an internal appointee: it is her first and only principalship from which post she says she will retire.

Our first 'official' meeting is on a Friday, after school, the only day she will leave earlier than 5:30 pm. She has chosen a local coffee shop and bookstore, her favourite place to come to relax after school meetings, she explains. She is a very tall, elegant woman, tanned and athletic looking: years of playing tennis and hockey she later tells me. Her fair, slightly greying, hair is cut short in a very flattering style: she is dressed in a well cut black linen trouser suit and striking cerise silk blouse. I compliment her on this and she smilingly replies that some accessory of lilac or cerise is her trademark: she likes to make a statement. Amelia strikes me as a woman who will always be noticed; the consummate professional woman in image, demeanour and the confidence she exudes: not someone who will readily take 'no' for an answer I think. I wonder how naturally all this had come to her or how hard she had worked to achieve this on her pathway to principalship. I assume that I will find the answer to this as her life story emerges over the next few months, and indeed I do.

The conversation between us flows easily as we renew a brief acquaintance from a school leadership programme on which she was a student some years before. Amelia seems

completely at ease and very much a woman in control as she immediately regales me with an account of an incident with a male member of staff, who had attempted to 'put me down' at the weekly Friday morning staff meeting. Her account of the response meted out to 'that young man' has us both laughing. Then quickly she stresses that though she would never deliberately embarrass anyone she has learnt over the years that to be too conciliatory can be construed as weakness, and 'what people expect of women': 'but weak I have never been', she says with conviction. Amelia tells me that she learned early to 'power on' whatever the circumstances, and powerful is how she presents herself in her professional life. This image has been vital to her career she believes, as also has been her approach: she does not 'suffer fools gladly' nor will she 'tolerate being patronised'. The steely expression that sets across her face, and hardens the look in her blue eyes convinces me that Amelia is definitely not a woman to be taken less than seriously.

The conversation stops momentarily as we both drink the coffees that have been brought to the table. Amelia's expression softens as she tells me that this is the start of a process that she definitely wants to participate in, a means of reflecting on her life, and her professional journey that she has never taken time to do. She frowns and remarks that actually she does feel rather guilty just taking time for and thinking about herself, it doesn't come easily; but then she says that she justifies it as time well spent if it's helping someone else as well: she pauses, then she laughs, adding that it's great that she can also get an excellent cup of coffee every time we meet. This is Amelia's story.

# Time past

## Childhood: the influences of early family life, race, class, culture, language and religion that shaped personal development and values

I was keenly aware very early on in our conversations of Amelia's fascination with her family history which she told me had always been of interest to her, of how it helped her to understand herself and how her family came to be. She was keen to emphasise that growing

up within a huge extended family had impacted significantly on how she sees herself, and how this has helped shape her life and her values. Amelia's focus on this aspect was unique amongst the participants, and as it clearly means so much to her and her life story it was important for me to reflect this in the life history account.

So, as the conversations continued, Amelia spoke at length of the influence of both paternal and maternal sides of her family heritage and a sense of being part of something very special and a bit different – even eccentric – at least on the paternal ancestral side. Of particular significance to her, and her sense of self, was what she understood of her grandparents' differing lifestyles and family values, and the influence of their family lives and culture on their children, and ultimately on her and her younger brother and sister.

She attributed much of her drive and determination to succeed in life, and to follow her chosen career, to both nature and nurture factors within the huge extended family of which she was a part.

> I think I was born with the desire to succeed. I never believed that I couldn't achieve, it wasn't an option in my family it was just what was expected of us, though we weren't pushed as such. Being a girl was not an issue in this.

The family history that has so influenced Amelia is both complex and fascinating. Her father came from a very large family of thirteen siblings, who had a very stern and quite forbidding English father, and a South African, French speaking, mother descended from 17th century Huguenot settlers. She was described in the family as being a "very French '*dame' '',* and she was a formidable figure in her own way. Amelia's grandparents' family life was centred on the father figure who worked hard to provide for the family, and his 'very strong willed' wife. Although in the patriarchal tradition of the time, he was the breadwinner and master of the house, Amelia's grandmamma exerted power and influence over him and the children in many matters, especially regarding the household and the manner of the children's upbringing.

But Amelia states that

> I can't remember thinking only men worked and women didn't or that what women did in the house wasn't important - I just saw different things happening, accepted that it was the way it was. No-one ever said to me 'that's a woman's job', or 'you can't do that you're a girl' …

In relating her family history, and the anecdotes which she had heard from her father, she describes an interesting language issue for her grandparents which consequently impacted on the language which is her mother tongue. There were communication problems between the paternal grandparents, because of the English and French spoken by each, with neither speaking the other's language. To overcome this, the couple apparently decided to learn and communicate together in Afrikaans, but only spoke this between themselves, which Amelia felt was part of the eccentricity that denoted her ancestry, and of which trait she was both amused by and rather proud.

> I know I have always had an independent streak, and was not one to always follow the crowd but I wasn't ever totally a non-conformist …

The grandparents' decision though was to bring up their 13 children with English as their mother tongue, and as a result of this Amelia and her siblings were also brought up as English mother tongue speakers. This despite her maternal family's Afrikaans heritage, but Natal, for historical reasons, was primarily an English speaking area, and both her parents wanted English to be the home language. Although Amelia is bilingual through her maternal family heritage, and because of the Apartheid period in which she was educated, with compulsory Afrikaans taught in schools, she regards herself as 'very English' orientated in her thinking and culture.

> The family heritage, both sides, played a significant part in how I perceived the wider social and political society in which I was brought up and the influence this had on my values and beliefs, language was part of this of course and living in a 'very English' area.

Her paternal grandparents originally lived and worked on a farm in the Western Cape, where her father was born and grew up. He would tell Amelia that as a young child his diet consisted of fish and sweet potatoes, reinforcing to her and her siblings that life was hard and choice an indulgence not open to everyone. You had to make the most of what you had. Amelia's mother was born to an Afrikaans family. Her father was a teacher who later became an inspector of Bantu education (under the Bantu system imposed by the apartheid government), and her mother was a housewife who stayed at home to look after their five children. Amelia remarks that her mother's extended family lived on farms in another

province, and she always told her children that her diet consisted of meat, pap and more meat (in contrast to her father's early years diet), and it became a family joke to tease her father.

> It was always one of those funny family sayings, and I don't think I understood this as a class issue, not then anyway – I mean my family were middle class as I knew later – it just seemed from my mother's stories that her family had more (money) than my father's – and that my *oupa* (grandfather) was a very important man in the community.

## Impact or influence of societal structures and attitudes in the community context

Amelia's father was eight years old when his family moved from the Western Cape to Natal where

> my grandpa was a horticulturist by inclination, and he pursued his dream of owning a nursery garden; my father worked with him as he grew up, and he stayed in Natal when he married. So I suppose that I grew up knowing that people must follow their dreams, and hard work can make dreams come true.

Amelia's parents made their home in Natal where she was born and bred as the eldest of three children: two girls and a boy. They lived in a large town in Natal in what is now the province of KwaZulu-Natal. She described her experiences of family life from a very young age as being

> strict but fair, loving but disciplined, my parents encouraged our independence but it was still 'children are seen and not heard', from my father anyway, and we never dared answer him back. We, my sister and brother alike were taught to appreciate what we had very early in life and not take things for granted or belittle those who had less – not always easy for us to observe as children when we got caught up in school playground taunts of course.

Amelia experienced childhood in Natal as part of a huge extended family, and during weekends they would all meet up at the paternal grandparents' nursery garden, a large sprawling plot of land, where they played, cooked in the open air together and shared the privilege of having

> such a loving and close knit family as our support system and everyone in the area knew us – the family had lived there for so long, and Natal was very colonial very English, in everything social.

Amelia's grandpa had enlisted and had seen active service as an army officer on the Allied side during World War Two. These war time experiences had had a profound impact on him and he told the children that they must live life to the full as you could lose it any day. This emphasis on the value of life, and its temporary nature, Amelia says, explained why he encouraged them all, his children and grandchildren, to do what they wanted in life, and not be held back through fear or pressures of any kind.

But in other ways she felt that his soldiering had strengthened the prejudices that existed in a country that was very discriminatory and segregated, even before1948 and the Apartheid era. Amelia disclosed that this paternal side of the family was very strongly prejudiced against people of colour and certain religious groups. Her grandpa was very outspoken and his intolerance was well known. Amelia's father, although prone to the prejudices of the context, time and place of South Africa, was much more accepting of others than his own father was. This, coupled with Amelia's maternal family attitudes, helped shape her views on equality and fairness as she tried to make sense of the conflicting views on race, religion and colour; for in contrast to her grandpa's family, her mother's family demonstrated acceptance and tolerance.

> *Ouma's* (grandma's) family was 'colour blind', people of colour were invited into their home. This free association of races, at a time of endemic racial hatred and distrust meant hostility and derogatory labelling from their neighbours, but this didn't deter *ouma*: I know I learned a lot about tolerance, fairness and the equality of human beings through her example.

## Significant events and actions during childhood and adolescence

Amelia's early childhood years were extremely happy, her father had a steady job as a telephone technician and the family were well provided for. Being able to spend a lot of time together, and with the extended family, is something she remembers clearly and with great affection: in her mind it was trouble free and always fun. Towards the end of her primary schooling days, a change occurred which had significant consequences on family life. Her father took a job as a salesman that offered much more money but meant that he spent a lot of time away from home. Also at this time the domestic circumstances changed too, as Amelia's mother started work as an administrator at a local company and was no longer a full time housewife. These improved financial circumstances enabled the family to move to 'a better

part of town'. The social setting now changed and Amelia remembers that her parents began hosting formal dinner parties with other townspeople, as part of this upward social mobility. This was something which had not happened before as all their socialising had been informal and extended family based.

> We had moved from being middle class to affluent, we were now upper middle class I suppose.

But this change of financial and work circumstances was not as rosy, or as much for the better for them all, as her parents had hoped. Amelia's father's frequent travelling away from home in his new job took its toll on her parents' relationship, and affected the family badly. With three children and both parents working it became very difficult to maintain the stability and ease which, according to Amelia, had been the hallmark of their family lives in her early years. Amelia's mother's decision to take paid work outside the home was a significant factor, but this decision was never rescinded despite the problems now manifesting themselves, and in the next phase of their lives this administrative career path was to continue for her.

> Although I remember being so proud of my mom, she had a briefcase that she took with her every morning, and always looked so dressed up, so smart for 'her office' as she always called it, I don't know if it influenced me – as I said before it was just the way it was. This was a change but not a huge event for me. My mom worked outside the house now and before this she worked in it, I don't suppose then I even knew what a career was – my parents both had 'jobs'.

The events that followed from the difficult times the family were experiencing are remembered with great clarity by Amelia. She was 11 when her father decided to join the military, an interesting and difficult choice, she now feels on reflection, at this time in South Africa's Apartheid era. Amelia says that her father's decision was heavily influenced by her paternal grandpa, who had always hoped that one of his sons would join the army, and that this move would give security and a new status to the family. Their lives then were changed completely as they moved to a very small house on an army base outside a major city in what was then called the Transvaal province. The three children had to move school and for Amelia this came at the wrong time for many reasons, not least because she had recently been elected Deputy Head Girl of her school in Natal.

> I was so proud of this achievement – it had a huge impact on me. I really believe that this is what spurred me on in my belief that anything is possible if you set your mind to it. To be honest I really liked the power and status it gave me … not in a bossy way though at least I hope not … and I wasn't 'an angel' either… so it was very sad to leave before I had a real chance to prove myself worthy of my election.

Amelia says her parents explained to the three children that their whole life style change was an opportunity for them to grow close again after the 'high flying life' of the previous years which had impacted adversely on their family life and their values. The children were told that even though it would be difficult in some ways, in other ways it would be an opportunity to grow and succeed. Her parents now emphasised service and duty, not financial reward, as the most important for them as family, and her father was very pro his country's position which would have been very normal at that time (the early 60s), well before military service to support the apartheid state was decried (and avoided) by many, and South Africa became a pariah nation.

So, Amelia's recollection of that time is that she and her two siblings had been shown quite dramatically that

> more money, as my father's sales job had given us, does not buy happiness. My parents said that so many times to us. I sometimes think they were just reminding themselves of it when things were difficult, but it was a lesson I learned and later on I would never have taken a job just because it paid well.

The family's life was settled and secure again, and Amelia's father was promoted to a very senior level. Amelia's mother was employed by a large corporation and achieved a very senior administrative position, never again working solely in the home. As the children became teenagers, their parents moved to a suburban home of their own, near to the base but far enough to away to ensure, as Amelia recalls her parents telling her and her sister, that,

> as young girls we would not be growing up where 150 troops 'were lurking' – but they never explained exactly why those 'lurking troops' might cause problems for us – certain things were never spoken of directly in our family, but we were school girls so we knew these things as most adolescents did then - from playground talk and stories.

So the teenage years were happy and settled and Amelia moved to a co-educational high school where she took full part in all academic and sporting life, enjoying all that was on offer at school. It was at high school that she also developed a strong religious conviction, which remains with her to this day, as she says,

> I gave my life to God – I knew this was part of my life's purpose even at that early age.

But she says that although her parents and extended family went to church they were not committed Christians in a deeply religious sense, so this strong desire to become firmly committed to God did not spring from their example, but from her own spiritual awareness and development. She became involved in Christian youth groups at school and attended their youth camps, all of this becoming a natural part of her growing up. As a result, Amelia built relationships with her peers who held the same deep religious commitment, and she says,

> we believed that our mission was to share the gospel with all people, it was what we did as youth groups, and as spiritual beings it was our duty.

There was one special occasion which had a profound impact on her and which she says she will never forget. This was a church youth group visit to a mission hospital where terminally ill patients were treated.

> We had the privilege of visiting these patients, singing to them and sharing the Good News while holding their hands and praying for them. Most of these patients were people of colour, and remember it was of the time of deeply entrenched racism in South Africa. I just thought about what my *ouma* taught me about equality and fairness and tried not to think of these people in terms of their colour, but of their needs as people. I think this more than anything in my life shaped my views on the injustices in society and I saw my faith as a way I could deal with this.

Amelia also believes that her natural leadership qualities were developed 'unintentionally' through this religious group interaction. She was invited to chair youth meetings, plan camps and seminars and 'was able to interact easily with older people', the latter not something that was shared by all her peers.

> I think I was probably always mature for my age – you know, I have what people call an 'old soul'. Perhaps being the eldest child, I was naturally disposed to 'look after' the younger ones, even my younger cousins I think. It wasn't that I was always a serious child but I was always very aware of having to be responsible and that

> service and duty was everything …not that anything has changed through my adult years or I wouldn't be where I am now I suppose.

## How, when and why decisions were made on higher education

By the end of her Grade 11 year, Amelia was committed to studying education to become a teacher, encouraged by her parents. Her 'dream' was fulfilled when following an application to the City's University, and an interview by Department officials, she was selected, offered a bursary and was enrolled at the University to study for a BA degree, majoring in Geography. As an undergraduate student, like most of her friends at that time, she lived at home, using the bus to the campus and back. It was a long journey each way but she used the opportunity to read motivational books as she enjoyed having the 'right thought to share or an inspiring story to tell' to her family and to her church youth groups. Through her studies, Amelia became drawn to psychology, particularly enjoying that subject and the lectures: she was fascinated by human behaviour and this became integral in her understanding of people and her life events. She says her long journeys by bus

> provided me with an opportunity to watch and observe the way people behave … I'm sure that this helped me to manage my life and understand how and why things happen – I know it has helped me in the way I've managed the process of promotion in my teaching career –understanding why school boards behave and act as they do. Seeing their prejudices as being about my gender and not necessarily about me as a person means I have the advantage over them ...

Amelia's university years were dedicated to her studies and she acknowledges that she was not a typical student in many ways. She didn't behave as many of her peers did, and has never had a casual attitude to anything she does.

> I really wanted to be successful so that I could fulfil my ambitions, I didn't know how else to be. I made friends with other young people who shared the same goals; self -discipline, chastity and a serious, no nonsense approach to studying. I suppose I was considered a little too serious and too boring by most other students. I didn't have a boyfriend, and was not interested in finding one. I remember thinking that I would probably end up a spinster, as most girls around me only discussed dresses, boys, dates, and when they could get married. But it was just the way I was and I certainly wasn't worried by this.

## The significance of the higher education experience

In her final year at university Amelia moved into residence and loved being close to the campus and the library, where she could easily

> keep my head down to studying and for longer now with no need to spend time travelling…

Her influence amongst her fellow students seemed to be growing and she embraced this comfortably as she had at her senior primary school when being elected prefect and subsequently Deputy Head Girl. She found herself being nominated by her peers to fill the student and the youth group leadership positions.

> I don't know if I ever thought of myself as deserving of the positions offered and accepted. I suppose I put this down to being someone who was very responsible, had values I lived by, was serious and could be very outspoken; I was not scared to stand my ground, to stand up for what I believed was right, not then nor since. But mainly I thought then it was because I was the tallest girl in the year, I was blonde and so I was noticeable. I always wore smart, formal clothes, I could never dress down as a student nor ever have in my whole career, so maybe I looked the part for official roles.

As a student influenced by two lecturers, who weren't afraid for their students to challenge the status quo, and through her church groups Amelia became much more aware of the social tensions and the injustices of the apartheid state, and this heightened her feeling that she must do something to make life better for those less fortunate. So at this stage, Amelia's political opinions were influenced by her studies and her religious convictions as well as the formative childhood experiences.

> People are people, despite colour or creed. I was a 'bit of an activist' as I believed everybody should have the same opportunities and during the apartheid years this was certainly not the ideology of the day, but I had the courage of my convictions I suppose, and my faith, though these were never put to the extreme test, as happened with some of my peers at university, arrested by the apartheid state police.

Amelia grew away from her father at this time because of her 'activist' political views. He had become more entrenched in the ideology of the apartheid state as a serving officer, as a result, she is convinced, of the days he spent on the border in military defence operations. Her father was concerned by what he saw as her 'growing left wing tendencies' and,

> he attempted to indoctrinate me, telling me I must "have a fear for the 'Red Danger' and the 'Communists' …this later became the 'terrorists' " of course to him and so many others. He saw these threats as being synonymous with people of colour and 'lefty whites', so I had no choice really but to distance myself from these ideas, and from him as well then in many ways too.

The consequence of this move away ideologically was that when she completed her studies, she immediately applied for a teaching position in Natal, influenced by her desire to go back to her roots, but also to move away from the family.

> Going back to Natal allowed me the opportunity to become my own person, I wanted to be independent and free… and this was so important to me at this stage of my life.

## When and why principalship was considered

Amelia had never doubted that teaching and secondary school education was her destiny and is convinced that the foundations were laid in Natal as a young child playing at being 'the schoolmarm' and spending time with the teachers in her extended family.

> I was groomed by the contextual influences of my early years and the farm school children I 'taught', I also knew secondary school teaching would be my forte as I did not have the patience to wipe noses and dry tears while teaching.

Two of Amelia's maternal uncles were qualified teachers, they were also married to teachers, and eventually one of these uncles was promoted to a very senior education directorship. It was certainly the case for Amelia that teaching was not just something that happened in her school it was work that people did, people she knew, loved and looked up to. Amelia was particularly close to one of her cousins, the son of the uncle who was to become an education department director and she remembers that this close relationship led them both to assist Amelia's uncle in marking papers – by adding up marks for him. It was this early exposure to teachers' work, and the process of teaching, that sparked Amelia's love of all things to do with schools.

> I idolised education, and I developed a passionate desire to teach when I grew up, and think I can say that I was probably only 11 when I was certain that I would be a school principal one day.

Amelia played at being 'the teacher'.

> I loved being the one who 'knew' things and told things, I loved telling stories, I loved 'teaching' my cousins, 'teaching' the farm workers' children and anyone else who would sit still long enough to be 'taught' by me. I don't know if it was the power of the position I liked, though I knew it was a powerful place to be, but I suppose I got a taste of it then and maybe that feeling did 'power me on' later as I climbed the career ladder.

Amelia never regretted her decision to move back to Natal to begin her education career. She was allocated to a school she really liked working in, and was immediately appointed to teach Grade 12 Geography. This was unusual for such an inexperienced teacher to be given the matric class, but she worked very hard to prove herself equal to the task. It was at this stage that she was also 'taken under the wing' of a male teacher, a senior member of her department, who seemed to appreciate her efforts and said she 'had a great future'. As a result of his encouragement she became involved with whole school matters, as far as she was allowed, began thinking about writing materials for text books, and

> in my second year I volunteered to mark matric papers, quite an unusual thing to do but my approach to teaching was always a little different from others I worked with, I was very single minded I suppose … and I was not 'in it for the money', as some obviously were. I loved slaving myself by marking and preparing interesting lessons.

Over the next few years Amelia concentrated on achieving 'brilliant' matric results for her pupils. She didn't allow herself to be discouraged when she was not promoted to head of department, which she thought she had earned and deserved, as this job was offered to a male teacher from outside the school. But she wanted to prove to herself and others what she was capable of, as she knew she would have to gain more experience and become better at everything than any male teacher to have a chance to be promoted. She became involved in community activities and educational forums, was elected onto various executive committees and was always willing to 'go the extra mile'.

> I used these experiences to enable me to develop more and become more. I really wanted to continue to study as well, but the financial constraints were a real obstacle. Also I felt so much loyalty towards my teaching work and the school that I didn't think it would be right to take time away from the work I was paid to do and that I loved, so the studies had to wait, even though I thought more qualifications would help me get promotion.

Ambition for Amelia did not abate during those first teaching years. She knew she was 'driven' to achieve and that early words of motivation from her father to her and her two siblings remained with her. She says her father's favourite expression when they were feeling unconfident of any task or exam at school kept ringing in her ears "*go big or go home'* – don't be satisfied with less than you're capable of; if you can't make the effort to be the best then give up now".

> So I suppose that just as I had known that I always wanted to be a teacher, I knew that I still aspired to one day being a principal. But my experience in the school was not encouraging. I really thought then, that this was now just a dream, as I could see that the system seemed to allow only male teachers the opportunity to be promoted whether competent or not. I know that I felt angry that it was very unfair to promote anyone who was not good at their job so I determined to do better than anyone else and see where that got me.

During this time, through her church work, she met the man who was later to become her husband and to whom she has now been married for over 30 years.

> He was not a teacher, he was several years older than me, and although we shared the same deep faith, he was very different from me; he was carefree and adventurous. But he also believed in hard work to make dreams come true and having belief in yourself and your dreams. He always encouraged me saying, 'if you can dream it, you can do it'… a bit like my grandpa and my father really, and the scary thing was that he had his birthday on the exact same day as my father, what a co-incidence.

The couple married after three years of courtship and planned to have a family. Amelia was not deterred from motherhood despite her ambitions for principalship and her intention to continue teaching

> I never thought I had to choose between these two, it didn't occur to me. We were blessed with a beautiful daughter, but after this I knew that I didn't want another child, for many reasons not just my career, and perhaps it seemed strange given that I loved being a sibling and also having all those cousins to grow up with. It was a joint decision with my husband, but I was put under some pressure by my parents who said only children were never happy children, and it was selfish of me. But our daughter is now grown up very happy and with her own life. We have seen reflected in her our strong personalities and our Christian values. I am so proud that she chose to become a teacher. She said I was the best possible role model and because of me she'd never wanted to do anything else.

Amelia describes the family life as being very settled and harmonious but she spent only a few months at home after their daughter was born, as she became 'very bored with domesticity'. It was this that made her realise she was not a natural 'stay at home mom', any more than she could have been a primary school teacher with young children to nurture. However, the family dynamics were to change as her husband's work necessitated them moving to another province which for Amelia meant a welcome return to the Transvaal. Amelia didn't see this as a negative factor for her career, she was happy to make the move which she thought would be better for her work and promotion chances as well as for the family unit.

> I know some of my friends, who were very much 'women's libbers' at this time thought I was mad to 'up and follow' and put Ray's work first; but I didn't see it this way … the move was good for us all, and I wanted the opportunity as much as he did. Am I a feminist (?)… I don't know … I hate labels of any kind and have spent my life trying to avoid being labelled or labelling others …if believing in what women can do and the equality they must enjoy is feminism, then I am …and my faith demands equality in how all people are regarded.

The family relocated and Amelia's belief that this would be in her best career interests was borne out. A friend of her father's was principal of a local high school and Amelia was offered a temporary post teaching Geography, so she went back to work, and she and her husband were agreed on this decision. But she recalled that as she didn't have, or want, a live in, full time maid or a nanny (very unusual in South Africa at that time) to do the housekeeping and the child care, she and her husband shared the domestic duties: This was never an issue between them, certainly not one that caused any bad feeling

> but, I think I did most of the work in the house, as I still do, though that's more because I like things done my way not because my husband doesn't help … I know that I am quite a controlling person.

With some amusement Amelia recalled that the child care was managed very differently, as on many days, from the time her daughter was a toddler up to pre-school age, she took her to school with her, with the principal's permission. She was looked after by admin staff but when she was older she often remained in Amelia's classroom, doted upon as she recalls by the pupils, as much as by the staff: an early version, and she unwittingly a pioneer, of South Africa's, 'take a girl child to work' she says.

## The last stages of the pathway to principalship

In 1995 she was given a permanent post, appointed HoD at the school where she was teaching and this really marked the start of Amelia's career in educational leadership and a significant first step on her journey to principalship. Her commitment to her career and to education was demonstrated in the success of her own classes, in her work with exam boards, writing educational materials and matric marking, and in her wider involvement in her professional association. Amelia applied for several deputy principalships but was not successful and became very frustrated with what she saw as a lack of recognition for her work and abilities, but she was determined not to let these setbacks deter her.

> The Boards then consisted of men only, the district officials and governors, who quite obviously didn't want a woman. I was always disappointed and I don't know why they bothered to interview me really, except as a 'the token female', but I kept thinking this was good experience and I wouldn't let their prejudice stop me, I would 'power on'. In fact I think it fuelled my determination and as I said before, from my university psychology studies, I never thought it was me they didn't want so it wasn't a personal thing for me really.

Amelia remained confident in herself and her abilities, describing herself as

> a strong and resolute character … a type A personality I suppose you could say … and I wanted to succeed. I didn't have strong role models in my career but I had so many important and influential role models in my family, both male and female. Also, my husband's unwavering support for my ambitions was a huge boost … I was never conflicted over my roles as a wife, a mother and a career woman … he has been in many ways my mentor exploring and explaining problems and dilemmas of leadership from his corporate work and perceptions …

Amelia's dogged determination paid off and eventually she was offered an internal promotion to deputy principal, and this position and the experience gained made her confident of obtaining a principal's post. This, she knew, was now the right time to embark on further studies and she was afforded the opportunity to enrol on an Advanced Certificate In Education (ACE) in Management at a local university and passed Cum Laude. This really encouraged her to take her studies further in her professional field so she enrolled at another institution for the Certificate in School Leadership and Management, which she also passed Cum Laude. These results, and the extra boost in confidence they had provided, encouraged

her and she began the process of applying for principalship posts: with both the experience and the theoretical understanding of leadership she was determined that nothing would now stand in her way.

> I had never worked for a female school principal so I had never had the experience of a female leader role model, or first-hand evidence that a woman could do the job better than a man but I was definitely convinced that I could do the job at least as well as the men I knew who were leading schools …and now that I was better qualified than most of them, I was sure I could do it better.

At the beginning of the new millennium, Amelia felt very confident of her chances of gaining a principalship in what had always seemed to be a male preserve, co-educational high schools. She made several applications for an external promotion to principalship but it seemed the time still was not right for women to be appointed to 'the top job'. However, she did not let this deter her and in her role as deputy principal, despite having lacked a 'real school mentor' in her own career, used her position and influence to mentor and encourage young female staff particularly to '*go big or go home*'. But she was very clear that she didn't limit this mentoring to female staff.

> I wanted to do the best by all the staff and professional development was a passion of mine and something I saw as my duty as a senior manager. Besides I was always grateful to that male colleague in my early years, who encouraged me, even though it wasn't the mentoring I would have wished for – oh and not forgetting how lucky I was to have the principal who gave me my chance in the Transvaal school – with a baby as well … does that count as mentoring?

Amelia did not let the lack of success in her promotion applications affect her work, or her optimism that 'it would happen', and she remained happily at the school continuing to 'learn and grow'. She had also become very well respected for her work in the Province, and with her professional association to which she was increasingly committed. Then in 2004 'it happened', she was offered the opportunity, as an internal candidate, to apply for the principal's post. Amelia was the only woman interviewed, even in the climate of the 'new South Africa' and gender legislation to redress the historic injustices. Amelia was appointed to the principalship commencing in 2005: her dream and ambition finally realised.

> I suppose I am a role model in that I have 'made it' to the top job in a co-ed school. Although I made it without the experience of a female role model, I do believe that if one woman shows she can do it against the odds, then any woman who really wants to can do it.

However, after all the years she strove to get the 'top job', it is ironic she feels that it was only a short time later when she was invited, and hugely encouraged by 'the governing body chairman', to apply for the principalship post of a very prestigious girls high school.

> I was tempted of course, what woman school leader wouldn't be? It was flattering as I felt that all those years of dedication had paid off, this was my recognition, so I did apply. But it was strange really as I began to ask myself why I would do this now when I have worked so hard to get the post and the type of school I really want, against all the odds for a woman, odds I had observed since my Natal teaching days. My school, a former Model C, was not an easy one to lead: societal changes post - apartheid had altered the demographics of the school population, and in consequence the nature of the pupil and the parent involvement. Where could I do most good was my question to myself and, as my faith determined for me, the answer was in staying where I was. So I withdrew my application and have never regretted that decision.

## Chapter overview

This chapter presented the findings from the narrative account of one of the women principals with whom I had in-depth conversations over a period of many months. The life history that I have presented is my interpretation of Amelia's life story through the data analysis of the personal and professional actions, events and influences which have determined her pathway to principalship: her *'time past'* to her *'time present'*. The analysis of the data has identified three key factors which have impacted significantly and definitively on her and the journey she embarked upon from such an early age and with such clear aspirations. These key factors are: early family life; the importance of education; and religion and her deeply held belief in God's purpose for her life.

Amelia's story shows clearly that the family played a huge role in shaping her values, her interests and her aspirations. The importance she placed on the influence of her heritage and particularly her paternal grandparents' history, cultural backgrounds and beliefs, and their eccentricities; the support and affection given by the close extended family and above all her parents' commitment to family life, the values they instilled in the siblings, and their belief in their children's ability, irrespective of their gender, to do and be whatever they wanted. Family members, male and female were her role models. This empowering family ethos was to be continued into her own family unit's values and beliefs as she married and had a child of her own.

Amelia's deeply held faith was her mainstay as she grew older, and her story demonstrates how this complemented the values, discipline and love that her family embodied, and became an extension of the way she knew she had always wanted to lead her life: through service and duty. Amelia says categorically that she gave her life to God, and her journey to achieve principalship was the path that she believed her faith wanted her to take.

Amelia's belief in the power of education from the age of eight was a key determinant of her journey. She admits to 'idolising' education, a belief engendered through the association with the teachers in her extended family, her love of learning and school, and of her 'playing at teaching'. Teaching was all that she ever wanted to do and was clearly how she demonstrated her deeply held conviction that through education, social justice could be achieved; a key factor to uphold in the entrenched prejudice of the apartheid era in which she grew up, and in which she taught for much of her early career.

The next chapter provides a detailed presentation of the data drawn from the narrative life story of a second female principal.

# CHAPTER FIVE: MAROPENG'S STORY

*Fly with the eagle, fly high above the storm*

## Introduction

This chapter follows the same structure as the previous chapter. It provides a detailed presentation of the data drawn from a female principal's narrative of her personal and professional pathways to principalship, and the findings which have emerged from my interpretations. It is also loosely based on Lawrence-Lightfoot's (1997) portraiture approach, and presents a brief, subjective pen portrait of this woman as I observed and came to know her over the course of the research study. My intent in placing this portrait at the beginning of the main body of the chapter is to illuminate and render the reality of the research participant as I saw her: to position her in *'time present'.*

## Time present

Maropeng is 57 and the principal of a large high school in a semi–rural area of a predominantly rural province of South Africa. She became principal in 2011 as an internal appointee. It is her first principalship from which post she intends to retire.

Our first 'official' meeting is on a Wednesday during the July school holidays. She has asked me to choose a venue in Johannesburg where she is visiting her daughter and granddaughter at their home to the south of the city. I suggest a local shopping mall close to Wits campus and just off the M2 highway for ease of access. I am aware that Maropeng, like many other 'out-of-towners', is apprehensive about driving in Johannesburg, so it is important that the mall is easy to find and that inside this, the bookstore and coffee shop I choose is a quiet, comfortable venue which will suit us both well. She arrives slightly breathless and looking rather tense. I stand up to greet her; we share a hug, exchange the few traditional words of greeting in Sesotho that I have learned and sit down. Maropeng tells me that she did not drive

herself but was brought safely to the venue by her daughter, and feels so much more relaxed as a result. She gathers her breath, silent for a moment, and then says that she is 'gasping' for a cup of tea. I express surprise at the very English expression she has used: she leans towards me and takes my hand, smiling broadly as she tells me that she learnt 'many more English expressions than that' during her study period in England. We laugh together as I wonder aloud what those could be; she declines to tell me saying I must wait till we know each other better. It is a relaxing beginning and I see how the tension has left her face, allowing it to soften to reveal the gentle features and disarmingly dark brown smiling eyes that I remember from our brief acquaintance at a school leadership programme on which she was a student some years before.

Maropeng is a short, slightly built woman, she is dressed in a dark skirt and patterned blouse over which is a maroon cardigan picking up one of the colours in the blouse; over her arm is a neutral coloured winter coat. As is commonplace for many African women, she is wearing a straight, glossy wig over her natural hair, and though this is partially covered by the warm hat she has donned, the wig's sleek fringe frames her remarkably unlined face. Maropeng looks smart, very comfortable, and also very warm on this typical, bitingly cold Johannesburg winter's day. She strikes me as a woman whose gentle, kindly demeanour belies the forceful character she must be to hold the position she does. Yet I wonder how hard she has had to work to bring out that forcefulness and not allow first impressions based on her inherent gentleness to act against her on her pathway to this recent principalship. I assume that I will find the answer to this as her life story emerges over the next few months, and indeed I do.

The conversation between us flows easily as Maropeng launches in to a description of what principalship means to her, and how her whole career had been based on chance, arising out of very difficult personal circumstances. She asks if I mind this ' stream of consciousness', as she has never before had the opportunity to reflect deeply upon her life story, and had never considered her life and career as orderly or planned: quite the reverse she says emphatically. I reassure her that I am very comfortable with this approach and that I am looking forward to the conversations, in whatever way she directs these, on my journey to understanding why she chose the principalship path. She smiles, slowly sips her tea, and tells me that she has 'trusted in God's purpose' for her, even at the darkest times. After a moment's silence she

says brightly that if I am happy to listen to her story then she is very happy to help me with my research journey. This is Maropeng's story.

# Time past

## Childhood: the influences of early family life, race, class, culture, language and religion that shaped personal development and values

Maropeng is the first-born daughter of eight siblings, born in October 1957 into what she has described as a well-educated, middle class family, who lived in the south of Johannesburg in a primarily Sotho speaking area. But it was clear from the early conversations that Maropeng was somewhat ambivalent about her family and family life given that her experiences had not always been happy ones, at least not from her adolescent years. During her early years she tells of growing up in a very large extended family, which included five of her cousins. She says that, as the African proverb states '*It takes a village to raise a child',* her parents did what so many other black families do, and consider their duty: they had taken in the older children of their siblings who lived in the rural areas, to ensure that these youngsters received a better education by being in urban schools. Maropeng tells me that this better urban schooling was a distinctly possible prospect in the South Africa of the fifties and early sixties, despite the iniquitous Bantu Education Act of 1952 which, she explained, enshrined in law the segregation of black and white schools and the curricula in these. She also explained that the distinction between cousin and sibling is blurred in African culture and having such a large and disparate-aged family of siblings and cousins seemed perfectly normal to her, as she knew no other way of family life. Her cousins were already part of the family when she was born, and her seven younger siblings arrived during the course of the next twelve years.

These early years were happy and nurturing, and she was blessed with parents and grandparents who were strong role models in so many ways during her childhood. Her family were well educated professionals: her grandfather and father being high school teachers of English and her mother a senior nurse. Her parents' friends were all of the professional

middle class and included their neighbour, who was a hospital matron, nurses, teachers, school inspectors, court interpreters and some church members. Maropeng's family were devout Christians though her parents had different faiths. Her mother was Catholic and had completed her secondary schooling at a Catholic Mission school prior to her nursing training: her father was a Methodist and had been educated at a Methodist school prior to his teacher training. The children were brought up in their mother's Catholic faith and it was only in much later life that Maropeng was to turn her back on Catholicism after significant and devastating events made her re think her faith and its direction.

Maropeng was therefore totally immersed from a very young age in education and in religion, both of these were given high importance within the nuclear and extended family, and both governed the way their family lives were led at this time. Her grandparents and parents believed passionately in the value of education and its importance in building and improving their lives, and that of others. Maropeng regularly visited the local library with her family and was 'hooked on books'. Their home was also filled with books and Maropeng says she grew to love the feel and the look of the old books of English novels, poems and plays that her father had collected, and which he would very often read aloud to the children. In their home reading, written information and the written word were treated with respect, and formed the backbone of the family's daily lives. Maropeng remembers clearly that,

> every afternoon my grandfather brought along the newspaper for my father to read to the family and explain to us in detail what was written. As this was going on, I would be listening attentively and watching my father's expressions as he read, and my grandfather's as he nodded or shook his head at what was being read. It was almost a religious practice I think … and it was as much a part of our lives as eating or sleeping or praying.

The routines of Maropeng's family life were clearly very ordered and she loved this as it gave her a 'sense of security and of joy'. She was a happy child and

> I could not have wished that my situation had been any different during those childhood years –only later did things start to go wrong and I still wonder why my life took the path it did when I was in my late adolescence …

But of that early childhood she has 'wonderful memories'. She describes how the family, like many others before the advent of television, gathered around the radio every evening after supper. It was a ritual that her parents always observed as at 7.00 pm it was news time on

'Radio South Africa'. She remembers that during this news time, all the children, including her older cousins, and younger siblings

> would be sitting quietly, and told to keep our fingers on our mouths lest we be tempted to speak out and distract my parents and grandparents from listening to the news.

That education was highly valued was clear to Maropeng, and there was no distinction made as to gender. She remembers that there were traditional roles adhered to in the house, with certain chores being assigned to the girls or the boys, but as far as their education was concerned, all were expected to do the same. All the cousins and siblings were encouraged to do their best, to study and achieve and 'make something' of their lives. It was taken for granted by the children that the parents would insist that after the news it was study time for all of them. The study time activities depended on the ages of the children, with the young ones having to practice their letters or their reading.

> But those who had homework to be done, well my father would help them thereafter it would be lesson time, which he provided. I am not sure if the lesson was always relevant to what we were taught at school or not but it always focused on the three Rs -that is reading, writing and recitation …sometimes arithmetic and visual literacy was taught too …but really it was whatever my father thought useful or that he was interested in doing that day.

As the first born Maropeng feels that she had to be more responsible than her younger siblings. She was a 'serious–minded' child and always a driven person, determined to do well in her lessons: it seemed to come naturally to her. Always during these homework times she wanted to learn what her cousins did, even though the work was harder than hers as they were older and in higher grades at school.

> But I made sure that what my father taught them I mastered.

Maropeng loved her primary school days and was determined to enjoy everything that school offered. She knew that her parents were very proud of her achievements and encouraged her to do well at school and be 'a role model' for her cousins and siblings as she excelled in her grades. Her father told her that she must always:

> Fly with the eagle, fly high above the storm.

She loved the idea of this maxim that her father told her to live by and this, coupled with her deep faith, is how she feels she has lived her life and made sense of what at times have been 'the nonsensical events' that have befallen her.

## Impact or influence of societal structures and attitudes in the community context

Maropeng moved up to high school and continued to do well academically. Her parents' friends children were also doing well and it seemed that their chance of entering the middle class professions of their parents' generation was secure. Maropeng was already torn, at the age of 15, as to whether she would be a nurse, like her mother and her mother's friends or a teacher of English, as her father and grandfather were. But she leaned more towards nursing at this time, influenced by the hospital stories of her mother's friends, and her in-built sense of responsibility and duty.

> I suppose this was brought on by caring for so many young siblings … I knew I couldn't be happy if I was not doing something to help others. Even at that young age I knew that you must put others before yourself. But I always had a love for language and literature, of story-telling too. My mother belonged to a book club and she would sometimes tell us about the books she and her women friends were reading. You see, our house was always full of people, educated people, and I knew my parents were very well respected in the community. Of course that influenced me and I aspired to that … so to be a nurse or a teacher was my ambition and one encouraged by my parents.

Maropeng's continued success at high school was marred now by only one factor: her older cousins became very jealous of her. She says that now she has thought about her life more closely, she is certain that these cousins were beginning to be influenced by the unrest that gradually permeated Soweto's communities and schools; issues that were 'quietly smouldering' and affecting family life only in subtle ways at that time: effects that she was mostly blissfully ignorant about. But whatever the reasons, Maropeng would feel the full brunt of the cousins' jealousy of her when her parents were out and they were babysitting the younger children.

> I know they thought I was a show off and a swot so they always used the opportunities when my parents were not in, to 'deal with me'. They would bully me and say some very hurtful things and dared me never to tell my parents or worse would happen next time. I knew better than to tell my parents anyway but I often

> ended up in bed in tears not really understanding why the cousins were so mean, just because I liked school and was good at learning things.

The cousins' behaviour towards her caused Maropeng to 'dig deeply' into the faith that was already the cornerstone of her life. She believed that she must always live the life her parents and grandparents expected and on which, as she believed then, her solid family life was built: values of hard work, discipline, loyalty, trust, service and duty. During those early childhood years, as the Sixties decade unfolded, she was aware of, but not exposed within the family in any overt way, to the injustices of the Apartheid system and the growing civil unrest which was later to affect them all. Maropeng's memory of the time is of a full and happy family life; the extended family meals especially on Sundays, of her parents' friends visiting and all the children always being around: to be seen if not always heard, as her grandfather often reminded them if they played too noisily.

> My parents were strict and we were occasionally beaten for our misdemeanours, but though my mother would show us the *sjambok* it was mainly for effect rather than action. We were children, we did childish things, and I like to think that, as in the stories that I love by Chris van Wyk about his Johannesburg township childhood and growing up in the early Apartheid years, we were no different to children anywhere despite what was happening around us – we laughed, played games, had fun and sometimes ended up in tears ...

Maropeng is clear that her childhood was not knowingly affected by the events that were unfolding around her, yet she learned later that her family were as embroiled in the struggle, and as divided in so many ways by loyalties and allegiances to the different struggle groups, as other families in their community. It was this growing awareness of the outside world impacting on their close and loving home and community context which, in her late teenage years, she is now certain, was to set her against herself and her values.

## Significant events and actions during childhood and adolescence

By 1974, Maropeng's cousins, who had become more difficult in the home and more reluctant to study, dropped out of school and went back to their rural homes. This was something of a relief to Maropeng as the relationship had become even more difficult between them and this was affecting the whole family. Her insistence on studying hard was

also giving rise to tensions with one brother in particular, who was already espousing the political consciousness of a radical struggle group. Maropeng was also aware of the growing tensions between her parents, but unaware of the cause of these. Only much later in mature adulthood was the truth around these tensions revealed, and Maropeng was to learn the full meaning of hypocrisy as demonstrated by the father she had once revered.

Maropeng was now 18 and very impressionable and naïve when she became involved with a group of very disaffected and politically motivated high school students and young people in her community.

> I was caught up in things I didn't really understand and with people I wasn't certain I could trust, but I wanted to fit in, I did believe that I should fight oppression of my people. It was exciting too, of course, to rebel. The Soweto uprising occurred, I was part of that and the whole world knows what happened on 16th June 1976 and the months afterwards. But for me the more dreadful aftermath of that was the discovery that I was pregnant. I had got involved with a boy and despite my Catholic upbringing we had become lovers. It was so impulsive that I never thought about consequences.

Maropeng knew that there was no option for her but to have the baby although she realised this would be the end of her dreams of becoming a nurse or a teacher, as she would have to drop out of school.

> It was unacceptable to have a baby before completing school; moreover I was not even married or betrothed.

She was unable to face up to the harsh reality immediately, so she kept the pregnancy a secret for as long as it was possible. But eventually she was forced to tell her parents of her condition and who the father was.

> Both my parents were so disappointed, it was a heavy blow to them; my unmarried pregnancy hurt them and my grandparents very deeply. But, my cousins were happy to see me down and out. We all knew that this was the end of my dreams of completing my education … becoming a nurse or a teacher seemed well beyond my reach now.

In addition to their disappointment, her parents totally disapproved of the father of Maropeng's baby. He was a young man from a very poor and not well educated family, and

they warned her against marrying him, despite him having 'despoiled' her. But she says that, in the end, the cultural traditions were upheld, *lobola* (dowry) was paid by the young man's family and they were married according to customary law.

> It was a terrible mistake and my parents were right that it could never work out. I thought my father was being a snob but he knew that this boy would never aspire to be anything and would resent me for wanting more from my life. I tried, I really tried to be a good wife in his family but it was not in my heart … I was too young, and I just wanted my education back. The truth is we were such different characters and he began to resent me for being who I was. If he caught me reading he would tear the book from me, and I put up with this … what else to do I didn't know until one day he took and burnt all my books. I left him then … how could I live with a man like that he was ignorant and stupid.

Maropeng returned to live with her parents, with the baby girl she had given birth to in 1977. The little girl was looked after in the family and brought up by Maropeng's parents as was the usual practice. Maropeng was expected to contribute to the family income so she needed to find work. Over the course of the next few years she took on various unskilled jobs to earn a living and pay her way.

> I worked as an assistant nurse, untrained, but this was hard and unfulfilling as really I was just a cleaner and paid very low wages … later I worked at a manufacturing company in menial jobs but this was better paid. I was not happy there and I didn't see how I could be when it was so far from my dreams of a professional career. And by now, some of my friends had graduated as lawyers, teachers, nurses and doctors. I felt I was completely left behind.

Maropeng had reached a very low point in her young life and to add to her sadness and disillusionment she and her baby girl had not bonded well: the child was happiest when with her grandmother or her young aunties. Maropeng knew in her heart that this was for the best, as she was not ready for motherhood, any more than she had been ready to be a wife. But her Catholic faith remained her 'bedrock' and although, as a Catholic, she was only too aware of the 'sin' she had committed, she was certain that 'God would find a higher purpose' for her, or else her life would make no sense.

## How, when and why decisions were made on higher education

Maropeng had always expected that she would be a student at university or nursing college, as her parents had also expected of her. But although this seemed like a pipe dream now, she was still part of a circle of young people who had continued with their studies and gone to university.

> Fortunately my friends did not give up on me, they encouraged, supported and helped me. They took me through their lectures; I learned new things through them as we got together during varsity holidays. We continued our hobbies like reading, visiting open lectures, botanical gardens, museums, art galleries and choral music festivals or competitions. It was at these meetings that my desire to complete my education really took hold … I wanted so badly to be properly educated and have a worthwhile professional career.

Maropeng was very unsure how she could pursue her dream, but she knew she had to do something and finally she decided to broach the subject with her mother. Their relationship had mellowed over the previous few years as her mother tried to come to terms with her daughter's 'shameful' behaviour and she had eventually forgiven Maropeng, whose bitter disappointment with herself was so obvious to the family. However, her father was not so forgiving. He had been so angered by his daughter's pregnancy, and her failure to 'make something' of herself when she had been given every opportunity and encouragement, that he distanced himself from her both emotionally and physically; as far as the latter was possible whilst still sharing the family home. He would not speak or communicate in any way with his oldest daughter.

> I could not talk to my father about my wish to take up my education again as we had really drifted apart because of my misdemeanour: I had fallen from grace in his eyes and there seemed no way back. As he had always told me I should, I wanted to be the eagle and fly high above this storm but he couldn't see that … I suppose his hurt was such that couldn't believe in me anymore … I had disappointed him so badly.

Maropeng's wish for her education to begin again was so strong that she finally 'plucked up courage' to talk to her mother.

> It was not easy for me but she listened as I begged for another chance. My conviction was such that I think she knew that somehow I would do it and that it was better for me if it was the family who helped me back onto the 'right path'. I felt so positive about my future as my mother now supported me whole heartedly.

Maropeng was overjoyed and with her mother's support and encouragement, both financial and emotional, eight years after she had thought her education was over forever, she registered at university for a BA Degree in January 1985. Her mother's words of advice were to stay with Maropeng: *'get married to your books now, forget about men … get qualified'.*

## The significance of the higher education experience

Her university studies convinced her of her career path, she knew now that she would be a teacher eventually, that to be part of the education process was the service and duty she must devote her life to in helping others. Maropeng's dream now was to be a teacher of English, one as committed and passionate as her father and grandfather had been to the importance of books and literacy. Maropeng discovered very quickly that, determined though she was, for many reasons there was to be no easy path through her studies or to reach her goal.

> The home and family circumstances remained complicated, especially my relationship with my father and my responsibility to my growing daughter. The ability to study well was made worse by a strike affecting lectures … and the social context with increasing unrest was a major complicating factor too. I tried to be the eagle but it was not always easy … it took me four years to complete the degree instead of three, which was frustrating and financially difficult as well but I would not give up.

Maropeng loved being a student; she took as full a part in student life as was possible and made many new friends. She was a member of the Christian fellowship and her faith became even more rooted as she joined with other like-minded young men and women in prayer and in their belief in service to others. Her certainty in 'God's purpose' became even more important to her as the tensions and events of the struggle against Apartheid intensified throughout the country. Her Christian group became her rock in the face of these, and their 'Christian-based commitment' to work towards ending the injustices was of great importance to her.

Maropeng graduated in December 1988, a proud moment for her and a mark of her courage and determination to succeed in the face of all the odds that had seemingly been stacked against her.

> My father was the happiest of them all. After all the disappointment I had caused he was so proud of me and our relationship was able to grow again. So when my maternal grandmother offered to sponsor me he did not want to hear any of it. He organised and paid for me to get the graduation regalia and even offered to take me to the venue. My graduation was a proud day for us all, the pride and confidence both my parents had once had in me was permanently restored. I was exonerated from my previous misdemeanour; I was worthy once more to be included in the circle of my parents' friends.

Maropeng knew that this was only the beginning of her academic journey, and that she would enrol on a teacher training programme: her future professional life seemed assured and she was convinced that teaching was 'God's purpose' for her life. Although Maropeng would not consider principalship for many years, the path towards this was marked out, albeit indirectly, through further traumatic circumstances in early 1989 that made her leave her home and family and move far away. As result of an unprovoked attack by the brother, who was now a committed activist, Maropeng sustained head injuries which could have endangered her life, and undoubtedly changed it.

> In January 1989, my brother came home in the early hours of the morning. He was drunk and this was too much for my mother, who was constantly worried about him and his safety in those dreadful times. She became very angry at his behaviour so she took the *sjambok* and lashed out at him. My brother was enraged and very aggressive … he left the house but returned carrying a crowbar …what I know is on his way towards my mother he saw me and he became more angry and he struck at me, hitting me on the head with the crowbar. I tried to run outside to escape, but he hit me again… just as I reached the kitchen door I collapsed. When I came to there was blood all over. But fortunately our neighbour had come to the house when she heard all the screaming … somehow she pulled me into her car and drove me to the local hospital. I had sustained head wounds which needed many stitches but the wounds were not so deep that they were life threatening.

Maropeng's recollection of this dreadful event clearly revived very sad and painful memories, but her story of the events following her hospitalisation threw more light on this woman's strength of purpose, and her determination to overcome the odds once more on her quest for life and career fulfilment in 'God's service'.

> This whole event saddened me so much, that I wanted to have nothing to do with my family anymore. I wanted to go far away, but I did not know where to go or how I could do this. I had just graduated, was unemployed and had no money. I felt trapped, but I knew that I must find a way to do what I knew was right. My daughter was happy with my parents so there was just me to take care of.

Maropeng's disillusionment with her family, following this traumatic event, was to be the catalyst for change and for her to find independence. Close friends from her schooldays, both teachers now and married to each other, came to visit her as they had heard of the incident, and by that time Maropeng thought she knew the cause of her brother's attack.

> He was mad with jealousy because ever since I went to university he was no longer recognised in the family. Everything was 'Maropeng this, Maropeng that, Maropeng is going places' … he was 'sick of it' he said.

The result of this disclosure, and Maropeng's need to leave the family home, was that her friends, shocked at what had happened, offered her the opportunity to pack up immediately and leave with them, where she would have both a home and a teaching job.

> Zwele had been promoted to a principal's post in one of the secondary schools in the area, he needed an English teacher, I needed the job and the distance from my home … all this was just chance but it was the chance I needed to find my true vocation and fulfil God's purpose for my life. I was indeed 'going places'.

## When and why principalship was considered

Maropeng's path to principalship began when she took this opportunity and embarked on a teaching career. She had been given an opportunity she could never have dreamed of, and it came out of extreme adversity. Her friend, and the school principal, Zwele was a source of inspiration as he encouraged and supported her during this early induction into the work of the classroom teacher. Maropeng did not have a teaching qualification but with his guidance she soon discovered that, despite all the difficulties and the problems of being such a novice teacher, and an untrained one as well, she loved the work and in this school context she found her 'voice and her vocation'. She was teaching English, which she loved, and she found the work stimulating as well as challenging.

> It was interesting though very tough working with teenagers. All my father's teachings came to the fore and I was determined to be the best in what I was doing and work towards improving the standard of English which was very poor in that area.

She had discovered very quickly that most of those teaching in the schools in the area had only a matric certificate, which she found very uncomfortable as she had never known that it

was possible to teach with such a minimal standard of education. Maropeng was one of the very few graduates employed and they formed a support group to stimulate and motivate themselves.

> We men and women got together in the evenings and on weekends. We had something in common to talk about and we encouraged each other to further our studies so as to take advantage of all the opportunities available.

As a result of this support group's activities, Maropeng decided to return to studying so that, most importantly, she could gain a teaching qualification, and with two others in the group, she registered for a distance learning post-graduate Higher Education Diploma (HED) with UNISA. They were able to study together and motivate each other to the completion of the course; finally all graduating in 1992. This support group was instrumental in Maropeng's furtherance of her career and, ultimately, in providing the opportunities that enabled her to consider principalship as an attainable goal.

But soon after they had commenced the course, Maropeng's school was the focus of unrest which was rooted in the community's dislike of the principal, her friend Zwele, who was not from that area or community by origin. In late 1990 there was an uprising, which was not an uncommon occurrence then. The parents and the students rebelled against the school principal as there was much tension in the area over where he was from, and in addition to the dislike and distrust of the principal, was the fact that increasingly he was employing qualified teachers and graduates who were also from outside the area.

> The local people wanted their children, who had just matriculated, to be employed in the schools rather than have people from outside the community take up those positions. It didn't seem to matter that there would be no qualified teachers in their schools ...

Maropeng's principal was forced to leave the school and with him went other colleagues, including Maropeng, as it was no longer safe for them to be in that environment. Zwele helped her to find another post at a school still in the same province, but in another area, where she would be helped to grow and develop. In 1991 she commenced teaching in a very different environment where the principal employed only graduates, and mainly those with a

teaching qualification. It became imperative that she complete her HED. Maropeng explained.

> Things were very different in this area, and proper qualifications were needed. Although it was a small settlement, the difference was that it was populated by people holding different academic qualifications. Most of these people were strategically deployed from various places to develop the area which had come about as a result of the forced removals under the Apartheid regime.

Maropeng was inspired to pursue her goal now she was working with such committed colleagues and finally completed the HED, graduating in December 1992: she was now a qualified teacher and very proud of her success. Her confidence and proficiency had grown and once again she was assisted by the principal of her school. He encouraged and mentored her as he saw how committed she was to her teaching and, increasingly, to the development of her career through achieving a position of responsibility and leadership.

Maropeng is very clear that she had high regard for this principal whose management of the school she recognised as being the key to its growing success. His leadership was excellent and she learned from what she saw there of how management and leadership could be developed for the good of the whole school community. The students were settled and the teachers were very professional, there was a strong work ethic and a determination to 'make things better'. It was a school in which Maropeng says she really gained confidence: she began to consider seriously that she too could achieve principalship. She had been told that she should consider applying for the Head of Department post when it came up, and this now seemed a prospect entirely within her reach, and a necessary step on her pathway to a principal's post. This was especially so, as the principal had commended her on her work and her proficiency in achieving such high grades and pass rates in her Matric class.

> I was so proud that my first matric class got four distinctions in English in 1992. It was the first time in the area to have learners pass English with distinctions. I think this was the turning point for me and my career path as I knew that I could achieve my goals through hard work and determination, and my ambition to become a principal could be a reality.

However, during this successful period in her professional life, Maropeng's personal life had taken on new directions as by 1991 she had met, and subsequently married, an older man who

was also a teacher, and whom she said was 'living as a bachelor' when they first met. She had once more 'ignored my mother's advice' on concentrating on a career not on marriage. Maropeng's husband shared her love of books and studying: she was very happy and her life seemed very much on course. But subsequently Maropeng discovered by accident at a family occasion in his home village that her husband had lied to her, and to his family about her: he practised polygamy and she was one of several 'wives'

> I was so shocked as I had no idea … this was not my custom or culture not in my Christian family and I could not believe the situation I was in. He shrugged off my questions and my tears … he said, 'don't worry about them they're my wives not yours'. I was angry and humiliated, and I got my revenge at once as I took his car and drove away and that was to be the end of my marriage and my attempts at married life. I would never make the mistake again and would heed my mother's advice always. I would also remember, even in the bad times, the words of an American woman writer I once read who said, 'I am not a victim of my life'.

Maropeng once more was faced with managing the consequences of a traumatic and life changing circumstance, as chance was again playing a very important role in her journey to principalship. These distressing events focussed her entirely, and she now concentrated solely on her career and her desire to achieve a senior school position. This dedication to her career ambitions ultimately paid off as two career opportunities arose almost simultaneously a short time after her marriage had collapsed. In mid-1993 she was encouraged by her principal to consider a post of responsibility that would soon be available, and subsequently she was invited by a panel of nine officials to motivate for the position of Head of the English department in her school. She was the only woman interviewed and was appointed to the post. This was a major achievement to be selected for, and appointed to, what she had thought, despite her principal's support and belief in her, would be a post for a male. She worked in a very male dominated environment and, although she had never felt personally discriminated against because of her gender in the school context, she knew from all her experiences at schools and in the general societal context that traditional patriarchal views of males as leaders prevailed, especially in the rural community in which she now lived and worked.

> I have never considered myself a feminist but this promotion helped me to acknowledge that I have always been a champion of women's rights to be independent and to be whatever they want to be without fear or favour.

This promotion was the most important milestone yet in Maropeng's pathway to principalship, but for excellent reasons she had to defer the take up of the appointment. It was at this same time that in recognition of her outstanding work in the teaching of English and her success rates with her learners, she was given another major career opportunity, which would benefit her, the school and the local area as well: It was an opportunity she seized with enthusiasm.

> I was invited to be trained by a South African/UK language proficiency development initiative as an English facilitator to help primary teachers with English proficiency skills. This was a one year programme and although home based it was also possible to train overseas for part of the time. I applied successfully for a scholarship via the British Council to study in Southampton. I was so proud and excited … to be studying English in England was a dream come true. I left for the UK in January 1994 and it was this independent and totally satisfying study and work experience that finally convinced me that I could and would gain promotion to principalship.

Maropeng returned to South Africa after this study period and immediately took up the post, which had been held for her, as Head of the English Department at the school. She was also involved for several more years in workshops and training initiatives in her role as an English language facilitator. Maropeng's career was firmly established and she was held in high esteem by her colleagues and the district officials. She remained totally committed to her school, her teaching and her leadership role as Head of English: although her principalship ambitions were not to be fulfilled for several more years to come, she never wavered from her intention to achieve this position.

## The last stages of the pathway to principalship

The final stages of Maropeng's pathway to principalship were even more drawn out than she could have imagined as a result of the unexpected twists and turns that her personal life took during the time she served as Head of English. These events, she is certain, did impact upon how quickly she was able to seek and apply for senior leadership posts. In 1997 she became very ill, and eventually underwent major gynaecological surgery. The experience was prolonged and traumatic and she began to question her Catholic faith, now 'looking to find God in a different way'. She joined a new religious group and found with them the peace of

mind she needed and a re-affirmation of 'God's purpose' for her life. It was at this same time that other major family events occurred, as her mother and daughter came to live with her.

> I finally discovered the reasons for the tensions observed so many years earlier between my parents. The father I always respected, and whose high moral standards I believed I had failed to live up to in my teenage years, was a cheat and a hypocrite - My mother had left him after 30 years of marriage because she could no longer put up with his affairs –she felt degraded and humiliated. What's more I learned he had fathered an illegitimate child born only three months before me. I despised him now and wanted nothing more to do with him, not for what he had done himself but how he had made me suffer. My mother knew that she could turn to me as her first born … and also because I was a successful and financially independent woman. The tables were turned, I was now her role model and support … I knew that I was strong enough in spirit to take responsibility for these two important women. It was a joy to have my daughter fully back in my life, and I was so proud that she was studying at varsity to become a teacher … I felt very blessed.

Maropeng happily undertook these additional family responsibilities during the time that she remained as Head of Department in the school where she had taught since 1991. She was working well with the same principal who remained her mentor and role model, as well as her friend. Her work involved taking on additional unpaid responsibilities and this was a steep but very useful learning curve for her which she knew was part of the principal's means of preparing her for the most senior position. As a result of this increasing confidence in herself, Maropeng took on the role of acting deputy principal in 2001: a post which was not officially advertised until 2004. Again, it was with her principal's support that she decided to apply. She was the only woman interviewed and was not certain that she would be appointed given her belief that senior posts usually went to men, whatever the strengths of the women applicants. Neither was she a member of SADTU, the major teacher union, nor had she any overt political allegiance, which she had thought would count against her. But Maropeng was appointed to the post and held this until 2011, when her aspirations for principalship finally became a reality.

> In January 2011 my principal informed me that he was retiring at the end of that term. I was not surprised by this because he had been taking a back seat in the running of the school for some time, leaving much of the responsibilities of the job to me. I had learned a lot about the role of the principal during this time and knew that he had intended this to happen … to prepare me. But his departure was a sad one for me because I had worked with him since 1991; he was my mentor and my friend. I was really happy that I was appointed acting principal in April 2011 and I knew that I deserved to be appointed permanently.

The post was advertised in August that year and Maropeng was still unsure whether it would be worth her time and effort to apply as she was not convinced that she would get this formal post because she was a woman. She had never served with a woman principal and none had been appointed to the schools in her area. But her former principal, her mother and her daughter, encouraged her,

> It was their belief in me that decided me, and I knew that I had become a role model for them all. My pride in my daughter knows no bounds as she also has found purpose in her life in serving others, as a teacher and now, after studying for a Master's degree, she is a HoD, and has a daughter of her own. The difficulties and dilemmas I faced over the years in embracing motherhood make this outcome a blessing from God.

Maropeng finally determined that whatever the outcome, she had faith that this was what 'God wanted me to do' and it had the blessing of her mother and daughter. She was appointed to the principal's post from January 2012, and has had no regrets on the achievement of this ambition.

> I was concerned that leadership positions seemed to be awarded on the basis of political or union affiliation more than personal ability, integrity or the values that one upholds. But I finally decided to apply for the post … I was prepared to take a chance and use the opportunity to voice my views on the current state of affairs in education and why I was the best person for the job. As the interview date neared I got more determined to do my very best. I wanted to be the first female principal, and the prospect of what I could bring to the school as its leader fuelled my desire to be successful. I know that I would like to leave a legacy when I retire. I hope that it is as a leadership role model for my staff, both male and female, and for the learners, who will know that gender is no barrier to opportunity or success. I hope to have shown them that they must always try to do what I have done, that it is possible, to fly with the eagle, fly high above the storm.

## Chapter overview

This chapter presents the findings from the narrative account of one of the women principals with whom I had in-depth conversations over a period of many months. The life history that I have presented is my interpretation of Maropeng's life story through the data analysis of the personal and professional actions, events and influences which have determined her pathway to principalship: from her *'time past'* to her *'time present'*.

The analysis of the data has identified three key factors which have impacted significantly on her and influenced the journey she embarked upon from childhood to find the vocation that would be of the greatest importance to her; nursing or teaching. These key factors are: early family life; religion and her deeply held belief in God's purpose for her life, and the importance of education. The analysis also reveals how the traumatic and distressing events that happened to her from late adolescence, though these hindered her educational journey, also provided her with the insight and determination to choose the vocational path that best served her passion to help others. She became a teacher because she believed that this vocation best fulfilled 'God's purpose' for her life. Maropeng's strength of character and independent spirit had been fostered from an early age, and adversity only strengthened these characteristics which have served her well in her professional and her personal life.

Maropeng's story shows clearly that, in the early childhood years, her extended family was instrumental in shaping her values, her beliefs, and her ambitions for a professional working life. The importance she placed upon what she learned from her parents and grandparents was evident in the way she told of her family life being caring, ordered and disciplined. She learnt the virtues of trust, patience and hard work and, above all, that duty and service to others above oneself was of paramount importance in life. Her family and their friends were teachers and nurses and she regards these as the role models that most influenced her desire to 'follow in their footsteps'. The happiness of these early childhood years, in a large and loving family were imprinted on her memory and the traumatic events that happened to her later have not affected her certainty that the solid foundation provided, and the values instilled, are what shaped her whole way of being: working for the good of others.

Maropeng grew up in a Christian family and, though different faiths were followed by her mother and her father, she was brought up as a Catholic and this faith profoundly influenced her thoughts, her actions and, as an adolescent, the guilt that followed her 'fall from grace' when she became pregnant whilst unmarried and still at school. But this faith also enabled her to believe that 'God's purpose' for her would be served one day. Her strength of character, and her ability to win through the darkest times, was largely because of her faith, which has shown her the 'right pathway' throughout her adult life. She found purpose for her life and a

way of working in the service of others when, following traumatic circumstances that led her away from the family and her home, she found her true vocation when she became a teacher.

Maropeng's belief in the importance of education was the key determinant of her journey. This was fostered from her early years by the family's insistence on education as the means to achieve in life, and also as a worthwhile and fulfilling life experience in itself. Her family home was full of books, and a love of learning was instilled by her grandparents and parents into their offspring as part of a daily ritual and routine. They wanted all their children to achieve, and gender was not a barrier in their family to learning or an education through to university and beyond. Maropeng developed her desire for a full education and a professional teaching career mainly because of the confidence that grew in her through her parents' belief that their children should 'make the most' of every opportunity that was provided 'to make something of themselves' regardless of their gender. The events that made her path longer and less straightforward than it might have been did not deter her nor diminish her passion for learning and the value of education for herself and for others.

Maropeng's journey into teaching, and thus towards principalship, was not a straight path, and it was undoubtedly the result of both the traumatic and also the serendipitous events that befell her from late adolescence. But it was a planned journey once she had decided that teaching English was what most suited her talents and her passion for the language and literature, and her desire to work in the service of others. Her professional role models and mentors were the two male principals who had supported and mentored her during her career. Her friend, Zwele, who had given her the first teaching job and an opportunity to achieve and grow; and the second whose belief in her ability, and whose supportive actions in her leadership development, paved the way for her to achieve the principalship she had worked long and hard towards.

The next chapter provides a detailed presentation of the data drawn from the narrative life story of a third female principal.

# CHAPTER SIX: ELANIE'S STORY

*Teaching was in my blood*

## Introduction

This chapter follows the same structure as chapters four and five. It provides a detailed presentation of the data drawn from a female principal's narrative of her personal and professional pathways to principalship, and the findings which have emerged from my interpretations. It is also loosely based on Lawrence-Lightfoot's (1997) portraiture approach, and presents a brief, subjective pen portrait of this woman as I observed and came to know her over the course of the research study. My intent in placing this portrait at the beginning of the main body of the chapter is to illuminate and render the reality of the research participant as I saw her: to position her in *'time present'.*

## Time present

Elanie is 43 and the principal of a small township school in a predominantly rural South African province. She is one of the very few white women principals of high schools which, because of historic demographic factors, still serve black communities and pupils only.

Our first 'official' meeting is in Pretoria on a Monday morning during the April school holidays, this mid -way venue suits us both. We meet in her favourite coffee shop in a quiet shopping mall, where she informs me she can also indulge in some 'retail therapy'. This is a shopping, browsing and mingling with others' experience that is not possible where she lives and works, and is time purely for herself to which she really looks forward. Elanie is a petite woman, very slim and casually dressed in jeans and a white shirt. I am very aware of her piercingly pale blue eyes and the penetrating gaze with which she fixes me as we shake hands. She strikes me as a woman whose stature and features belie the forceful character she must be to hold the position she does. Yet I wonder how hard she has had to work to bring

out that forcefulness and not allow first impressions based on race, looks and stature to work against her on her pathway to this principalship. I assume that I will find the answer to this as her life story emerges over the next few months, and indeed I do.

The conversation begins a little stiltedly: she seems slightly ill at ease, saying that she isn't sure what I want her to tell me or that what she says will be what I want to know. I try to re – assure her and I change tack then, concentrating on renewing our brief acquaintance from a school leadership programme on which she was a student some years before. She laughs as she reminds me of a comment, a clever play on words, made by another student which greatly amused us all: "South Africa is a 'democrazy,' and I think I must be crazy to work here". Our shared experience of this and the programme seems to relax her. She says that she doesn't think she's crazy to work as and where she does, despite what other people think: she knows that there is a higher purpose and that is what drives her. She pauses, silent in thought, her gaze fixed on the coffee cup, then she laughs again, and in that moment she loses the drawn and anxious expression that I had seen earlier. She says that today she is driven by a need to shop, have a decent cup of coffee and spend time with someone who actually wants to listen to what she has to say. This is Elanie's story.

# Time past

## Childhood: the influences of early family life, race, class, culture, language and religion that shaped personal development and values

Elanie was born and brought up in a neighbouring country to South Africa. Her parents were of Afrikaans stock and had moved there from South Africa some years previously. Afrikaans was widely spoken in the country, and was the family's home language, although the parents and children were fluent in English as well. Elanie's nuclear family of parents, and older brother, were very tightly knit, as there were no grandparents, uncles, aunts or cousins to be part of her childhood to provide extended family support. But her father, who was considerably older than her mother, had been married previously and had three other

children, two daughters and a son. These much older half-siblings were close to Elanie and her brother, and would often come to stay with their father and his second family. Elanie 'idolised' her sisters, and wanted always to follow in their footsteps: in her eyes they could do no wrong. This was to become very important to her in terms of role models in later years.

During the week the family lived in the town where her parents worked and where the two children attended school. But her parents owned a farm to which they went at weekends whenever possible, and always in the holidays. The farm was quite isolated, with no near neighbours, but Elanie describes this as typical in that large but sparsely populated country. The family loved the solitude and the change of life style that the farm provided: it gave them all a chance to spend time together. Although there was always work for everyone to do on the farm, the time spent there gave her parents the chance to relax from their 'real' jobs: Elanie's father was a magistrate and her mother was a primary school teacher. The farm provided stability for the family as it was their permanent home and one they cherished: this was because they were never based in the same house in the same town for very long. Elanie explained that working for the government, as her parents did, meant they were moved at least every three years to another district, and had no choice as to where they were re-located. This frequent uprooting of home and school had a major impact on Elanie.

> I learnt from an early age that nothing is ever permanent or secure, and I'm sure these experiences of change and upheaval 'formed me'. I know that I developed an acceptance of change and an attitude of 'coping with what life throws at you': I became very adaptable, though I sometimes think a bit rootless as well.

Elanie attended a total of three primary schools in different towns as a consequence of the family's relocations. Each primary school she saw as a new opportunity to make friends and do new things, an attitude encouraged by her parents. Elanie made the most of these school days and family life in town, enjoying the sporting activities on offer, but she always felt happiest when at the farm.

> I loved the openness and sense of space, I loved the discipline of the work that we had to do, but that it never seemed like work, and best of all was that we worked together sharing tasks … all of us, my parents, siblings and the farm workers. I think that's where I learned the importance of co-operation and team work in getting things done … easier together than alone

## Impact or influence of societal structures and attitudes in the community context

Elanie's childhood in this middle class and closely knit family was happy and relatively prosperous. Her parents instilled in all the children the importance of appreciating what they had, of valuing what they must work hard for, and of sharing in many practical ways their good fortune with those less fortunate. They valued most their family life and the support that family could offer, in good and bad times: a lesson which Elanie has taken to heart, and which she says has guided her in her adult life as a wife, a mother and in her career. Her father's work as a magistrate brought him into contact with people whose lives had taken very different paths from his, and whose stories he viewed with compassion.

> He never discussed the cases at home with us children, but he would frequently remark that there was a very fine line between the right and the wrong path in life, and for some people events they couldn't control made this line impossible to see. I suppose this influenced me very early on that we must always try to understand why people do what they do before we judge what they have done. I know I have tried to put this in to practice in my working life, though that's not always easy.

Elanie's father was orphaned at an early age and what she understood of how he had coped with this loss was a source of pride to her. This obvious admiration for her father also stems from him never being afraid to speak openly to his children about his feelings which Elanie knows was unusual for that time, and for a man who was almost of her maternal grandparents' generation. Though they, and the paternal grandparents, were long deceased she knew that her father's extended family in South Africa had disapproved of what they saw as his 'radical' views on race and religion during the apartheid era: a period when, she explains, most traditional Afrikaans families held the State and their church, the Nederduitse Gereformeerede Kerk (NGK), in high esteem. The latter was closely aligned to the National Party's apartheid policies; dissension, if only in the home, was unacceptable and considered treasonous.

Elanie's parents were a 'strongly bonded couple' and held similar views on many things, not least religion. They were committed Christians and regular church goers, ensuring their

children grew up in that tradition. They were not evangelical in any way but Elanie says she knew that she was always drawn to something deeper in the religion in which she was brought up. For the whole family, racial equality was of great importance and they held strong views on social justice. Elanie's mother was a vocal advocate of human rights, and her work as teacher strengthened her belief in the need to make life better for everyone. Their mother's passion for her job, and the difference she believed teachers could make to lives, was very apparent to her children: Elanie is convinced that this is what inspired her two sisters to become teachers, and although she came to teaching much later in life she is convinced that,

> it was always my destiny, I just didn't accept that for a long time, but now I'm sure that teaching was in my blood.

Elanie's family were living in a 'former colonial' country but it did not have the same institutionalised racial injustice as South Africa, and this meant that the family were much freer to uphold and demonstrate their liberal attitudes towards all people. The children grew up as 'colour and culture blind' as it was possible to be, given the problems that were still manifested through the entrenched racial prejudice of some others in their communities.

> I don't think I ever consciously saw the colour of people, or ever gave labels to people. I liked some of the children and adults I met, I didn't like others, but this was something about their personalities not what they looked like, or where they came from. The farm workers' kids were my friends, some of my best friends at school were from Portuguese speaking families: I loved the way all these friends did things differently from us, lived differently: I didn't see it as better or worse, I adapted to whatever was there.

## Significant events and actions during childhood and adolescence

Elanie's childhood and early adolescence she describes as being very happy years. After primary school, she moved into a high school in the town where the family lived and shortly after to a school in another town, as the family moved yet again.

> My parents were always very proud of me and always supported me through the bad as well as the good times. They encouraged and motivated me to do more and better. I wasn't always a good student then as I didn't like that school, although I couldn't really explain why to them. They had always told us that they were there to give support, wanted us to do well but would still love us even if we didn't succeed, as

> long as we tried our best … I try to follow this example with my own children now, and those I teach too.

Although Elanie had not settled happily into this second high school, she thought she would complete her schooling there, but this was not to be. A huge turn-around in her life was when her parents sent her to South Africa, to a girls' boarding school in the Western Cape. Elanie's parents had realised that the local school was not benefitting her academically, and knew that she was unhappy there. So they decided to send her away to a 'good school' for her final two years.

> I was placed in a hostel with many other girls at the start of Grade 11. I know I am adaptable, but it was one of the toughest years in my life, as I missed my family and my home so much and could only go home during school holidays because of the distances. Things got easier the second year I was there and looking back I know it was the best decision my parents made for me in so many ways. That school taught me how a school actually should be … inspiring, motivating and character building.

Despite the initial problems, and the difficulties of settling to this whole new way of life, Elanie enjoyed these two years, and the education she received gave her the opportunity to achieve grades sufficient for university entrance.

## How, when and why decisions were made on higher education

A university education for Elanie and her siblings was a goal which her parents had always worked towards; one which they believed would enable all their children to have what they were sure would be the best start in their adult life and work. So Elanie had always known that she would 'go to varsity', this was a given: all the siblings had been encouraged from their early years and none of them had ever questioned this.

> My father's 'pledge' in life was to let all his children study … he didn't make any differences between his daughters and his sons. He was not prescriptive on WHAT we studied, but we all had to go and get educated in something. So I studied as broadly as I could, as I was still very confused about what I wanted to do with my life.

## The significance of the higher education experience

Elanie was very committed by this time to her Christian faith and this grew stronger when she left her Western Cape school and registered for a BA degree at a university in another province of South Africa. Her experiences from childhood, and the adaptability she had acquired as result of the frequent family re-locations, enabled her to settle well into University life. She made friends easily, entered into all aspects of life away from home and determined to enjoy this time when decisions could be deferred as to what might come next. She joined a Christian youth group, which supported her religious focus, but her studying was definitely a formality, 'a means to an end' rather than something to which she was wholeheartedly committed to underpin, or help her to decide on, any specific career.

> My years at university were fun and not exactly career driven: I was never a 'good student' and perhaps that's why I've always been drawn to the 'underdogs'. Anyway, I suppose we were all 'living in the moment'. I know many of us felt this same indecision about what would be next: South Africa was in a period of huge transition by then … the future was very uncertain and very threatening for many.

After graduating from university, though still drawn to the idea of a teaching career, Elanie knew she was not ready to take that path. But she did make a very big decision that was to have major impact on how she was eventually to lead her life. With her parents blessing, she decided to commit herself to her faith in an absolute way: she pledged herself to God and embarked upon a formal, 'year of service for Christ'.

> It was through the medium of sport and recreation that we delivered the message of God. We took children from all different parts of the country on youth camps, working with them and trying to influence them towards better choices in life. I enjoyed this year tremendously, although the work and conditions were very hard. I know that it was this experience of service that to a great extent gave me my purpose in life; that I wanted to serve and make a difference in people's lives.

But the path to the 'what and how' of a 'service' career was long for Elanie. Even at the end of 1994, and the promise of a new and exciting future for the newly democratic South Africa, she was still unsure of what she wanted to do, or where she wanted to do it. She admits to a fear of the commitment that was involved in the decision; with the exception that she knew she wanted to stay in South Africa, where both her sisters now lived and taught, and where

she felt she could make the type of contribution that she aspired to do. But as she considered her options, and in order to earn a living,

> I drifted into doing a bit of everything: waitressing, administration work for a farmer, and other casual jobs. Eventually I ended up working as an estate agent. My family couldn't understand why I was doing this, and I'm not sure to this day that I know why, as those three years of being a realtor were not fun to say the least. But I think it was meant to be, to show me that I could not work just for the money. I was shown in large measures that I needed more out of life, and that I wanted to mean something in people's lives.

## When and why principalship was considered

Elanie's path to principalship began when she finally made the decision to become a teacher.

> I suppose I was bound to get there although the path wasn't as straight or clear as it had been for my mother and sisters who had never wanted to be anything else. I don't know why it wasn't clear to me but think it was partly this sense of rootlessness from childhood that got in the way … I needed to be certain that this was right for me.

Elanie also knew that she was never what she termed 'a natural leader', not like her mother and sisters.

> I was always a determined child, but I never stood out or wanted to really. I was never a head girl or a deputy head girl at school, and I never held any 'official' leadership roles of any kind at university or with the church groups. I 'learned' leadership through having a sense of purpose, a deep faith in God's will, and a belief that this purpose would show me the right way to do things, and in that way to be a model and influence people.

The path she was embarking on in 1999 was clearly not a straightforward choice for her, and she explained that it was only because of our conversations that she had really thought about the 'deeper why' for the first time.

> Now I look back I am certain it was more the caring aspect, a concern for others, which brought me to teaching, rather than a passion for education itself. That's why I came to the realisation that I wanted to teach at a type of 'missionary place', maybe a faith school, in order for me to make the difference I thought was possible.

Elanie's family were delighted that she had finally settled on the career which they felt was 'her calling', and that she would now study to qualify as a teacher. She would do as her sisters, her 'role models', had done and teach older children; she would train as a secondary school teacher and teach English in high school: she would put her faith to good use in working with adolescents in a Christian environment. This she felt was her calling and her year 'working for Christ' had given her confidence in working with older children. Shortly after her decision was made, one of her sisters told her about a secondary school that was sponsored by a missionary group in a deeply impoverished area of a rural province. She was certain that this was where she was meant to start, as this school was founded on the belief that it must,

> give hope in a very hopeless situation. Give GOOD education to those who can afford it the least.

Elanie was sure that this was right for her, something that she was destined to do.

> So, I wrote a letter and told them that I was interested in working there and if ever they had a post available they must call me, and they did. I started work in April 1999 teaching English and began studying teaching through the mail, through UNISA.

The following three years were extremely fulfilling for Elanie and she never doubted that she had made the right decision to begin her teaching career in a school whose Christian values were her values. The school was co-educational but was divided into separate teaching areas for girls and boys, with a principal for each, a female and male respectively. Above these two was a male rector, in an executive position. The gendered leadership roles did not surprise Elanie at this time as this was the school leadership pattern she was familiar with, accepting the status quo and not always questioning it. She was never,

> a feminist as some of my friends were, and some of them in a quite radical way at university. I don't think I ever felt I was held back by being a woman. I know that many years ago my mother campaigned against the lower pay that women teachers got for doing the same job as men, and one of my sisters was sure that she was passed over for a HoD post because she was a woman and was very angry that a much less qualified man got it. I certainly would fight for my rights if I ever felt I was being unfairly treated just because of my gender … I think all women should but especially black women who have a much harder time – especially as I've seen in the rural area where I work - they seem more easily intimidated by males but I know that it's often a cultural thing … so it's easier said than done of course ...

Elanie's description of the school and the leadership showed clearly how much she admired all three leaders whom she depicted as very supportive and caring to colleagues as well as to the pupils. The male rector was a retired principal who put his experience, knowledge and skills of schools to very good effect. He encouraged Elanie to continue her studies and to develop her professional knowledge to help her towards leadership posts, which she knew he was confident she could achieve. Her lack of 'official' leadership roles in her adolescence and early working life had not given her much self confidence in her leadership potential, but she was inspired by his belief in her and over the next few years she made sure that she did study and involve herself in all aspects of school life. In this way she began to build a very strong self-belief in her leadership capabilities. This man, who is now retired from the school, but still working for the church community, remains a friend and mentor to Elanie, who regards his influence as being the strongest in her working life, and pivotal to the career path she took to principalship.

> He was the one who supported, influenced and guided me through my career, encouraged me to consider principalship, and remains my mentor up until today.

But it was also the close association with the female principal in the girls' section that inspired Elanie. She grew to admire her greatly, a woman whom she saw as 'a natural leader', with strength and determination in carrying out her work. She was both a role model and a mentor from whom she learned so much every day about how to make things happen, seemingly against insurmountable odds, to improve the children's educational chances and afford them better opportunities in life. The principal gave Elanie encouragement and support, and just as the Rector believed in Elanie's potential, so this woman was confident that Elanie had the commitment, qualities and drive to become a school leader.

> This gave me the extra boost I needed to believe that I could do that job one day, I was only quietly confident though, as I have never been the totally assured type, as I told you. So I gave my all and worked extremely hard … being single and unattached still I could devote myself to this and my professional studies.

This dedication and commitment to her chosen career was now Elanie's driving force, and though her personal and professional circumstances were soon to change, the 'desire to

succeed' was heightened by the two major events that occurred in her life in 2003. At the age of 33, she met the man who was to become her husband later that year, not a teacher but as deeply committed a Christian as she was; and at this same time Elanie's school principal decided she was ready to move on to take up different challenges. The principal's decision was compounded by the resignation of the HoD, who because it was too small a school to allow a permanent deputy principal post, was also the acting deputy. Both these personal and professional events involved major changes, and challenges, for Elanie. The school was faced with a double dilemma, but the first priority was to appoint a new principal. The Rector, Elanie's supporter and mentor, invited her to take on this role in an acting capacity. This was a huge 'vote of confidence' in her capabilities and leadership potential and, encouraged by her husband as well now she accepted the post, inspired by what she had learned from the outgoing principal.

> I was still very young and inexperienced, but I believed I could do it, that I was equal to the task, and I gave the school my all through hard work and commitment to upholding its values and ideals. I was determined not to let anyone down, and was so fortunate that I had the full support of my husband in this task.

The school continued to thrive and Elanie's confidence in her leadership skills grew. She knew that she wanted the principal's post permanently but was also aware that she lacked the requisite minimum of five years' experience as stipulated by the Department of Education. Eventually when the permanent post was advertised she decided to apply, despite not meeting the stipulated teaching years' requirement. Her intention was to benefit at least from the interview experience, which could only stand her in good stead for other applications in the years to come. She was interviewed but, as she expected, was not appointed. The principal's post was given to an experienced and much older female applicant and Elanie was faced with the prospect of returning to being a post level one teacher at the school of which she had been leader and a successful one too.

> When I did not get the appointment for principal I realised how difficult it was to go back to where I started. But I knew that I had to go through the different steps on the promotion ladder in order for me to get there again, to where I knew now I wanted to be. So I applied for the HoD post at the school and I got it.

Elanie was very content to take this opportunity which she knew was necessary for her to grow and gain more experience of leadership. She continued to work at the school for another two years, 'under' the new principal. Elanie was very clear that this was a subservient position, as she never felt that she worked 'with' the principal, whose leadership style and approach to colleagues was very different from what Elanie had come to know and accept as 'the right way'. So, she did not enjoy a comfortable professional relationship with this woman, who was not willing to offer support or mentoring to colleagues in the way that Elanie had come to expect and benefit from during her professional association with the former principal. It was also not what she was learning through her studies of leadership theory and practice. Elanie had grown in confidence, self -belief and knowledge of people and processes, just as her mentor had predicted. She felt she had 'grown into leadership' and knew that what her new principal was demonstrating in the role, was not 'the right way' to manage or lead; it was not how she wanted to do things, or the way she believed things should be done to motivate, develop and manage the school staff and pupils, whose commitment to a work ethic was not always as strong as Elanie would wish to see.

> I don't think I'm a control freak but I do like to organise, arrange things and establish order … it upsets me if a job is not done properly in the way that it should be done, or when someone is supposed to do it and doesn't … I saw that order and discipline can easily deteriorate if the leadership is weak ...

The difficulties for Elanie grew and the Rector was aware of these, as also the personality clashes with this principal experienced by other staff; but for whatever reasons Elanie felt that 'his hands were tied'. However, he continued to encourage Elanie and helped her cope with the problems which she was encountering.

> It was extremely difficult for me as we had completely opposite leadership styles. I was demotivated and frustrated to say the least … but he taught me how to manage my feelings and work around the problems not let them swamp me … he would say that this was a learning experience for me and that I was being tested by God ...

Elanie had married in 2003, and in addition to the professional upheavals and challenges from that time, she was also adjusting to married life, which had come quite late for her at the age of 33. There had never been an issue over whether they would have children; she and her

husband both wanted a full family life as well as their professional lives, and would put their trust in 'God's will' as to whether they would be 'blessed' in this way.

> We both had several siblings, and we loved what being part of a large and loving family had meant to us through our lives. There was never a discussion of 'should we, shouldn't we?' have children, it was just accepted that if we were blessed by God then our lives would be enriched.

So it was in the midst of the difficult working relationships experienced by Elanie, that, in 2006, she gave birth to their first child, a boy. They were fully agreed that she would continue with her career as this was such a driving force for her now, despite the pressures she felt at her school, and also Elanie was sure that she did not want to be a 'stay at home mom', and all would be well when she got her own principalship. They had always employed 'a cleaning lady' and now she also worked as a nanny. They were fortunate that there was also 'an excellent' local crèche run by their church which they used as part of their childcare arrangements. Their domestic life was harmonious in most ways as they, like her parents, are 'strongly bonded': she and Andre sharing strong values and a deep Christian faith. Elanie and her husband have always jointly managed the household chores and the childcare as well. This has been the pattern throughout their married life as their family increased to five, with two more babies being born: their daughter in 2008 and their second son in 2011. The crèche remains their main childcare facility for her young son, and her husband is the one who does the 'daily school runs'.

> Andre is very helpful with the chores – I call him 'my new generation man' and it's certainly not a typical attitude in the area where we live, but he does what he does and we don't worry that perhaps we seem 'a bit different' … he supports what I do and only worries when work really gets me down, and I wonder if I can cope with my job and my family equally well … but then that's another story...

## The last stages of the pathway to principalship

Elanie is convinced that it was the unwavering support of her husband, in addition to her own confidence and faith, which enabled her career to move quickly following her appointment to HoD. She was determined that her hard work and commitment would be recognised by the Department officials, and this determination paid off. An opportunity arose for Elanie to be

an acting principal again, and this was the 'step on the ladder' she needed to achieve her ambition.

> A neighbouring high school's principal passed away and the school was in need of strong leadership, so the Circuit Manager came to me and asked me if I was willing to act until the post was advertised. As I was extremely frustrated in my school, this was not really a difficult decision. The school had been leaderless for some time and was not performing well in any area. My task would be to turn this school around, a challenge in itself, and I would be the only woman and a white woman at that in a school leadership position in a very traditional rural community. I knew it would not be easy but for me the biggest obstacle in accepting the offer was that this school was not missionary assisted or a Christian faith school.

Elanie, after much deliberation on her need to be doing God's work, accepted that the secular nature of the school should not deter her: this was a school in need. The pupils were not being cared for or helped to achieve in the way that she knew it was her calling to provide: duty and service could just as well be done here as in a faith school. Elanie, encouraged also by her husband as well as the rector of her present school, took up the challenge. She became acting principal and immersed herself in the 'huge task' that she had taken on. She took only a few months off when her daughter was born in 2008 and had completed two years in the temporary post when she was invited to apply for the position permanently as the post finally could be advertised. She did not hesitate, despite being very aware of the continuing challenges in turning this school around, the difficulties that she would still face as a white, woman principal in a traditional rural community, and someone known for speaking her mind. As she thought about what this post would mean for her she recalled the words attributed to President Roosevelt in the biography she had read some years before, "If you have strong opinions then peace is not an option". But Elanie was prepared for this, and as she was now 'a known quantity' in the community, she knew what she would be taking on.

> Faith and blind certainty that I really could make a difference propelled me on and in 2009 I applied for and was appointed the permanent principal … I was elated and very proud I suppose of what I had achieved from such uncertain beginnings to my career. I've thought a lot about this journey since we've been talking, and it wasn't the usual pathway to principalship I'm sure and it was a pretty short one really. I know I am 'very young' to be holding this post, especially as a woman as I was just 39 when I was appointed permanently. But what I do is what I was called to do … and I would say the recognition and belief in me from others, made it possible for me to believe that I could actually do it.

## Chapter overview

This chapter presented the findings from the narrative account of one of the women principals with whom I had in-depth conversations over a period of many months. The life history that I have presented is my interpretation of Elanie's life story through the data analysis of the personal and professional actions, events and influences which have determined her pathway to principalship: from her *'time past'* to her *'time present'*.

The analysis of the data has identified three key factors which have impacted significantly on her and influenced the journey she embarked upon from childhood. These key factors are: her family life and the influence of her parents and siblings; her commitment to God and her belief in God's purpose for her life, and the value and importance of education. The analysis also reveals how her reluctance to commit to the career 'that was in her blood', until her doubts and 'sense of rootlessness' were resolved, was eventually overcome primarily though her deep sense of a religious purpose to her life: the driving force to her entering a caring profession, in the service of others.

Elanie's story shows clearly that the nuclear family was instrumental in shaping her values, her interests and her life's path. The importance she placed upon what she learned from her parents of social justice, mutual understanding and the equality of people was a major influence as she grew up. She valued the affection given by the close family and her parents' commitment to family life, the values they instilled in all the siblings, and their confidence in their children and their abilities, regardless of their gender. Elanie was shown the importance of 'taking the right path' in life, helped by her father's knowledge, through his work as a magistrate, of how difficult this decision can be. Her family members, male and female, were looked up to, especially her older half-sisters, and she modelled herself on them, always upholding the family's values and ethics. These values were to be continued into her own family unit and remained integral to her life as she married and had three children of her own.

Elanie grew up in a Christian family whose religion was important to them and for whom church going was a part of their family life and also their duty. But Elanie became

increasingly aware that her belief needed to be expressed in a deeper and more profound way, and this need to embrace her religion and give purpose to her life was manifested in her total commitment to her Christian faith when she attended university. Doing 'God's work' was her *raison d'etre* as she grew older, and her story demonstrates how this complemented the values, support and unconditional love that her family embodied. This became an extension of the way she knew she had always wanted to lead her life: through service to others, and this service was best done, she finally realised, through taking on the challenges of a teaching career and ultimately the leadership of a school.

Elanie's belief in the importance of education was a key determinant of her journey. She admits to having a deep, through initially unacknowledged, conviction that teaching is what she would do. However, the data makes it clear that it was the aspect of being in a caring profession, and one totally aligned to her need to live a life with religious purpose and in service to others, that drew her into the career, rather than a 'passion' for education itself. Within this context it was the influence of two significant role models and mentors, a male and a female leader in the mission-supported school she was first appointed to, which confirmed her commitment to education as a means of achieving social justice and equity. These mentors also ignited in her a desire to achieve as a leader, and affirmed her as a capable and competent woman who should take on the challenge of principalship.

Elanie's journey into teaching was not a planned or a straight path. But ultimately this journey, though circuitous and encompassing many other unrelated jobs in her early adult life, enabled her to build upon her adaptability and determination, personal characteristics that were increasingly evident and instrumental in her success. All of these factors led her, fortuitously, to working with the mentors she came to trust and admire, and thereby to acknowledge and embrace her destiny: to become a principal.

The next chapter provides a detailed presentation of the data drawn from the narrative life story of a fourth female principal.

# CHAPTER SEVEN: PHUMLA'S STORY

*Following in my father's footsteps*

## Introduction

This chapter follows the same structure as chapters four, five and six. It provides a detailed presentation of the data drawn from a female principal's narrative of her personal and professional pathways to principalship, and the findings which have emerged from my interpretations. It is also loosely based on Lawrence-Lightfoot's (1997) portraiture approach, and presents a brief, subjective pen portrait of this woman as I observed and came to know her over the course of the research study. My intent in placing this portrait at the beginning of the main body of the chapter is to illuminate and render the reality of the research participant as I saw her: to position her in *'time present'.*

## Time present

Phumla is 42 and the principal of a large township school in a predominantly rural South African province. She was asked to join this seriously underperforming school as acting principal, by the provincial education department in 2012: in 2013 her appointment was made permanent. It is her first principalship but she is sure that it will not be her last; she has ambitions to take on another challenging school and turn its performance around.

Our first 'official' meeting is on a Friday morning during the September school holidays. She has asked that we meet at a café close to Wits main campus as she is attending a teacher union indaba in Braamfontein, and can make time to slip out during the lunch break. Phumla arrives promptly and immediately joins me, placing her conference folder decisively on the table in front of her. She carefully puts her car keys into her handbag, a large and overstuffed leather shopper type, saying that if she doesn't do this at once she will lose them as her 'mind is always somewhere else these days'. We then exchange greetings in the traditional fashion,

and she says that she is looking forward to the experience as she enjoys talking about what motivates her to work as she does. I am already fascinated by the forcefulness of her arrival, and that she has taken charge almost without me saying a word: a whirlwind springs to mind. I assure her that the conversation can go wherever she wants to take it. I then offer her the menu, mainly to give her a chance to slow down, and a moment for me to gather my thoughts on how I am going to manage this obviously energetic companion and our conversation process today, and over the next few months. Our meetings and discussions hold interesting possibilities as I now vividly recall this outspoken woman from our brief acquaintance at a school leadership programme on which she was a student some years before, and her very 'matter of fact' manner with people.

Phumla is a distinctive looking woman with very dark skin, she is of medium height and build and is very casually dressed in jeans and an orange sweat shirt, over which she is wearing a black leather jacket; her footwear is a pair of well-worn *takkies* (trainers). She is not wearing a sleek, straight wig, as is the habit of many African women, nor does she have cornrow extensions woven into her natural hair; but she is wearing a trilby-type hat, perched at a jaunty angle, over her long and rather frizzy locks. The look is remarkable and is in huge contrast to the 'beanie' (knitted hat), commonly worn in cooler weather in South Africa. I gaze at this very interesting and individual character sitting opposite me, and I think that Phumla is undoubtedly a woman who is confident in herself, and is certainly not someone who will be gainsaid, or nervous of taking on a challenge. Yet I wonder how naturally all this has come to her or how hard she has worked to achieve this on her pathway to principalship. I assume that I will find the answer to this as her life story emerges over the next few months, and indeed I do.

The conversation flows easily over lunch, as Phumla launches into descriptions of her current experiences as an office bearer in the union. She recounts the difficulties she has faced in being a 'strong woman' in what she says is 'a man's world of officialdom, and officiousness'. She is forceful in stating that she has never been afraid to stand up for herself or what she believes in and she refuses to be intimidated by 'these African men' even if she is 'shaking inside'. Phumla pauses and then tells me that she has always been so busy doing what she knew she was driven to do that she hasn't really thought about why this was. But it was the

information letter which I had sent to her some months previously that had made her think about what she had achieved and how she had managed to fulfil her ambitions of principalship. Phumla sits forward decisively on her chair, looks me straight in the eye and tells me that she will always 'fight for justice': I have every reason to believe that this very straight talking and determined woman means exactly what she says. Phumla relaxes slightly, pauses a moment to drink the juice she has ordered, and then tells me that she is happy to have this opportunity to share with me how and why she is where she is now and why, as a committed Christian, she knows that there is still so much more for her to do. This is Phumla's story.

# Time past

## Childhood: the influences of early family life, race, class, culture, language and religion that shaped personal development and values

Phumla's childhood was clearly a very happy and ordered time as she speaks with affection of her early years and her family life. She has never doubted that she could achieve anything she wanted as, from a very young age, her family structure and, what she describes as, her father's 'huge presence', gave her a strong self of self and of confidence to 'think big and act strong'. Phumla is the last born in a family of seven children, and she grew up with her brothers and sisters in a very close and tightly knit family in the KwaNdebele homeland to the north of Pretoria. This, she explained, was one of the Bantustans set up by the apartheid government in the 1970s, to give a semblance of self- government to certain regional tribes: in this case the Ndebele people. Phumla's family were of royal descent on her father's side and this status, with the responsibility to the community that this royal lineage brought, hugely impacted upon her and her siblings. That she was a girl did not weaken or undermine her strength of purpose, as she knows it did with many of the girls who were brought up very differently from her and her siblings. This was very significant to her as Phumla explained me that the Ndebele people are very traditional in their ways, and their adherence to their cultural norms and practices: perhaps the most traditional of all the tribal groups in terms of patriarchy, and the role and place of women in their society.

Although in many ways Phumla says her family exemplified this traditional stance, in many others they were very different especially in the way that the girls were treated. Phumla is in no doubt that education was highly valued in the nuclear and extended family and that her parents were totally committed to ensuring that all their children were well educated. There was no difference made between the boys and girls as far as education was concerned, and though household chores were assigned on a gender basis according to traditional custom, all the siblings were apportioned time equally for their school work. Phumla's mother was a traditional homemaker: she took care of all the domestic work of the family and had no work outside of the home. Although she was not well educated, she had completed only primary school, she wanted all her children to complete their schooling, and was adamant that her daughters especially would have the chance that she had not had to do this. Phumla describes her mother as being 'very traditional but also very westernised' and in cases of conflict between the two, as far as the children were concerned, she would always go 'the western route'.

> My parents always encouraged each one of us to work hard and succeed through our education. But my father was very strict and there were rules in the home that we had to follow – or face the consequences. He told us that we must all be good students and gain good marks. He always insisted that we do our homework, spent time helping us, and was never satisfied with less than excellent results from all his children.

Phumla's father was very well educated; he was a teacher and later became a primary school principal; he wanted all his children to be well educated professionals, ready for the new South Africa that he believed in, and that he was working towards. Throughout her early childhood and adolescence, she was influenced particularly by her father, his sense of duty, his importance in the community and his professional status as a school principal as well.

> My father loved teaching, for him it was a calling. He knew how to encourage us to do our best, to know the value of hard work to achieve results – so he would always congratulate us for work well done, especially when we did well academically. He was so proud then and always gave us a special treat as well as kind words. I learned so much from his attitude … I have always tried to act in the same way as an adult, to my own children and to all those learners in my care

Her parents were committed Christians and the children grew up with a sense of duty and service instilled in them; their family influenced by the deeply religious basis of their lives,

and the values that underpinned this. Her father always reminded the children that there are choices to be made in life and Christian paths that are right to follow; he had chosen his pathway and would encourage his children always do what was right as Christian young men and women.

> My father was my role model in so many ways; as his last born and his youngest daughter I was also his favourite I think. Eventually I was the last child at home when my siblings had all gone on to college, and he spent time just with me telling me of his work at school, for the community and always of his work to fulfil his dreams for a new South Africa. He was such a passionate man … yes he was strict, but I remember him always as a very kind and fair man, to all of us.

Phumla recalls her childhood experiences and the joys of growing up surrounded by a loving and caring family as very happy times. She does not remember that there were difficult times, just some sad ones as much loved extended family members passed away, both the young and the old, and that her faith, already deeply embedded, helped her to understand this process as a natural part of life and of growing up. As a young girl, and even into adolescence, growing up in KwaNdebele she does not remember being exposed directly to any of the problems that South Africa was experiencing, given the political unrest and the growing violent opposition to the apartheid regime from the mid 1970's. But she remembers vividly that her father would speak of the injustices that the apartheid system embodied, especially in education, and that it was his duty as a traditional leader, as a school principal, and as a Christian to 'fight this from within the system'.

## Impact or influence of societal structures and attitudes in the community context

Phumla tells many stories of how her family were regarded in the community. It was clear to her from a young age that her parents were greatly respected and accorded a special status in that they would be approached for help and advice on all matters affecting that community by many different people, with many different problems. The community was always very supportive and very positive; they enjoyed associating with Phumla's parents, whom she describes as 'pillars of the community', and who were afforded the dignity of 'elders'. Phumla is clear that this was partly because of her father's royal status, and the respect

accorded to traditional leaders and chiefs, but it was also because of the respect that the community had for him as a teacher. Speaking with great pride of her father she says,

> during my childhood a person called a teacher was highly respected. All the children in the community would want to associate themselves with us, as children of a teacher and a school principal. Community members would regard the child of a teacher as the most intelligent one, and that created a pressure for us in doing our school work …we knew we had to succeed, as the community believed in us and if we let ourselves down we would let everyone down. I think that was a good lesson, but it was very hard sometimes as children to have these double pressures.

Phumla is certain that her desire to be a teacher was also influenced by how the community respected her parents and this was reinforced for her given that when the community, both individuals and groups, needed advice they would seek help particularly from her father.

> I saw the importance then of being a teacher because of the respect people were giving 'the old man' because of the work he did, because he was a professional man, because he was a leader. That type of respect was important to me … although I am not sure that I was ambitious, I really did want to be someone in the community. I know I was very proud of how my family were regarded, and very influenced by it.

## Significant events and actions during childhood and adolescence

As the last-born Phumla was eventually the only child left at home as six of her siblings, having passed their end of school exams, had each decided to train as teachers: each one following an older sibling to the College of Education, over a period of years. Phumla is very clear that her siblings leaving home and going to college were significant events for her and that as an adolescent she now had many role models whose actions and choices were to influence her. As her older brothers and sisters began their teaching careers over several years, she was certain that this was what she would do.

> I don't think I knew, or would have questioned even if I had known, that there were very limited professions open to me as a woman, and especially as a black woman at that time … but I do know now that I would have been a teacher whatever else was open to me. Like my father it was my calling … even if I didn't really understand that at the time.

Phumla loved high school and was an enthusiastic learner throughout these school years. She knew her parents were proud of her achievements, and she was also inspired by a female teacher, who taught English at the school. This was Phumla's best subject and she was motivated to excel in this: to become very proficient in the English language as a means to ensure the professional future her parents wanted for her. To improve her language skills and her general knowledge, encouraged by her English teacher, Phumla read,

> everything I could find and everything this teacher recommended. I knew that I needed to know more, to be 'one step ahead of others' to succeed. I saw what my siblings were able to do, how well they spoke and how well they were regarded … I saw that people admired them for this and I wanted that for myself.

A significant event outside the family occurred for Phumla when she was in her final year at high school, her English teacher, who had been such an influence in her education, was promoted to deputy principal. This was to prove a further source of inspiration to Phumla, not only at the time, but in later years, as she realised that a woman could achieve a position of authority.

> She was such an important role model for me, outside of my family. In my community I did not know any woman who was married and had a career … there were teachers of course but not principals or deputies … this was for men. I think that she was the biggest influence on me and my career, not just the kind of person she was and a good teacher, but because she wanted and got results for her learners and for herself …she told me many years later, when she had become a high school principal, that she was never satisfied with second best, and would never allow anyone to treat her in that way just because she was a woman.

Phumla's desire to be a teacher and 'someone in the community' was reinforced by this event, and in addition she recognised that she had the strength of character and the personality to 'fight for what I wanted' she was not someone who could easily be 'put down' and certainly not one to 'give up' when things got difficult. She explained that her family found it amusing that she was always this brave and battling character, who could never stay still for long, given that her Ndebele name means 'rest'.

## How, when and why decisions were made on higher education

It was always accepted in Phumla's family that all the children would go into higher education. All the siblings were expected to pass their final year matric exams, and none ever questioned this expectation. In their family, high expectations were the norm, and all the siblings lived up to these. Phumla was determined to exceed these expectations, to excel in her exams. So she worked even harder in her final year at school, determined to pass the final exams with as high a mark as she could so that she would be able to study to be a teacher as her brothers and sisters had done. After achieving excellent marks in the matric exam, Phumla immediately applied to, and was accepted at, a College of Education.

> It was now a family tradition for us, and it was really important to me to be 'following in my father's footsteps'. My parents were so proud of me and encouraged me to study hard and gain my teaching diploma; they wanted me to do well.

## The significance of the education experience

Phumla studied hard over the three years needed to complete the Teaching Diploma, achieving very high marks in her finals. She was also very involved with student life and the friends that she made there. Her connections with the other students made her far more aware of the situation in the country, the changes that were taking place and the part that they as young teachers would be playing. She was part of a student Christian group and this gave her additional support and strength given the difficult times apparent throughout the country, and in schools and in colleges of education at that time: the late 1980s. She had made the decision to be a primary school teacher, as she was very influenced by her father and his position. She had not considered high school initially, though it was always a possibility as she realised that she preferred working with the older primary school learners. But her commitment to secondary school teaching, and the change to that sector, was only to come a few years into her teaching career through circumstances she could not have foreseen. Phumla's interest in the sector was also heightened through a chance meeting with her former English teacher, now a high school principal. She was very encouraging about Phumla's potential as a high school teacher, and this woman was to become a good friend, and also her role model and mentor in later years as she eventually gained promotions on the journey to high school principalship.

## When and why principalship was considered

Phumla is convinced that her pathway to principalship started from the first term that she began her teaching career at the primary school in KwaNdebele where her father was the principal. She had been placed in that school and though she didn't choose it, she has no regrets.

> I know some people thought I was there because of my father but if I was then I hadn't asked for or expected this – we went where we were sent and I was fortunate to start teaching at this school, under my father's management. I learnt a lot about being an effective teacher and an effective leader from 'the old man' … I saw how he was respected and how successfully he ran the school – he worked so hard, and he was trusted, which I knew that many principals were not. Now my father had become my mentor and role model in many professional ways … I began to dream of being a principal – I knew that I could do the job well once I had gained more experience.

Phumla worked at the school for two years before her father retired. She was already considering moving school to gain the experience that she realised she must have if she were to be considered for promotion. She knew that she would like to move to high school teaching but wasn't sure how she would do this. Eventually the decision was made for her as an opportunity arose out of various changed circumstances both at the school level, and in KwaNdebele. All the homelands were integrated back into the newly democratic South Africa from 1994, and the education system in the country was also under major revision. The education department was redeploying many teachers and as a result of these changes, Phumla was allocated to another school where teacher shortages were acute. This was, fortuitously, the opportunity she had wanted to enable her to realise her ambition of working with secondary school learners. Phumla was assigned to a high school and though apprehensive about this change, she was also excited that she had been given the chance to do what she now believed was her true calling as a teacher.

> The change was not easy and I worried that I might not succeed as I was not trained for secondary teaching. But I don't give in and I was excited by the challenge … I was determined not to fail and I learnt a lot there, realising that I had the capabilities to handle secondary learners. My interest in high school work developed dramatically from there as I saw myself succeeding so well in teaching secondary learners up to Grade 12.

Phumla's success as a Grade 12 teacher of English inspired her to consider further study to improve her basic diploma qualification. There were more opportunities opening in 'this new South Africa' and she was determined to take advantage of these. Over a period of years she embarked on various study programmes all of which gave her both extra skills and competences but also reinforced the self-confidence and assurance which had always been with her from childhood. Phumla had never doubted that she could achieve anything she wanted and set out to demonstrate this through further studies that would prove her abilities, give her higher qualifications, and thus put her above 'the mediocre and incompetent men' she worked with.

> I wanted to improve my competence and study further as my desire to achieve promotion to principalship grew. I took a Certificate in Technology and also ACE (English FET) then ACE in School Management and finally gained an Honours Degree in School Management. I was very proud and now certain I could succeed in my chosen profession … I knew it was possible that I could lead a school, and be so much better than the men I saw doing this.

This was an exciting and challenging time for Phumla and many changes, challenges and opportunities were to affect her on this pathway to principalship, both personally and professionally. The first was that at the high school she met the man who was to become her husband: a fellow teacher, he was also Ndebele, but not of the royal family, and Phumla says that her only regret in committing herself to him, was that she would lose her royal surname.

> I wasn't what you would call a feminist, it was that my name was a status symbol and it meant something to people, so I wanted to keep it … but still in those days, and in his very traditional family, it would have been impossible for me. Mbongane was not so traditional, he was educated and the only one in his family who was, but he was not willing for this so I accepted that decision … that was one fight I wouldn't have won.

Phumla and Mbongane were married in both a traditional and a western ceremony: they were husband and wife in customary and in civil law. There was never a discussion about having children: in such a traditional Ndebele culture the families' expectations of offspring had to be met and Phumla had their first child when the *lobola* was finalised and before the marriage took place. Within the next five years she gave birth to two more children and still thinks that she may want to have another, before she is 'too old', especially now that her eldest is at varsity, and the other two will soon be going. Childcare was never an obstacle or an issue for

her professionally, or for them as a teaching couple. They engaged a domestic worker as a housekeeper and nanny, and have always had this help throughout their married life and through all the children's babyhood and adolescence. Phumla is clear that though her husband is from a very traditional family he is 'a very modern man and a good father', and is willing to share chores and manage the household budget with her. He has always supported her professional ambitions and that is not a common occurrence in such a patriarchal and traditional culture as theirs. She knows that being seen to be too controlling can be a problem, in her husband's extended family particularly, but she admits that she likes 'to be in control', so she has to manage the process carefully at home and at work.

In the first three years of her work at the high school, Phumla also became 'very politically conscientised'. She joined a large teacher union and rose rapidly through the ranks to become a senior official.

> I was elected to the higher levels in the union. In carrying out my duties I saw that I had the potential to lead with authority especially when I confidently addressed many large groups of educators at our meetings and conferences. I was so proud when some years later I was elected as a negotiator, serving in different structures, even at the community level.

Phumla's experience of leadership in the union, her success at school in improving learners' results in English, together with the additional qualifications she had gained, enabled her to consider seriously her chances of gaining promotions in school. She knew that she must gain more experience to fulfil her dream of becoming a principal, as she was still a post level one teacher, without formal management responsibilities. Phumla decided to ask to take on extra duties voluntarily as a way of gaining management experience, and although this did not make her popular with other teachers, it was an opportunity she was happy to have, and a fight she was willing to take on with those who tried to oppose her. In this voluntary capacity she was supported by the principal of the school who was very happy to share duties with her for many reasons, but mainly she knew because he was overloaded, not very competent and not in good health.

> The course I took in school management at UNISA in 2004 was really important and a turning point for me as I believed it would definitely help me to achieve principalship. At the time I was still a post level one educator, so I then started

> helping the principal of the school in performing his duties … I was happy to volunteer to do this to help my career but also because I could see that it would help the school … there was no deputy principal and the HoDs were not willing to take on more work. My father encouraged me in this volunteering, reminding me that I had a duty to the learners, and that getting extra pay for a job that needed to be done didn't always lead to 'the right path'.

So Phumla continued with this extra, unpaid work for that year, despite the difficulties and resentment that she encountered. She knew that it was 'worth doing' and she learned a great deal about how to apply the management principles she had learned on her course through the trails and errors of the work she was now doing in the school. Phumla was not mentored in any meaningful way by the principal, whose style was one of abdication, and she found herself taking on much more management work: he supported and encouraged her intentions and ambitions but did little to provide guidance. Phumla is clear that there was also tension amongst her union colleagues, and her actions were not welcomed at senior union level. This was to cause extra problems for her then and, she is convinced, when she began applying officially for management posts in later years. But in 2005, in her early 30s, she was appointed acting deputy principal of the school, following a special provision made for her by the SGB, who had approved of her volunteer work, and the results she was obtaining. Phumla continued in this role for three years and in 2009 she became the permanent deputy principal, after the Department of Education recognised the SGB (School Governing Body) appointment, and endorsed this without any interview process being held.

## The last stages of the pathway to principalship

Within a few months of Phumla achieving the permanent deputy principal's post, the principal took early retirement on health grounds. She became acting principal and the pathway seemed clear for her to apply and be appointed to the permanent position: Phumla was confident that she could achieve this. She was encouraged by her husband, her father and by her former English teacher, now a high school principal and her mentor; so despite the problems she had encountered in the school she went ahead with the application. The consequences of this move were distressing and very difficult for Phumla to accept. Her application was blocked by the very union in which she served as an elected officer: there were officials who did not want 'this girl' to be appointed. Phumla was told that her interview

application had been deliberately under-scored to enable the preferred external candidate to get the post: this applicant, a male, was duly appointed.

Phumla continued in her post as deputy principal despite her frustration and disappointment at the outcome of her application, and the interference she firmly believed had occurred. But she was determined to serve well under the new principal despite the difficulties that were put in her way by the HoDs, who had been opposed to her since her first promotion.

> They (HoDs) tried to sabotage my work and turn the principal against me …they told him he must not work with me, that the school would be better without me, that I was not worthy of my post … but he is not a bad person and he did work with me although it was not easy as the school was becoming very difficult to manage and it was affecting the learners, I was very unhappy but I was not going to let them beat me. My husband was very supportive, he believed in me, and he encouraged me to apply for principal posts … he wanted me to get away from that school as it was affecting our family … I was so tired and always so stressed.

The situation at the school was known to the director of the district in which Phumla worked, and though she was aware that she was well thought of by the circuit and district managers, they seemed unable, or unwilling to tackle the problems. However, within six months of the new principal's appointment, Phumla was moved from her post to take up an acting principal's post at another high school which was seriously underperforming and needed, she was told, 'a very strong person' to turn it around.

Phumla made huge strides in her first year to improve the school, it was a challenge she really wanted, and the proof of her efforts was evident when the matric exam results improved by 20%. In January 2013 Phumla was appointed permanently to the principal's post.

> I had proved that I was a competent as well as a strong leader, and that being a woman in 'a man's world' was no barrier to success, despite the odds in such a dysfunctional school, and against opposition from some quarters. I hope that I am a role model for other women, as there are still only two female principals in my circuit …I know how important it is that women colleagues can see that we females can do it, and it is worth fighting for. I am striving hard to make the school to be one of the best performing schools in the province, and will continue my work till this job is done. There are other schools that will need me, I know as Christian that I have this duty to serve well, and I will move on when the time is right. For now I am

> happy to have realised my dream that I could be a principal of a high school, and that as a woman I had the capability to lead, to influence others, and to improve the education opportunities for the learners.

## Chapter overview

This chapter presents the findings from the narrative account of one of the women principals with whom I had in-depth conversations over a period of many months. The life history that I have presented is my interpretation of Phumla's life story through the data analysis of the personal and professional actions, events and influences which have determined her pathway to principalship: from her *'time past'* to her *'time present'*.

The analysis of the data has identified three key factors which have impacted significantly and definitively on her and the journey she embarked upon from such an early age and with such clear aspirations. These key factors are: early family life and strong role models; the importance of education; her Christian faith and purpose for her life.

Phumla's story shows clearly that her close family, their values and their way of life, was instrumental in shaping her into the strong, confident and determined woman she became. She grew up enjoying a very happy childhood in what was a very traditional and patriarchal community in KwaNdebele. However, her parents, though they were vested in the Ndebele culture and her father's royal status, did not determine their children's future through gender differentiation in schooling and the chances that education would provide in enabling them to be professional men and women. Phumla's confidence, strong sense of self and her aspirations she attributes particularly to her father's 'huge presence' and his encouragement of all her siblings to work hard, achieve well and work in the service of others. He was a traditional leader, a teacher and a school principal; and his status and the community's respect for their family because of this, heavily influenced Phumla in determining what she wanted to be and do. Phumla and all her six siblings grew up wanting to become teachers, which they all did eventually. They were also encouraged in this by their mother, a hard - working traditional homemaker and strong woman, who wanted the life choices for her children that she had been unable to have. It is clear that Phumla's family members, male and

female, were looked up to, and the family values instilled in her were to be the mainstay of her own family life as she married and had three children in a supportive and democratic relationship with her husband, Mbongane, her 'modern man and good father'.

Phumla was brought up to believe that education was the way to achieve in life and she and the siblings were encouraged and inspired, particularly by their father, to hold fast to this ideal, and to do well at school. She loved studying and was never in any doubt that she would become a teacher: this was all that she ever wanted to do, 'to follow in my father's footsteps', and to 'fight for justice' through education. Phumla's father had instilled in her, and the older siblings, that teaching was a profession that was also a means of service to others and through which young people could be uplifted and a more equal society achieved. This was of especial significance in the apartheid era in which Phumla grew up and started her teaching career, but also in the post-apartheid era, with the major educational system changes which were to impact upon her work as she embarked on the pathway to principalship.

Phumla's Christian faith, her belief that there was a God-given purpose to her life through service to others had been instilled in her from early childhood. Her parents' deeply held religious conviction and their manifestation of this 'Christian duty' in their daily lives and interactions with others had deeply influenced her. Her pathway to principalship was determined in so many ways by the 'strong, battling character' she says she is; and driven by her aspirations, her desire to 'be someone' in the community, her self-confidence and self-belief. However, she is also clear that everything she has done in her career has been underpinned by the sense of purpose that her faith has provided, and why, as a committed Christian, she knows that there is still so much more for her to do as a high school principal.

The next chapter presents the discussion and analysis of the four data chapters in which I have presented the life histories of the four women principals.

# CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

## Introduction

This chapter sets out the analysis of the data collected from the life stories of the four women principals. These provided the narrative exposition of the women's personal and professional pathways to principalship. As life history methodology requires of the researcher, I have interpreted these stories, created the life history accounts and, from these narratives, I have identified the emerging themes: a grounded approach (Dimmock & Lam, 2012; Elliot, 2005). This provided the basis upon which to present the analysis of the themes which have emerged and which have been categorised, as I compared the stories and identified the key areas that were evident from the data collected. This process of identification and comparison was continuous from the commencement of the research process, and throughout the time spent together, as the women's narratives were fleshed out over the two to three years of interactions and 'conversations with a purpose' that constituted the substance of this study.

But, as life history research shows, people's stories change over time and in re- telling; their interpretation of meaningful events in their lives may be contextually, and time, bound (Elliot, 2005, Floyd, 2102; Goodson & Sikes, 2003, Ribbins & Zhang, 2006). It is clear that the passage of time gives different shades of meaning to events and, the more traumatic it was, the more difficult to recall, or want to recall, for fear of bringing long submersed emotions to the surface (Middleton, 1993; Smulyan, 2000).

This factor is referred to by Antjie Krog, a journalist and researcher who reported on the daily narratives told to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) during the mid-1990s. In a later book (2009) of three written about the Commission's enquiry into apartheid crimes, she details the evidence from one victim's mother, and the follow up narrative enquiry interviews which she and her team conducted to ascertain the consistency of the woman's story, and particularly the significance of a vivid dream she referred to; the details of which were woven into her evidence to the TRC. Krog's book, *There was this Goat,* tells the story of this Xhosa woman's account of hearing of the brutal murder of her son

at the hands of the apartheid police in 1986, and subsequently identifying his mutilated body. Repeatedly and emotionally, woven through her horror at these events, the woman tells of her dream of a goat standing upright at her door the night before she hears of her son's death (in Xhosa culture, the goat is a very symbolic animal, and dreams are considered to be important ways through which the ancestors communicate). Krog's subsequent and prolonged conversations with this bereaved mother led her to believe that the significance of the dream was of vital importance as she analysed the data collected for the book. As Krog states, the appearance of the 'dream goat' and the moment of learning of her son's death are inextricably linked: the mother tells of the dream then omits it again when the pain of the recall of the event, becomes too much for her to bear.

> … In her memory she had the story of his death…and how it played, and is playing, itself out for the rest of her life. Every time she told the story… she had to make choices - for whom am I telling this, why am I telling this…? And these determine what she is to depict and what to leave out, what to adapt to the moment of telling, and what to add (Krog et al., 2009, p, 187).

My inclusion of Krog's observations from her research, is to emphasise the necessity of thoroughly investigating even what might initially appear to be inconsequential details within a participant's story, before discounting any data. This factor is of specific significance to this study and my analysis of the findings, as it relates to narrative enquiry and life history approaches. As I stated in the introduction to chapter four, and the subsequent data presentation chapters, although I chose not to present all the very personal and deeply intimate details I had learned about the women, I was aware of, and reflected on, the importance of all these in assisting a deeper understanding of the participants and the influences impacting upon their lives, and their choices. Also, of relevance to the context of Krog's research, is that my study is of women whose lives have spanned apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa; the effects of which will have been experienced by them, overtly or covertly.

It is this context that is apposite particularly to Maropeng's story as she recalled the violence that she was subjected to by her activist brother at the height of the struggle against apartheid. The emotions that accompanied her telling and retelling of the events were varied, and she did not always focus on exactly the same aspect of the event. As with the Xhosa mother's

'dream goat' experience, Maropeng emphasised, then omitted, key aspects of her original story between our lengthy conversation sessions. She spoke initially of the event almost dispassionately, then as we revisited aspects of her life story over many sessions she became increasingly distressed as she relived that one experience, and the horror of what might have been as much as what was. It was clear that Maropeng described, then analysed and then deconstructed the events during the time with me, as she had evidently done over the years, in her attempts to make some sense of the horror experienced. When the retelling became too much to bear, she refocused her narrative to restore some emotional control.

All of this is key to understanding the complexity of data analysis in life history research: the data collected is very personal and is only as complete as the participants allow through their narratives and the choices they make as to what to include in, and how to tell, their stories. As life history and narrative enquiry research reveal (Elliott, 2005, Floyd, 2012; Goodson & Sikes, 2003), it is only the perspectives of the participants that will be known, as demonstrated in Maropeng's version of what occurred and why as a victim of extreme violence. In my study the women's narration to me of all, or some, of their life stories is clearly linked inextricably to the significant others whose lives intersect within these life events, but whose version of events will never be taken into account by the researcher. As chapter three demonstrated, this raises a key question in life history research: how to know the truth or veracity of the data collected? Although qualitative research focuses on perceptions, or subjective 'truth', (Bush, 2007), rather than absolute truths, the key factor for the life history researcher is the need to ensure that the narrative data, the analysis and ultimately the conclusions drawn from this analysis, can be considered as trustworthy, and therefore reliable.

The resolution of this life history research dilemma is that if the story is what the teller wants to believe or portray as truth, from recall and interpretation at the time of telling, then it can be regarded as truthful. The life history researcher accepts that this is what it is, then interprets and writes up the life history from the stories told. This occurs in the knowledge that these stories could be derived from selective memory, could have omitted what might be deeper explanations or factors for the events described; or could be what the researched wants the researcher to believe about them and their lives.

> Visions change once any story is told; ways of seeing are altered. The point of the story is to present itself … as complete, so that it can be said it does for now, it is an account that will survive for a while … to make an audience connive in the telling, so that they may say: yes that's how it was, or that's how it might have been. Once a story has been told, it ceases to be a story. It becomes a piece of history, an interpretive device. In this sense a story works … for us when its rationale is comprehended, and its historical significance grasped (Steedman, 1987, p.22).

Therefore, as the researcher I accepted that only the participant's view of the truthfulness of the events can be the reality for those engaged in the interpretation of life stories. I acknowledged that factors change through revised interpretation and memory recall, and that stories may well differ in the telling if they were to be told at a later stage, or to a different audience (Elliott, 2005; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Perumal, 2007; Smulyan, 2000). However, the analysis was an on-going part of the whole process from the beginning of the data collection and, as narrative enquiry methodology indicates, I could maximise the probable veracity of the events told by interacting over a lengthy period of time with each participant through our 'conversations with a purpose': this is what I chose to do. Thus, as this became a longitudinal study, I was provided with many opportunities to engage with each woman and her story, which in a sense provided a form of triangulation through these repeated engagements (Bush, 2007). I was able to re-visit the descriptions and explanations; to probe more deeply into the circumstances narrated and the emotions described. This gave more credence to the teller's perceptions of events and, therefore, my certainty of the veracity of what I was being told: it was true because it was perceived as such by the narrator, who was unshakeable in her view of events. I was, in essence, 'finding the goat' in each story. I therefore accepted and interpreted the data as provided through the narratives told over time, and this has formed the basis of evidence for my final analysis.

## Identification of themes and an analytical framework

I have identified the themes which have emerged from the participants' stories, and my interpretation of them, as told to me during this longitudinal research. It is structured around the key areas that I have identified from the women's life histories: themes that I have grouped broadly under the following six headings.

1. Early socialisation: family life and childhood influences

2. Role models and mentors
3. Values, religion and social justice
4. Barriers and discrimination
5. Agency
6. Serendipity

These broad thematic groupings do, to an extent, provide a common pattern that has resonance and applicability to all the women. However, within these broad themes, there are specific and important nuances that must be applied to each life history, and its central character. This allows a deepening of understanding of the motives of each woman in taking her particular pathway to principalship, and enables grounded theory to emerge from this cross - case analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Dimmock & Lam (2012) explore the uniqueness of grounded theory (GT) research and the possibility, "to discern common patterns … sufficient to group participants in to distinct types…with each type displaying different patterns of experiences, reactions, feelings, behaviours… from the other types" (Dimmock & Lam, 2012. p. 199).

Whilst I have kept this in mind during the whole process of interaction with, and interpretation of, the women's stories, there is a key element in the analysis of the data gathered that is specific to research in this narrative enquiry field. This impacts upon the research processes which underpin most data analysis work in qualitative case studies: viz. codes, categories, dimensions, patterns, triangulation, validation and veracity (Bush, 2007; Cohen, et al., 2007; Dimmock & Lam, 2012; Huberman & Miles, 2001; Macmillan & Schumacher, 2010). Some life history researchers consider the above as reductionist in that this approach may lose the essence of the stories, which should stand on their own (Floyd, 2012. p.228). However, I have chosen to use a combination of narrative description and thematic analysis as the way forward; to go beyond the telling of the stories, and try to connect individuals to the wider societal structures in which they have lived and worked, (Bathmaker & Harnett, 2010; Seidman, 2006).

This combined approach has not been uncomplicated for me, given that life history is concerned with the stories of personal actions, responses and emotions to the events that individuals encounter on their life's journey. As I stated earlier, their stories are deeply personal and unique, and although they constitute the data in life history research, it is certainly more difficult to categorise and typify the data from this individuality of expression of experience. But through the unpacking of the specific nuances pertinent to each of the women's life histories, it has been possible to determine common response and experience factors and, therefore, to some extent identify a typology that can be applied to each of the women. What has been discerned from the analysis of the women's stories of impact on, and responses to, the life events encountered on their pathways to principalship is, therefore, central to this chapter. The themes emerging from this research will be explored through the analysis of each of the six broad areas that the data revealed have impacted upon each of the women to varying degrees. From this it may be possible to identify key factors that could validate the designation of a type that matches each of the women. This will then assist in determining the emerging theory; thus answering the key research questions underpinning the study, (Mouton, 2001, p. 137), and providing the basis for my thesis and the conclusions presented in chapter nine.

## Thematic analysis

### Early socialisation: family life and childhood influences

This key section explores each of the women's experiences of early socialisation, family life and influences, through childhood and adolescence, both covert and overt. This is a key feature in research into the factors which impact upon women in pursuing career ambitions in what have been traditional male domains in both the developed and developing world (Acker, 1989; Blackmore, 1999; Celikten, 2005; Coleman & Fitzgerald, 2008; Evetts, 1994; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Hall, 1996; Lumby et al., 2010; Mahlase, 1997; Middleton, 1993; Mogadime, et al., 2010; Moorosi, 2007 & 2010; Oplatka, 2006; Perumal, 2007; Smulyan, 2000).

Ribbins, (2008), categorised the process of the formation of principals as being,

> made up of all the influences which shape the kinds of people prospective principals become …[they] are socialised into deep rooted norms and values by the action and

> interaction of … family (notably parents), school and teachers, peer groups and local community. These … exerting their greatest influence in early childhood, shape personality and …generate a conception of self with the rudiments of work style, attitude and outlook (Ribbins, 2008, p. 65).

Each of the women revealed detailed stories of their childhood and family life to me; and in the telling they were matter of fact, or they laughed, or cried, or grew angry or showed pride as they graphically described the people, the homes, the celebrations, the traumas: indeed the myriad of events that made up their experiences and shaped their lives.

Childhood and family experiences can be either positive or negative in their manifestation, but the responses to these are seen to be determined by the individual's own reactions and behaviours: as Maropeng told me, "it is not what happens to you that determines your life, it's what you choose to do about it". For Maropeng the disillusionment with the family only came in her late teenage and adult years; so her recollections of the formative childhood years and influences are positive and happy. Her childhood as the oldest of eight siblings, and sharing the family home with her older rural cousins, in a devoutly Christian , middle class, professional family in Soweto, is described with affection and pride. Education was highly valued and seen as the pathway to success by her mother, father and her grandfather; a nurse and schoolteachers respectively. The stability of those early years impacted significantly upon her life's path. Her "quiet self- confidence" and "determination", as she describes her attributes, grew from the nurturing environment of which she was part, and the positivity that the family elders instilled in her from a young age. The family were well respected in their close urban community of middle class, professional families who espoused and demonstrated similar attitudes and behaviours. The women, as well as the men, occupied professional jobs, all of which made a great impression on the young Maropeng. Whilst she engaged in the domestic chores allocated equally to the siblings, she never saw this as anything other than the norm: it was the way it was, but it was not necessarily a template for the way her life would be lived, as later experiences proved (Holdsworth, 1988; Smulyan, 2000; Walkerdine, 1985).

These influences are pivotal to understanding how Maropeng experienced and interpreted her gender. She was never aware during her childhood that 'being a girl' was an inhibiting factor for her education, or to achieving what she wanted to do in life. Gender literature would suggest that this is not the norm, particularly in very traditional, patriarchal societies where women's positions are generally informed, as Moorosi, (2010) argues, "…by the larger context of historical and cultural norms and social expectations of the roles played by men and women in society" (Moorosi, 2010, p. 558). But what career she wanted to embark on was not clear to Maropeng either as a child or a young adult: nursing and teaching were the options she considered most likely because they both involved a commitment to helping others through duty and service. The restrictions in South Africa in apartheid days of there being only limited professional occupations available to black women (nursing or teaching) was not consciously imbibed by Maropeng: she was influenced positively by her family, not by the external context. The same was true of Phumla's career ambitions; she is clear that it was her father's professional status that inspired her: she did not see limitations imposed by apartheid as dictating her chosen career path.

There is also the gendered aspect across all four case studies, as all the women chose a career that is traditionally acceptable for women in most societies. Grogan & Shakeshaft, (2011) have postulated that early socialisation and family influences can send powerful messages to females, particularly when it involves girls being told, or expected, always to be good, to do good and to help others. It is this gender-reinforcement, of what are regarded as primarily female qualities, that Grogan and Shakeshaft, (2011, p.38) consider may be a significant factor in influencing women to embrace a more nurturing or caring career environment. However, it is not evident from any of the four women's stories that they were influenced by a gender specific stereotype from a young age in their families. All the children in the four families, not just the girls, were expected to "be good, to do good and help others": it was part of the Christian ethos that permeated their family lives. The overwhelming evidence from the life histories is that these four women, from different backgrounds and cultures, ultimately chose teaching because they were inspired to do so, not because it was the only, or the most acceptable, option available to them as females.

The positivity, and the almost gender - equal environment, within the family that Maropeng describes, is clearly evident in Amelia's story: she also indicates enabling and positive family influences from both genders which fostered her self-belief and confidence. The extended family was an integral part of her life and of the lives of her siblings and cousins. It was through the interactions she experienced, and the influences exerted upon her, by young and old, that instilled in Amelia a life - long confidence and assurance which brooked no opposition. She asserts that she was "always a leader" and her memories of the farm school, with her role in "playing at teacher and principal", encouraged by her teacher uncle, was pivotal to her career ambition. She was not aware of her gender being an inhibitor to anything she did or wanted to do: a positivity which she ascribes to the family ethos of success being in all the children's grasp. Amelia's family were her rock, but she learned that things could change, and not always for the better, as when her father aspired to better paid work that necessitated much travelling away from home. But she learnt to adapt and accept the non - constancy of life: a valuable life lesson for her; though it did not alter that the concept of family always remained at the centre of her life, as a child and later as an adult with her own family. She admits to being heavily influenced by the slightly unorthodox, yet very disciplined way in which she and her siblings were raised, in a Christian family ethos. They were taught to have respect for authority and rules, but to question rather than follow blindly; not a common trait in apartheid South Africa, as she explained. This was certainly the approach to life which heavily influenced Amelia into her adult years, and provided the strength and determination to succeed in her chosen career of teaching, and her pathway to leadership which she knew was the means for her to try to change lives for the better (Coleman, 2002; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Mogadime, et al., 2010).

Phumla's experiences also mirror this almost gender - equal upbringing in terms of encouraged educational aspirations and ambitions. In itself, this would seem to be the opposite of 'cultural norms and expectations' (Parsadh, 2001; Moorosi, 2010; Uwamahoro, 2011). Phumla's large and extended family were committed Christians, and her parents had high standing in the traditional community in which she lived; as her father was both a traditional leader and a school principal. She was encouraged, indeed fully expected by both parents within this close knit, very traditional rural setting, to perform well at school and achieve a professional career and status. The domestic chores, which were shared equally amongst her siblings, were not always assigned on a traditional gender basis, and neither she

nor her siblings were allowed to use these chores as a way to avoid their school work. Her mother was the embodiment of the traditional African woman home maker, yet although she was not educated, she had aspirations for her children to succeed at school, especially her daughters, as she had never been given that opportunity.

As was evident in Amelia's story, Phumla also demonstrated the same type of self-confident, fearless approach to life: she brooked no opposition and being a girl was not a hindrance to her ambitions. But she was fully aware that many of her peers were treated very differently from the way she and her siblings were brought up: "the girls were kept at home, did all the domestic chores and did not go to high school like their brothers did." Phumla knew that it was "the way things were" in her community and keenly felt the unfairness; but she was cushioned from this gender discrimination herself. That the gender unfairness she witnessed in her community has heavily influenced her goal to achieve professional status is very clear: she has tenacity and strength of purpose, instilled from an early age, to change the status quo through education. Both Amelia and Phumla, though they are of a different age and ethnicity from each other, state this intent categorically. It is argued by Grogan & Shakeshaft, (2011) that, "women are likely to report that they entered the field of education because they wanted to 'change' the status quo … women … talk about having entered teaching to change the lives of children, to make the world a fairer place …" (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p.10).

When analysing Elanie's experience of family and community life, though it is significantly different in context from the other three women, it still mirrors that of Maropeng, Amelia and Phumla, in that it was an almost gender - equal upbringing in a middle class, professional family. Though Elanie, growing up in a neighbouring country to South Africa, did not have the influence of an extended family, as had been enjoyed by the other women in this study, her nuclear family was very close knit and, as well as her siblings, it incorporated her half siblings from her father's first marriage. This expatriate South African family's life was slightly nomadic in that they moved towns frequently because of the father's job as a magistrate; but they were anchored through their weekends and holidays at the family farm. Elanie and all her siblings enjoyed a very secure and happy childhood: one that was grounded in their Christian faith, and the tenets of hard work, fairness and discipline to achieve self-improvement and advancement. Education was paramount in the family and all the children

were expected to succeed and eventually attend university. There was no distinction made between the boys and girls in terms of education, of household chores, or of the work on the farm in which they all took an equal share. Elanie's parents were a source of inspiration to her, through their work, their fair-minded and compassionate attitudes to others, and their total commitment to the family. But thoughts of a teaching or judicial career were far from Elanie's mind as she grew up: she knew it must involve helping others, but had no idea what form that would take, and as her story revealed, it was many years and many jobs later before she committed to teaching.

These specific instances from the stories of the four women's early socialisation, family life and childhood, are indicative of the huge influence of the attitudes and expectations of parents, extended family, peers and the community, and the potentially lasting impact of these, upon individuals. Much is made by the women of this early socialisation and the childhood influences: their self -belief and agency, to be discussed fully in a later section, can be argued to be as a direct result of these factors. Ribbins (2008), whilst arguing that these influences are pivotal in "making a principal", rather more forcefully argues that,

> My research has led me qualify [earlier findings] in so far as they emphasize the primacy of *micro* (parents, particular teachers, etc.) and *meso* (peer group and local community, etc.) level variables, they tend to underplay, in some contexts at least, the sway of *macro l*evel factors … I argue the impact of societal and cultural influences on the formation of headteachers …seems to have been as great, and may even have been greater, than that of family, school or college, peer group or local community (Ribbins, 2008, p.65).

Though I would fully agree with Ribbins, (2008) on the likely impact of macro level factors on an individual's life chances and career choices; there is little evidence gathered from the women's stories that their early lives were impacted upon to any great extent, at least overtly, by the social influences that, as a non -South African I might have expected to find: that of them being black and white children living through the apartheid era. In these four case studies, all the women achieved against the odds in a traditional patriarchal society, which was also racially segregated and discriminatory during their formative years. Only later, in their adult lives, was this factor, particularly that of deeply entrenched patriarchal attitudes, to

be described as having an overt effect; with consequences that each revealed as impacting upon them and on their relationships with their families.

**Role models and mentors**

"I never dreamed that one day I would become Secretary of State … it's not that I was modest; it's just that I had never seen a Secretary of State in a skirt" (Albright, 2003).

Madeleine Albright, the first female American Secretary of State, established the path for two female successors, Condoleezza Rice and Hillary Clinton: the latter who challenged the highest glass ceiling when she ran for President of the United States in 2008, as the first female Democrat candidate with a high chance of success nominated to run for that office. She famously stated that the glass in the ceiling was a great deal more cracked than had been the case in the previous century when she started out as a lawyer: another traditionally male occupation, with a glass ceiling. As Bowles, (2012) argues, "Through the power of their own precedent - setting examples, women who ascend to senior leadership positions traditionally held by men have the potential to alter gendered career aspirations and to break open career paths for other women." (Bowles, 2012, p. 5).

However, it is also the case that there are examples of women who have broken through the highest 'glass ceiling' in their careers, but have done little to help other women aspire to and break through to achieve similar positions: creating what has been termed the 'glass floor'. Adler et al., (1993) cite the case of Margaret Thatcher, Britain's first female Prime Minister, whom they see as being an obvious example of Maslow's self – actualised woman: one who has made it in what would be regarded, traditionally, as a man's world. "[Thatcher] was herself successful in a man's world - and she did nothing to improve the position of other women" (Adler et al., 1993, p.8). Arguably, Thatcher was a role model in terms of her breakthrough of the 'glass ceiling' but, arguably was never a mentor to other women aspiring to break through that same ceiling.

The presence of role models and mentors to women in their personal and professional lives is clearly of critical importance. It is explored in much leadership and gender research, as it is a key aspect of the way women can be motivated and inspired to achieve promotion, despite any societal prejudices, or bigotry, especially in entrenched patriarchal societies such as

South Africa. Three recent South African studies, (Lumby et al., 2010, Mogadime, et al., 2010 and Moorosi, 2007), have highlighted the lack of female role models and mentoring as key deterrents to women seeking promotion to principalship. This is also noted in international research, and clearly there is a link between what women are capable of as leaders in the public domain, and what may assist them in demonstrating this, against prevailing and prejudiced attitudes towards their competency and suitability for the position., (Blackmore, 2006; Coleman 2001 & 2002, Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Smith, 2011a, Smulyan, 2000).

There was a clear distinction between role models and mentors in each of the women's narratives. Role models were very significant and very evident in each woman's life; mentors of either gender were much less evident, and female in only two instances: the lack of direct mentoring experience was lamented by all four women in respect of their pathways to principalship once they started teaching. This point is made by Smulyan (2000) who states that, "women sometimes lack the information and experience that would provide stepping stones … because they do not have the networks and mentors frequently available to male teachers …" (Smulyan , 2000, p.20). However, all four women cited instances where they had been given opportunities to take on administrative roles in their schools, though as each has wryly stated this was more a default position owing to the lack of visibility, job involvement and physical presence of the male principal concerned. As Maropeng said of her principal, "he was tired; he was waiting for retirement and had taken a back seat in the running of the school for several years… so I gained experience by doing his job."

But with regard to role models, it was clear from all the narratives that the strong role models in their lives had exerted a very positive impact upon them from their early years, and very significant to the findings is that these were not always female. Research studies tend towards the premise that female role models are necessary for women to model themselves on, to assist in achieving success in the professional field chosen (Coleman, 2001; Lumby et al; 2010; Mai, 2014; Moorosi, 2010; Naidoo, 2013) but this was not the case here as both males and females; either family members, friends and /or teachers have been described as playing a vital part in these four women's lives: supporting and inspiring their career aspirations and successes.

Amelia was exposed to strong female role models in both her nuclear and extended family, of particular significance was her paternal grandmother, the 'very French *dame*' whose influence was fundamental in the family and who did not discriminate between , or favour one gender above another. This demonstrated to her the strength and influence women could exert when operating in their specific spheres, in this instance the home. However, Walkerdine (1985) voices her concerns that strong women in the home may be role models but of a sort that may simply re-enforce gendered social stereotyping: female strength and influence that is acceptable in the home but not elsewhere. This view is supported by the research internationally into women in leadership, and the negative attitudes towards promotion to, and acceptance of female principals, which create barriers to success (Coleman, 2002; Duff, 1990; Evetts, 1994; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Gunter, 2001; Hall, 1996; Lumby, et al, 2010; Moorosi, 2010). But for all four women in this study, their mothers were positive role models, whether they worked in or out of the home, or both; as all were strong, determined and advocates of education as a right for their daughters, and a means to a achieve a professional career.

Amelia's, Maropeng's and Elanie's mothers all worked in middle class, professional occupations; a senior administrator, a nurse and a teacher respectively, and they also undertook the traditional female roles and the chores in the home, as they were, "…expected to play their cultural roles as mothers and wives" (Moorosi, 2007, p. 4). Only Phumla's mother worked solely within the home, but as with the three mothers engaged in paid professional jobs, she was also committed to equal access to opportunities for her daughters, which would enhance their life chances and eventual status. There is no suggestion that any of the four women were negatively impacted upon by observations of their mothers being the primary home makers: what they observed was the accepted norm of the time and generation. This status quo wasn't challenged, but it wasn't blindly replicated by any of the women, as their stories reveal; suggesting that there are many other influences and role models which play a significant part in determining future behaviour and expectations, which is primarily the argument made by Ribbins (2008), as I highlighted earlier.

It is interesting to note that for Phumla, it was her father who was the strong and significant role model, on whom she modelled herself, and based her aspirations. He was a champion of the right to education and status of all his daughters; she respected and admired him and followed his example into a teaching career. It was his position and work that she wanted to emulate, not her mother's. Phumla related how she sought the type of status and power which her father held: it was "the way I wanted people to see me…that I was strong and independent and powerful and had authority that people would accept and respect". Phumla also spoke warmly and with great admiration of her English teacher at high school, who had encouraged and nurtured this clever and clearly very determined girl, to achieve academically and "set my sights high". This teacher, who eventually became a principal herself, was a significant role model, and, as Phumla's story reveals, she also became her mentor. This mentorship was in place throughout teacher's college, and in Phumla's steps towards principalship; her former teacher remaining her mentor and friend once she achieved her ambition.

Amelia speaks highly of her husband as her mentor, whose experience as a business man was helpfully applied when Amelia needed mentorship, which was not forthcoming from the schools in which she was working on her pathway to principalship. Neither she nor her husband was fazed by this additional role in their marriage: as Amelia relates, "I took a pragmatic view, I needed help and support professionally, and an experienced management voice … Ray could provide this … there was no tension between our professional and our personal selves and lives". Lumby et al., ( 2010) also cite instances of husbands in business or teaching being regarded as mentors, which would indicate that women will act pragmatically, as Amelia did, to fill a mentoring gap when necessary (Lumby et al., 2010, p.20). Amelia is very clear that it was mentoring from her school managers, all of whom were men, which she lacked; but given the strength of her character and her long held career ambitions this was not, in itself, a deterrent to her. But she is equally clear that, though she was without school mentors, she was not without pressure to succeed in achieving principalship, especially from her last 'boss'. Smulyan (2000) states that, "… many women who do become school principals point out that they were 'pushed' into the role by others who told them they had something to contribute" (Smulyan, 2000, p.20), rather than this being a conscious plan.

This ‘push’ factor is related by all four women, but there are different connotations in terms of how they perceived this and how they responded. Amelia jumped at the opportunities presented on the long road she travelled towards her principalship, rather than feeling pushed and apprehensive from external pressures; and Phumla willingly and confidently accepted the pressure from her union and district official to move quickly up the ladder to her first principalship, despite her relative youth and management inexperience.

But for Maropeng and Elanie, their professional pathways were marked by the ‘push’ factor. Both had the insight to know that they could do the job better than their present or previous principals, but both were, in effect, pushed into the principal’s post they ultimately achieved. Maropeng had benefitted from the mentoring of the friend, and male principal, who had ‘rescued’ her from the family domestic tragedy many years earlier, and ‘pushed’ her into teaching as a career. She later benefitted from mentoring by a female principal, who had become a role model, who ‘pushed’ her to achieve principalship, because she had something to contribute. Elanie also achieved her post because she was ‘pushed’ to apply for the job she held as acting principal; and because she was told she had something to contribute. For neither of these two women was it because they were ambitious for the role, unlike Amelia and Phumla.

The significance and value of role models and mentors is very clear, both in the research literature (Coleman, 2001 & 2002; Lumby, et al., 2010; Mai, 2014; Mogadime, et al., 2010; Moorosi, 2007; Smulyan, 2000) and from the stories of the four women in this study. However, the impact is clearly dependent on many factors, not least that of the characteristics and personalities of the mentees, and also, significantly, those of the mentors and role models.

**Values, religion and social justice**

“Focussing primarily on their values, their sense of social justice and the influence they could exert, the women did not appear to doubt their own abilities to make a difference” (Smith, 2011a, p.18).

The passionate desire exhibited by all four of the women in my study resonates with the findings of Smith's (2011a) research in England: all four women wanted to lead others in duty and service; to continue willingly against the personal and professional odds they had encountered, and ultimately to lead schools towards positive outcomes for all learners. Their stories provide clear evidence of their strong values base firmly embedded from childhood, of a deep religious faith, and a commitment to education as a means of achieving social justice and equity for the learners for whom they care. Grogan & Shakeshaft's (2011) research, presents five categories of leadership that inform principalship, and of these, 'leading for social justice', and 'spiritual leadership' are ranked most highly by women (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p.15). The four women in my study state, without reservation, that their spiritualty, their deep faith, their belief in service and doing God's work, has enabled them to rise above the difficulties they have faced and has given them hope on the journey to principalship. Grogan & Shakeshaft (2011) also emphasises this factor when referring to a study of black and white female principals in the United States; the women all stated that it was their spirituality which gave them hope, and increased their resilience in their work towards social justice in schools as change agents.

Phumla acknowledged that her desire to lead and achieve professional status was based on her father's position and professionalism, but she is also clear that … "I knew that I had to earn this by setting a good example just like my father did. We were taught to respect others, and to gain their respect we must be worthy of that in deed and word." This sense of duty and the need to give and earn respect is echoed by Amelia, Maropeng and Elanie. Each were taught the value of family life and service over material possessions and wealth, and for Amelia this was brought home forcefully when her parents changed their family's lifestyle to earn more money, and within a few years realised that they had lost more as a family unit than they had gained. It is very clear from the women's stories that they, and their siblings, were expected to give and earn respect, to value people, to be tolerant and acceptant, to work hard, to put duty ahead of self and to help others. These were fundamental values that were to be part of their lives from childhood into adulthood and there is no evidence in the stories that there was any difference in their upbringing within the different family contexts, either between the younger and the older women, or between the black and the white women.

Maropeng, Amelia and Elanie were very clear that their sense of duty to serve God, and their deeply held belief that they were intended to do God's work, came as a very strong force at a later stage in their lives, even though they were all bought up in families where religion was a cornerstone of family life and values. Amelia describes her family as committed Christians who went to church, but it was her journey into adulthood at university, and her commitment to a church youth group that fostered the deep sense of God's purpose for her life, which has strengthened over time. It was also this sense of purpose and the deepening awareness of the extreme social injustice of the apartheid regime that caused a division between her and her father that was to persist over many years. As Amelia embraced the anti- apartheid struggle movement, so her father appeared to her to renege on the values of respect, tolerance, fairness and justice that her family had embodied in her childhood.

For Maropeng, this sense of God's purpose for her life became even stronger after the traumatic event of discovering that her second husband was a polygamist and that she was in fact his third wife. She sought solace in her religion; indeed changed the focus of her worship to a different Christian church, and this strengthened her personally, and in her work, after she left him. It was also around this time that she became distanced from her father, when she learned of his affairs over the years, and realised the extent of his hypocrisy in the way he had treated her after her teenage pregnancy and her 'fall from grace'. Both these women had discovered 'feet of clay' in their paternal role models: but the strong values base instilled in them was not affected: rather they looked deeper into their beliefs, and sought help and strength from God. This accords with other research studies, in South Africa particularly, and Lumby et al., (2010) state that "… the [women] depend on their faith for daily help, wisdom and strength and for their values, morals and principles …" (Lumby et.al., 2010, p. 25).

Phumla and Elanie were never faced with the challenges of observing 'feet of clay' in their paternal role models, and for Phumla, service, duty and her spiritual beliefs were in accord: understated but always part of her work and life. The need to draw on her faith and re-assert her values base arose from the behaviour of her union colleagues: their turning on her, as she strove to do her job according to the rules and her sense of what was right and fair, was a

source of pain and disquiet. But she was unshakeable in her determination, whatever the personal consequences; her faith brought her through this intensely difficult time. However, she had been forced through these circumstances to see a darker, self- interested side of people she had thought were, like her, committed to achieving social justice and equity through education. Elanie's values base, and her spiritual journey, was not challenged in the way of the other women on her pathway to principalship. Her deep conviction that she must do God's work, after embracing religion totally at university, as Amelia, had done, was ultimately channelled into education as a career and set her definitively on the journey to principalship, and to work for social justice; the concept she had learned in practice from her magistrate father. A study by Mogadime et al., (2010), showed that the women principals embraced, and personified, the spiritual leadership that Grogan & Shakeshaft (2011) identified in the United States.

> The women referenced their motivation for becoming a school principal based on a higher call. They envisioned their leadership role as determined by a higher design or higher power beyond human control that they also described as their destiny … (Mogadime, et al., 2010, p.814).

This is evident in all four women's stories in my study: their journeys, personal and professional, are underpinned by their moral, ethical and spiritual stance, their strong values base, and their commitment to work for social justice, as they believe God wants them to do. However, it is apparent that for the four women there is no theological tension between their faith and commitment to do God's work, and their personal ambitions, personal agency and drivers to succeed. These forces are inextricably linked as evidenced in the analysis of the data but are not in conflict, nor is one aspect taking priority over the others.

**Barriers and discrimination**

As Ribbins & Zhang (2006), argue in their study of Chinese school leaders, "The impact of societal and cultural influences … may be as great, and may even be greater, than that of family, school, college, peer group and local community" (Ribbins & Zhang, 2006, p. 85).

It is clear from the available research on gender and educational leadership that the major body of the literature emanating from studies of women's careers has mainly focussed on the "… notion of 'barriers' to women's progression" (Smith, 2011a, p.8). These barriers are

generally perceived to be, as Ribbins & Zhang (2006) argue, heavily related to societal and cultural conditions and influences prevailing in the context. This is certainly the case when considering how societal and cultural factors contribute to the barriers to women aspiring to principalship, particularly in high schools, in what has previously been widely regarded internationally as a male role; and which remains so in very traditional and patriarchal societies such as South Africa.

The four women in my study have all experienced, to a greater or lesser degree, externally imposed barriers and gender discrimination on their journeys to principalship, in their chosen sector of co–educational high schools. This includes discrimination in the workplace, lack of networking opportunities, lack of school based mentors, lack of district support and encouragement for promotion applications, and the obstructive and negative attitudes at promotion boards, when finally being granted interviews. Amelia was overlooked for promotion on several occasions, and when granted an interview, was thwarted at the selection panel point; being subjected to questions that would not have applied to men regarding, for example, family commitments, ability to maintain discipline with the boys, and other gender related bigotry. Elanie and Maropeng were also subjected to this same type of questioning at the selection panels, even though they were already, or had been, in post in those schools as acting principals: clearly proving their competence and ability as leaders. For Amelia, the principalship was awarded, after a selection process, but at the school where she had been deputy for several years, and on that occasion she was finally spared the bigotry and gender bigotry of previous interview panels: "they knew me, they knew my family life and my commitment to my work, that I was a strong and effective disciplinarian, and that I loved and played sport": the latter, she explained to me is very important in South African schools.

Phumla's case was very different from the other three, as she was fast tracked via the district official and supported by her union, which had a major influence in appointments at this level. She was very young, very determined and ambitious but as events subsequently showed, this support was quickly withdrawn as she proved a formidable and non -pliable deputy and acting principal. District support for her finally came after many months in which she was subjected to gendered bigotry and prejudiced attitudes from those with the power to select and appoint. Research has shown, in many countries, that the promotion seeking and

appointment phases are the times when most discrimination takes place, (Coleman, 2005; Blackmore, 2006; Grogan, 1996; Lumby et al., 2010) particularly to high school principalships. As Moorosi, (2010) asserts,

> the male normative of school management, which results from the fact that most principalship positions of secondary schools are held by men, sabotages women since the latter's suitability and acceptability are likely to be assessed according to male attributes (Moorosi, 2010, p. 549).

The barriers referred to here are those which Evetts (1997) has described as forming part of her "career history study" of secondary school headteachers (Evetts, 1997, p. 5). In my study of Amelia, Maropeng, Elanie and Phumla, their life histories began at the early socialisation and childhood stage, not just at the career stage; but the barriers which they encountered are, as evidenced by their narratives and as discussed in earlier sections of this chapter, primarily those at the career stage of their pathways to principalship. As Moorosi, (2007), found in her study of female principals' career chances,

> …the dominance of men in powerful positions within the structure of school management such as school governing bodies and district officials is usually regarded as detrimental to women's access … this male dominance …is linked to the traditional perspective of the position of women in society… (Moorosi, 2007, p.1).

The other major barriers which are known to exist for women relate to early gendered socialisation and childhood influences on aspirations, role modelling, and approaches to career planning. In addition to these, women's choices regarding marriage and domestic responsibilities, motherhood and the societal expectations of them as primary caregivers, add to the constraints placed upon them and their life and career choices. Mahlase (1997) argued that marriage and child rearing was a hindrance to women's careers, and the majority of research in this area, in the developed and developing world, would also identify this as a potential major barrier (Coleman, 2001 & 2002; Grogan, 1996; Hall, 1996; Lumby, et al., 2010; Moorosi, 2010; Middleton, 1993; Smulyan, 2000; Uwamahoro, 2011). Another career barrier linked to marriage for women was their likely dependence on their husband's work and location: it was assumed that if the husband moved for work then the wife would follow. This clearly could be a barrier to career stability for a woman, and affect her chances of promotion. Conversely, as Manamela's (1995) study found, South African women were

unlikely to take promotion which necessitated their husbands uprooting and following them as this was not culturally acceptable: another major barrier for women's career opportunities.

In the light of the identification of these major barriers, it has been shown that none of the women in my study, according to their narrative accounts, experienced early gender socialisation that inhibited their career aspirations or self – confidence as females. Within their family and communities, they were socialised and influenced to aspire to be whatever they wanted to be, as has been discussed in an earlier section. However, the influences of the societal expectations and the traditional mores of a patriarchal and deeply traditional South African context, impacted upon each of them as they grew up and made choices as to the directions their personal lives would take, and the careers to which they aspired. For each woman, the differences are quite significant in terms of how they experienced, and managed, the various societal roles and expectations, their personal life choices, and the organisational barriers that were encountered.

Marriage and motherhood was a conscious choice for Amelia, Elanie and Phumla, but for Amelia and Elanie marriage was a secondary consideration initially to their work and their service to God; and both met their future husbands, and married later in life, than was the norm in their families (in their thirties). Amelia's only child and Elanie's three children have been cared for within the nuclear family: Amelia sharing this with her husband, and Elanie with her husband, a housekeeper and a crèche facility. Phumla married in her early twenties and has four children: the child care has been shared with her husband but they have always employed a full time nanny. Child care constraints and problems are considered to be a major barrier to women for career progression. Lumby et al., (2010) highlight this as a major factor for most women teachers and leaders in South Africa; and studies in both the developed and developing world indicate that this can hamper women's chances, where the major burden of child care falls on them, and the costs of external child care provision, where any is available, are too high for many. Moorosi (2007) argues that class and race play a critical role in this in South Africa, with black women more likely to be affected by the barriers that exist as far as child care costs and responsibilities for child care are concerned, than their white counterparts, particularly working class black women (Moorosi, 2007, p.4). Although in the social context of South Africa I would concur that this is a likely issue, in Phumla's case this

was clearly not a factor that affected her, and as with all four women in my study, they were middle class both in origin and in ultimate destination.

It is interesting however, in terms of barriers to a career, through embarking on marriage and motherhood, that Maropeng's story revealed very different circumstance from those of the other three women. She fell pregnant as a teenager, had to leave her high school as a result and give up on her academic ambitions; she was subjected to the opprobrium of her middle class family and, as their traditional custom dictated, accepted that she must be married to the father of her baby to avoid further dishonour to her and her family. Her life took on a very different trajectory from the one she had envisaged, and her choices were very limited for a time. When she left her husband and returned to the family home, her parents took care of her daughter while she, as her story revealed in chapter five, worked in various low paid occupations to support herself and the child. What happened subsequently, in terms of how she extricated herself from this situation and pursued her academic ambitions and a career, will be discussed in the following section; but it is clear that her life and career choices were seriously hampered at that stage of her life through the constraints of her 'too early' child bearing and marriage; the cultural norms and traditions applying to wife and motherhood status in her husband's uneducated family, and the economic hardships imposed by these circumstances.

Although the four women in this study were able to overcome, or circumvent, the barriers that clearly exist for married women and mothers in pursuing their careers in both developed and developing countries, they were factors to which they needed to give attention. They all had to consider their options carefully, and the impact on them and their families of pursuing their careers, in a way that men aspiring to principalship would, in all probability, not have to. As Smulyan (2000) states, "while the world of teaching more easily accommodates the dual world for many women, the demands of administration still often presume one has a 'wife' at home" (Smulyan, 2000, p.21).

**Agency**

"To limit the scope of analysis [in research into women's accession to leadership] to 'internal and external barriers' to progression would be to deny women's agency" (Smith, 2011a, p.8).

It is clear from the four women's stories in my study that all have acted to challenge the system and have exerted their own agency, in the ways that best suited their personalities, attributes and characteristics. As Smith (2011a) has argued, women can, and do, take decisions for themselves and take steps to shape their own lives.

Amelia and Phumla are both very ambitious, determined and highly confident women with self -esteem and confidence. The age and race differences have indicated no barriers or hindrances to what they have achieved and how. Amelia described herself as a type A personality with a tendency to take control simply because she liked things to be done her way. Clearly these characteristics have enabled her to overcome the barriers and discrimination with which she has been faced on her career path: she brooked no opposition and, in her words, 'always powered on' to achieve her goals. Phumla is also a type A personality , ready to take on challenges and challengers, will do and say things her way, and is someone who, in her words, will 'always fight for justice'. She has never been afraid to 'stand up for herself and what she believes in' and it is this strength of character which, as with Amelia, has enabled her to overcome the barriers and discrimination she has faced on her pathway.

Maropeng and Elanie are very different in personality and characteristics from Amelia and Phumla: though their age and race differences have also indicated no barriers or hindrances to what they have achieved and how. Maropeng is quietly confident, but with a strong sense of self and clear determination. The quiet confidence belies her strength of purpose and character, and it is clear that she can and does assert this inner strength and conviction to achieve her goals, and to do what she believes is right in any given situation: she does not, in her words, 'suffer fools gladly', or accept 'unacceptable situations'. Elanie is also a woman whose self- belief and confidence is quietly presented but forcefully enacted when people and situations challenge her, and her sense of what is right. She has strength of character and purpose, and she will, in her words, 'fight like a tigress to right wrongs'.

These four women do fall into two personality types; the ambitious, overtly authoritarian, self-confident woman, and the non–ambitious, quietly assertive, self-confident woman.

However, the boundaries are blurred and it would not be accurate to typify each in any definitive way, therefore I have not attempted to do so simply in order to provide a typology, within a data analysis context. I prefer to leave this discussion and analysis now, and let the life histories speak for themselves (Floyd, 2012).

Each of the women in this study has demonstrated agency against the odds of the barriers and discriminations they have faced on their career pathways. Education, both initial and continuing, has played a major role in their lives, and in the choices that they could make towards their career objectives. All four found ways and means of furthering their higher education studies by enrolling on various academic programmes to gain the qualifications that would assist them on their pathways to principalship. They exerted their personal agency and key amongst these educational choices, and a common factor in the women's stories, is that they all enrolled on a two year part-time ACE school leadership programme, designed, as Moorosi (2010) states, to improve the knowledge, skills and competencies of aspiring and existing principals. This in itself was a major commitment that each chose: a clear manifestation of agentic behaviour of women who make their own decisions on what is needed in their professional lives, and do not conform to traditional stereotypes promulgated within the patriarchal society in which they live and work.

It is clear, as Smulyan (2000) argues, that much of the early research in the field of women into educational management "often fails to see the individual as able to act … to challenge the existing system" (Smulyan, 2000, p.17). And , as I have interacted with, and listened to, the four women in my study I would concur with Evetts (1994), that "social institutions and structures [are] not 'the ultimate determinants of all outcomes' and participants [are] not passive but *respond to, or negotiate*, in various ways, the constraints of their lives" (Evetts, 1994, p.51).

**Serendipity**

"One of the most notable things about the career progress of … women, was the unexpected nature of their achievement in becoming heads" (Coleman, 2002, p. 15).

After the discussion of women's agency, serendipity is an interesting and very important theme on which to draw this chapter to a close. As the previous sections have shown, all the women had very clear and determined objectives in the career path they chose, even though the choice was not initially teaching for Elanie and Maropeng. However, for all four it was to work for social justice and do the work that they all believed God intended them to do, in service to others. But within this choice, and the trajectory on which this led them, there was an element of chance, or serendipity; which they have termed destiny and 'God's hand' in their lives. For each of the women, there were serendipitous events and circumstances which helped them on their pathway to principalship, as is revealed in the data chapters presenting their stories. But the most significant events occurred for Maropeng and Elanie, and it is on these women that this section will concentrate, as they were the two with the least overt ambition and, initially, the least idea of the career they wanted and how to achieve this. As previous chapters have shown, neither of these women had planned to become principals, even when they decided to become teachers after the various jobs and life events which they had experienced into their mid to late twenties. As Moorosi (2010) states, "principalship… happened mostly by default for females … as most of them never set out to be principals" (Moorosi, 2010, p. 552).

But the default position does not fully reflect the circumstances that led Maropeng and Elanie to principalship. There are strong incidents of serendipity that clearly apply to the achievement of principalship for them both. Elanie, living in the Cape and searching for a career that fulfilled her need to serve others, received a letter from her sister in which she told Elanie of a newly established mission school, needing a teacher of English: it was situated in a deeply rural province, catering for impoverished, black children. Elanie was not a qualified teacher but she had majored in English and, undoubtedly, was a deeply committed Christian. Motivated by the Mission school's values and spiritual ethos she applied for the post and was appointed: that she was still single and with no ties made the decision to relocate and devote herself to this work very easy. This chance information from her sister led to her dedication in pursuing a teaching career, and ultimately to the leadership positions and eventual principalship that she holds today.

Maropeng's circumstances were more complex when the first serendipitous event happened. She was a single parent living with her parents; she had finally managed to achieve her goal of completing her education; had majored in English and was contemplating what future career she would follow when she sustained a sudden and brutal attack by her brother. This, ironically, was the catalyst for the chance that led to a fulfilling career and future for her. Unexpectedly visited by concerned old friends, one of whom was a principal of a high school needing a teacher of English in a rural province far from Johannesburg; they insisted she pack up and leave with them. Maropeng did not hesitate. She left her young daughter with her parents, where the child was happy, and went with the friends. There her new life and career began as she realised how much teaching meant to her, and how this was the way in which she could do God's work and serve others. The second serendipitous event again arose out of adversity. She had married for the second time, and was very happy with her teacher husband, until she discovered that he was a polygamist and she was his third wife. She left him immediately, not accepting his cultural right to take many wives, and foreswore marriage and children from that moment; determining to pursue her career as an independent, single woman, and concentrate on becoming the school leader she now knew she could and should be.

Serendipity is a real and positive element in all career progression, as research has noted when studying life chances and careers for both women and men (Ball & Goodson, 1987; Coleman; 2001; Earley & Weindling, 1988; Evetts, 1994; Goodson & Sikes, 2003; Mogadime, et al., 2010; Smith, 2011a). For these four women, both major and minor serendipitous events helped them form and shape their personal lives and careers; and in accepting the nature of chance, or as they preferred to call it God's hand in their lives, they were able to consolidate or determine their life's work and calling.

## Chapter overview

This chapter has provided the discussion and analysis of the four women leaders' stories of their personal and professional pathways to high school principalship. It has drawn on the data collected from their narratives, and the life histories which I have written from these. The life histories have elicited six common themes which have manifested themselves in

similar, yet individual, ways for the four women in terms of their unique pathways to achieving principalship positions. All four women, both black and white, had strong and positive childhood experiences within solidly grounded, middle class professional families. Education was highly valued as a means to an end in terms of career prospects and life chances and, very importantly, valued as an end in itself. Gender was not an inhibiting factor in their early socialisation and family lives according to their accounts, and all were encouraged and assisted in accessing educational opportunities, and aspiring to professional careers, by the significant role models in their families and communities, both male and female.

As well as suggesting an almost gender - equal upbringing, the women' stories revealed no distinction, or memory of such, in terms of the race demographics and the impact of the times during which they grew from childhood to adolescence, as far as parental influences were concerned. The impact of race was not overtly a factor for the two older women, Amelia and Maropeng, through their early years which were lived during the height of apartheid: their lives at this time were not overtly, or majorly, impacted because of this, as far as they recall. The two younger women, Elanie and Phumla, experienced their teenage years in a South Africa that was in the process of transformation from the racially segregated apartheid state to a democracy, and were in their adult years, post 1994, in the 'New South Africa'.

All four women ranked their deeply held religious faith, and a higher calling underpinning their work in education for social justice, as the main determinants of their principalships. Their pathways were similar, but each with its own specific motivation, pattern and time frame. The nuances of each have been drawn out in this chapter through discussion and analysis of the themes identified from the data, revealing both commonality and individuality of experience on, and actualisation of, their career paths.

The first theme of early socialisation, family life and childhood influences has been given slightly more prominence in the chapter than the remaining five themes; Role models and mentors; Values, religion and social justice; Barriers and discrimination; Agency and Serendipity; as it revealed so many aspects and nuances in this critical area of what Ribbins

(2008) terms “making a principal”, and to which all the other identified themes from the data are therefore linked.

The next and final chapter considers how the research questions have been addressed; it presents the conclusions and implications of the study and offers recommendations and suggestions for further research.

# CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*What might have been and what has been*
*Point to one end which is always present.*

(Extract from T.S Eliot's *Four Quartets: Burnt Norton)*

## Introduction

The previous chapter provided the discussion and analysis of the data collected from the four women principals' stories and the life histories which I constructed for each as derived from their narratives. The chapter was structured around the six themes emerging from the analysis using the grounded theory (GT) approach (Dimmock & Lam, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This concluding chapter addresses the original research questions showing how these have been answered and, of critical importance, considers the significance of the study both empirically and theoretically. The chapter also provides my recommendations for further research in this important field of women's aspirations to, and attainment of, co-educational high school principalship. The limitations of this small scale study, and therefore its lack of generalisability, is again acknowledged. A personal reflection on the research process and outcome concludes the chapter and this study.

The study was underpinned by the following aims: to explore the career and life experiences of women principals of co-educational high schools, and to better understand the motivations, barriers and the enablers applicable to women specifically in the South African context. To achieve these aims, the study examined the personal and career pathways of four South African women principals, through the telling of their life stories using a narrative enquiry and life history methodological approach. It was intended that this research would contribute to the body of knowledge of gender and leadership in the South African educational context: an equality area which has been overshadowed by the imperative of understanding and addressing racial inequity. It was also intended that the research will contribute to the body of knowledge nationally and internationally on female leadership of co-educational high schools. More specifically, it may also contribute to an understanding of the nature of principalship and the driving or motivating factors which draw, or might tend to draw,

women to this role, given the under -representation of female principals, nationally and internationally, in this school sector.

These aims and objectives were the *leitmotif* that underpinned the study, and these formed the basis of the research questions which are addressed in the next section.

## Addressing the research questions

The study focussed on the following questions:

Overarching question*:* Why do women become principals of co-educational high schools in South Africa?

There were also two sub questions

1. What are the barriers to women in achieving this position?
2. What are the enablers to women achieving this position?

To answer the main research question, the two sub questions will be considered first, following from the discussion and analysis of the data in chapter eight and the grounded theory arising from this.

**Sub question 1: What are the barriers to women achieving this position?**

The major barrier for the women in this study, as is evident from each of the four women's stories, is the one that appears in their career pathway stage: the lack of support and opportunity within the high school system to enable women teachers to access promotion in the way in which their male counterparts are encouraged, and enabled, to do. It is clear that the women's career pathways to principalship have been affected by the prevailing and entrenched patriarchal attitudes within the communities in which they have lived and worked from their adulthood. This has been the case throughout their aspirational progress to leadership positions and ultimately principalship. Each has been subjected to the bigotry and discrimination that comes from a traditional, patriarchal assumption that men should be the

leaders in schools. This is particularly the case in high schools where certain characteristics and traits, presumed to be a male preserve, are regarded as optimal: physical strength and presence , rational and logical thinking; strong discipline and authority (Lumby et al., 2010; Mahlase, 1997; Mathipa & Tsoka, 2000; Mogadime et al., 2010; Moorosi, 2007 & 2010; Oplatka, 2006; Uwamahoro, 2011).

This manifestation of patriarchy extends to the districts and the entrenched positions of some officials whose mind sets remain very traditional and who, as Phumla told me, seem to be "threatened by strong women, because we show them up for the incompetents they are". Many of these influential male officials, whether they have felt "threatened" or not by "strong women", have been described by each of the women as blocking the selection process, and also trying to obstruct the appointment at the panel stage when an interview was finally offered. As has been shown in the previous data presentations and data analysis chapters, all four women have been subjected to this tactic, and in Amelia's case this was quite a frequent occurrence as she applied for principal's posts. Research has shown that promotion seeking and appointment phases are the times when most discrimination takes place (Coleman, 2002 & 2005; Blackmore, 2006; Grogan, 1996; Lumby, et al., 2010; Moorosi, 2010). These research studies have highlighted this as a significant factor in preventing women's access to what is still regarded, traditionally, as a male domain: high school principalship.

This is particularly relevant to this study, as the application and appointment process for principals' posts in South African government schools is very dependent upon the support and recommendations of the district officials working with the schools. I have previously argued that traditional, stereotypical beliefs will not easily be changed simply because policy and legislation has: as Bush & Moloi (2007) state, "… attitudes change more slowly than the law, as the authors' research findings …demonstrate" (Bush & Moloi, 2007, p 48). Liberal feminism has, through the provision of equal opportunities legislation and other measures, failed to bring about real change, and remove the barriers entrenched in an overtly patriarchal and traditional society (Chisholm, 2001). It would seem that a more radical approach may be more appropriate in the prevailing circumstances, given the need to change attitudes to women's rights to hold positions of leadership and authority, and their competence to do so. This could apply to ways in which the other known barriers impacting upon women's

progression and access to principalship, could be diminished, and perhaps eventually eradicated.

Earlier research studies have highlighted the existence of these barriers such as early gendered socialisation, childhood influences, marriage and motherhood, and the lack of role models and mentors (Coleman, 2001 & 2002; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Lumby et al., 2010; Mahlase, 1997; Mogadime, et al., 2010; Moorosi, 2007 & 2010; Oplatka, 2006). All four women in this study acknowledged that these were barriers for them to some extent and, that probably for some women they were insurmountable; particularly when growing up, and living and working, in very traditional, patriarchal communities. However, each of the women demonstrated that they were not adversely affected by these 'identified socially imposed barriers' none of which ultimately prevented their career progression (Lumby et al., 2010; Mahlase; 1997; Mathipa & Tsoka, 2000; Mogadime, et al, 2010; Moorosi, 2010; Uwamahoro, 2011; Van Deventer & Van der Westhuizen, 2006).

Their early childhood influences were positive and each was raised in a professional, middle class family that valued education as both a means to a professional career and as an end in itself: as far as education was concerned, it was an almost gender - equal upbringing with both girls and boys expected and encouraged to learn and succeed at school and through to higher education. Their experiences of negative gendered socialisation were not within their own family units, but they witnessed this in the world around them; particularly Phumla who grew up in a very traditional, rural province. But 'being a girl' was never a barrier to any of the four participants in doing, and being, what they wanted. This was also because they had parents, and extended family members who were strong role models and exerted positive influences throughout, what the women describe, as their happy and fulfilling childhoods.

As they reached adulthood, only Maropeng was adversely affected by a strongly held traditional view of marriage and motherhood: her unplanned teenage pregnancy and subsequent marriage at 18 impacted upon her life and career plans. She was expected to conform to the conventions of her very traditional, and uneducated, husband and in laws. Her role as wife and mother sat very uneasily with Maropeng, and it affected her prospects of

completing her education and establishing a career until well into her middle twenties. Only by leaving her husband, after he burnt her books, and moving back to her parents' home with her young daughter, was there any chance of her old life and prospects resuming. This did eventually happen, though she foreswore marriage and more children, after her disastrous second marriage's collapse. The other three women chose marriage and motherhood: Elanie and Amelia in their thirties and Phumla in her twenties: Amelia choosing to have only one child, and Elanie and Phumla each choosing to have three. Mahlase (1997) has argued that it is marriage and motherhood that can specifically constrain women's careers, particularly in very traditional societies as their role is perceived to be as homemakers, child bearers and carers. This has also been posited by other more recent research in South Africa (Lumby et al., 2010; Moorosi, 2007; Mogadime, 2010). These studies, and others internationally, also posit that lack of available and affordable child care is a major barrier to women being able to attain and hold down their careers, especially when they are regarded as the primary care givers for the family (Coleman, 2001 & 2002; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2010; Smulyan, 2000). Some of these research studies suggest that women who are unmarried, or who don't have children are more likely to attain and hold careers, but the women in this study have certainly, in Maropeng's case later in her life, never allowed this artificially imposed social barrier to impact on their professional lives and career choices.

The women in this study have, in their career paths, experienced the known barriers and discrimination to progress at promotion seeking stage, but the impact of other socially imposed barriers regarding women's roles and responsibilities on a gendered basis have never been a major impediment to them. This is the case even in Maropeng's circumstances where it hindered her initially, but didn't stop her eventually attaining the education and career that she wanted. As Maropeng has said, she determined early on that she was "not a victim of my life", and this maxim can equally be applied to the other three women. None of them allowed gender stereotyping or societal attitudes towards women as being subordinate to men, who occupy leadership positions by virtue of tradition and patriarchy, to prevent them being and doing what they wanted in their chosen careers.

**Sub question 2: What are the enablers to women achieving this position?**

This lack of 'victim mentality' is an important factor in the answers to this question. Smith, (2011a) posits that gender studies have focussed largely on the barriers to career progress for

women and that this focus has exerted an undue, potentially negative, influence on the discourse on gender and leadership. That there are many barriers, as discussed above, is not in question, the point is that these need to be put in perspective within different societies and cultures, and certainly for different women. There is also a tendency in some research studies to present women as an homogenous group and this is particularly so in South Africa where patriarchy continues its hold with regard to power over, and subjugation of, women. A consequence of this is that it is sometimes assumed that all women are subjected to these powerful societal pressures and will therefore succumb to the undue influence of the prevailing culture and entrenched attitudes (Lumby et al., 2010; Lumby, 2015; Mahlase, 1997; Mai, 2014; Manamela, 1995; Mathipa & Tsoka, 2000; Mogadime, 2010; Moorosi, 2007 & 2010; Naidoo, 2013; Parsadh, 2001). However, as Intersectionality Theory demonstrates people exhibit multiple layered identities and each person is affected and influenced by the various interplays of gender, class, culture, religion, early socialisation, power play and life experience that impact upon them (Lumby, 2015; Moorosi, 2014).There is not one hierarchy of identity formation but an intersection of each, although the social context in which the individual lives and work, and the individual's response to these factors will have an impact. But it may be considered that their personality and character will determine which factor will have the greatest impact, rather than simply their common experiences of, for example in this research, the four women's gender and their middle class backgrounds.

Given the existence of the barriers, this sub question was deliberately focussed on understanding what are the enablers for women's careers into school principalship: without exception, the four women in this study have demonstrated the "multifarious ways in which [they] exert their agency in the career context, making conscious and positive choices which may be at odds with traditional hierarchical notions…" (Smith, 2011a, p. 7). Each has held firm to their aspirations and their certainties regarding the positions that they wanted, as they negotiated the difficult career pathways to principalship: they refused to be intimidated, or driven out, by the negative and often hostile attitudes to which they were exposed during their career journeys. Clearly, unfailing support from their families is a source of strength enabling them to continue against the odds. And although they are sometimes conflicted between home and work/life balance, particularly in Elanie's case, research indicates that most women in these positions invariably are conflicted; and yet they invariably do find a balance that

works for them in their individual circumstances, because they want to (Bowles, 2012; Coleman, 2002; Smulyan 2000). The women, with the exception of Maropeng who has been unmarried by choice for many years now, have very supportive husbands who share domestic chores and child care. That this is extremely unusual in two of the cultures that reflect the women's families, Phumla's Ndebele culture and Elanie's husband's Afrikaans culture, is indicative of the women's ability to make their lives work and achieve balance: it also reflects their careful choice of partners given their religious beliefs and their sense of purpose and duty. It is this ability to overcome the known barriers and constraints of the patriarchal societies in which they work that show these women's commitment and their 'agency' (Smith, 2011a).

I would extrapolate from this that 'agency', in its manifestation of self-confidence, self-belief and a strong sense of purpose, is a key determinant in women's ability to demonstrate their capabilities, against the odds (Coleman, 2001). None of the women in this study, once they had embarked on their career path, were deterred from achieving their career goals because of the prevailing patriarchal attitudes, overt gender discrimination, traditions and cultural expectations around them. It is clear from their stories, that they were fully aware of these barriers to career; that they felt, to a certain extent, the impact of these, but that they overcame these barriers in their own ways, and in their own time, and with great success.

Their individual characters and personalities have supported, indeed have probably determined, their 'sense of agency' and self-belief. Amelia and Phumla are ambitious, authoritative, in control and very self-confident: it is clear that they have never been constrained by the factors which have impacted upon other women in their context. Phumla, experienced major discrimination at the point in her career when as acting principal she applied for the permanent post of principal: it seemed a foregone conclusion that she would be successful. But she was blocked by the very people she had thought supported her: the union and district officials, who did not want 'this girl' in post, and a male was appointed: Phumla determined to show "these African men" that she could and would become a principal and within a year was offered an acting principalship at another school, where she was eventually appointed to the permanent position.

Amelia refused to be put down, or put off, by the interview panels which rejected her out of hand: interviews where she knew she was the token woman. Neither woman gave in or gave way; they exerted their agency and refused to be "passive players" (Smith, 2011a). Neither Maropeng nor Elanie are ambitious in the way that Amelia and Phumla are, but they were both determined to achieve the principal's position in their schools. Quietly assertive and self -confident , they simply did not give in to the bullying tactics of, or the negative feedback from, the male district officials and followed their own hearts and minds with a knowledge of the 'rightness' of their actions and purpose.

It is clear from the evidence provided by these women, that the enablers are primarily their personal agency and sense of self. They are committed to working for social justice and equity in education and this is underpinned by a deep spiritual belief in God's purpose for their lives. Their 'agency' is uncompromisingly coupled with their deeply held religious faith and their conviction that they are doing 'God's work': it is this that informs their sense of purpose, and informs their drive to succeed in their chosen career (Lumby et al., 2010; Mogadime, 2010; Moorosi, 2010).

**Overarching question: Why do women become principals of co-educational high schools in South Africa?**

As well as the literature on gender and leadership, as reviewed in chapter two, my stated researcher positionality, prepared me for the possibility of agency being given as a factor in overcoming the artificially-imposed social barriers born out of discrimination, entrenched traditional attitudes and patriarchy. This also prepared me for the possibility that working for social justice and equity would be a strong *leitmotif* for these women in striving for and achieving principalship, as many studies reveal evidence of strong values and working for social justice as deeply entrenched in the lives and work of women headteachers. I was, however, totally unprepared to find that the women in my study had such deeply-held religious beliefs coupled with the certainty of God's hand in their lives, choices and destiny.

Research in the United States (Grogan, 1996, Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997; Smulyan, 2000) indicate strong spiritual leadership dimensions in the work of American women leaders; but to my knowledge in UK studies, although strong values, and moral leadership are factors that have been stated as important, spiritual leadership is not a dimension which has been shown to be the driving or motivating force in women's careers as headteachers, or in aspiring to that role. I note this as an interesting observation, but to examine why this might be is beyond the remit of this study. However, there is no doubt that South Africa, though a secular democracy since 1994, remains a very religious country with its Christian faith population following many branches of that religion including the more evangelical church groups. It is very clear that all four women in this study are prime examples that spiritual faith and deeply held religious beliefs are regarded as the backbone of personal and professional life in South Africa.

These factors have helped to explain why these four women became principals of co-educational high schools. They were all self-confident, self-assured, working for social justice and equity, and committed to achieving the principalship position because they believed that it was their purpose in life as God wanted them to do. This underpinning religious faith was key in what they did and why, but also the personal characteristics that each displayed is clearly hugely significant. Their sense of self; their self-confidence; their ability to rise above the gender stereotyping that was all around them, and which impacted upon them during the final career pathway; their refusal to give in or give way; above all their belief that they could do the job they had set their hearts on so much better than the men in that post, were the key determinants of why they became principals. All the above translates into them being positively self-agentic, working against societal conditioning through exerting their personal agency and power to do what they wanted, not what gender stereotyping expected of them: they would not conform or succumb to traditional, patriarchal views of women's place in society, and in leadership generally.

The four women were co-educational high school teachers by choice, it was where they wanted to be as teachers initially and as principals ultimately. They saw no tension in them being women leaders in this environment: this is perhaps best summed up by Amelia's

observation on being invited to apply for an all girls' high school principalship after she had finally achieved her co- educational high school post.

> I asked myself why I would do this now when I have worked so hard to get the post and the type of school I really want, against all the odds for a woman, odds I had observed since my Natal teaching days.

The barriers and discrimination known to affect women, particularly in patriarchal societies, were experienced to some degree at the career stage of their pathway; but it is at this point that their personal agency was exerted to ameliorate these external factors: they achieved what they wanted because they had self-confidence, self-belief and were assertive, strong women. Within all the above, serendipitous events played a part, which further enabled the women to achieve what they wanted, and become principals in their chosen school sector. They did not regard themselves as feminists, but actually exemplified this positioning through their actions and conscious choice to exert personal power and demonstrate personal agency. In this way they challenged and overcame traditional societal beliefs regarding leadership of co-educational high schools as being a male preserve. This is perhaps best expressed for each of the women, in Maropeng's words as she states,

> I have never considered myself a feminist but … I have always been a champion of women's rights to be independent and to be whatever they want to be without fear or favour

## Significance of the study

This study has significance in two major areas: empirical and theoretical which are discussed in the following sections.

### Empirical significance

This study is the first longitudinal life history research of its kind, utilising narrative enquiry, to focus entirely upon women principals of co-educational high schools in South Africa. It has provided the opportunity to interact with four women principals, and hear their stories of the personal and professional pathways to their leadership posts. This study's empirical

significance rests in its contribution to national and international research and discourse on women into leadership, and specifically its contribution to the understanding of women leaders of co-educational high schools. It has, through its insights into, and understanding of, pathways to co-educational high school principalship specific to 'the realities of women's lives', (Gunter, 2001), added to the small, but growing, body of literature, as cited throughout this study, which focusses specifically on female leaders and their career pathways in the high school context: particularly in the South African context (Mogadime, 2010; Moorosi, 2010).

In addition to professional pathways, this study has also focussed on the early socialisation and childhood influences relating to these four women's personal journeys: this remains a limited research area and therefore this focus, in its empirical significance, adds a further dimension to existing gender literature on women's leadership careers and access. Most studies have concentrated on women's career paths, and although factors of early gender socialisation, and childhood into adulthood influences, have been highlighted as significant in the way women perceive themselves and their career choices and chances, this has not been the main focus of much of the gender research. Therefore, the contribution of this life history research, which did focus extensively on the four women's personal pathways, with their voices brought to the fore through their personal narratives, is of even greater importance and empirical significance.

The study is also significant in that it has aligned with research on women leaders in the South African context, across all school sectors in terms of understanding the barriers, discrimination and constraints that women face in such a deeply traditional and patriarchal society. However, where other research studies have found these to be major impediments to women's leadership career progression, this study has shown that the women's personal agency and personalities were strong enablers to their progress, and none of them allowed themselves to be hampered or constrained by these external, societally imposed stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes. This manifestation of their personal agency was also clearly interwoven with the deep spiritual faith of each of the women. This is highly significant to the study's contribution to understanding how and why women succeed in this school context, particularly in deeply patriarchal societies such as South Africa. The evidence from

the study demonstrated that it was the combination of these powerful forces and beliefs, their personal agency and deeply held belief that they we doing 'God's work', which enabled them to achieve the principalship in the co-educational high school context.

**Theoretical significance**

This study was located within a theoretical framework which encompassed narrative enquiry and life history within the concept of feminism, and feminist theory, where the voices and perspectives of women are foregrounded and central to the research focus: as Grogan & Shakeshaft (2011) have posited, it is not that women "… in [leadership] situations … have to do anything to make change, they are the change" (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p.25). The theoretical significance of this study then is linked to the discussion and analysis in the previous chapter of the six key areas that were grounded in the data. In terms of theoretical significance, this study contributes to the existing theories on gender and leadership, particularly regarding those which relate to why women might be drawn to principalship against known odds in any country (Coleman, 2001). However, as feminist theoretical positioning requires; women leaders' voices need to be heard, and their experiences seen through their eyes, not through a 'male lens' and an 'androcentric view' of the role (Hall, 1993). This is a key tenet of feminist theory, but, it is evident that the reality of women's lives, and the experiences specific to their gender, remain missing areas of focus in much of the gender and leadership research. The context and history of South Africa makes this reality, and these experiences even more complex, given that racial redress and equity was of more pressing importance than gender equity (Chisholm, 2001). However, this study, within the context of the gender policies and legislation that have been in place post 1994, has generated grounded theories, although through a very small and non- generalisable sample, which may add to theoretical understanding of women's career motivation particularly in very traditional, patriarchal societies such as South Africa.

As I have highlighted earlier in this chapter, none of the women in the study referred to themselves as feminists, or when probed on their lives saw themselves as feminists; but Amelia mentioned friends that, in their university days, she described as being 'women's libbers'. This awareness of feminism was the extent to which it seems they saw their choices, decisions and actions as being feminist. Yet all four would seem to be the embodiment of liberal feminists in their actions and conscious choice to exert power by using personal

agency to overcome the societal constraints and traditional attitudes of a patriarchal society. Clearly, these women are well within the parameters of the definition of feminism: i.e. a feminist is an individual who will challenge all forms of discrimination against women, is focused on women's rights, as well as their promotion in society to positions which are not gender specific or determined by societal influence or traditionally.-.held beliefs. They benefited from the policies and legislation post 1994, designed to give women equality of opportunity and position; not because these policies and laws necessarily worked in practice in changing entrenched attitudes and behaviours (Chisholm, 2001; Bush & Moloi, 2007; Moorosi; 2007 & 2010), but because they had the power of these behind them to challenge any obstruction to their career progression on the grounds of their gender. They used their knowledge of this legislation to, as Amelia says, "power on", and it is another dimension of their personal agency in being able to change the way things are: as they are indeed change agents by virtue of what they have achieved in becoming school principals (Mogadime, 2010; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Tallerico, 2000). From their discussions of their conception of gender, it is clear that the four women had all "developed and internalised ways of approaching, thinking about and acting upon the social world" and demonstrated "… agentic potential to resist and rescript their social conditioning (Perumal, 2007, p 338).

The contribution to theories of women into leadership is grounded in the theory emerging from the data that was presented and analysed in previous chapters, from the women's life histories. The six themes identified from the data were: early socialisation; family life and childhood influences; role models and mentors; values, religion and social justice, barriers and discrimination; agency and serendipity. From the discussion and analysis of these it became clear that whilst all these played a role in their leadership aspirations and progression to principalship over many years; for all the women it was their early socialisation and childhood influences, in almost gender - equal family environments, which were the instrumental factors in their development of self-confidence and self-belief: they learned that being a girl was not an impediment to anything they wanted to do or to be.

Their family role models were strong and, unusually for the time and context, were both male and female: this coupled with the passion for, and commitment to, education for girls exhibited by these family role models paved the way for the women to contemplate and

achieve a professional career which was, eventually, teaching; this then leading to principalship for all four women. Their family values base was strongly rooted in a deep religious faith which for all four women became the most significant factor in their personal and professional pathways. This values base allowed them to work to achieve social justice and equity through education, and very importantly enabled them to do God's work and fulfil God' purpose for their lives.

## Recommendations for further research

This life history study has enabled greater depth of insight into addressing the overarching research question of why women choose to become principals of co-educational high schools in South Africa. The data presented and analysed have highlighted significant factors, and within this preferred feminist methodological framework, the women have been able to present their understanding of the society in which they live and work. It has also enabled them more easily to consider the complications and tensions that they have experienced as women in that society, to gain a better understanding of how and why they have made the decisions and the choices they have. The "conversations with a purpose" (Ribbins, 2007) which I had with the four women elicited responses that have provided significant data; but, it is important to acknowledge again the limitations of the study, which is very small scale and is not therefore generalisable, nor was it intended to be. Also, as a methodological approach, life history studies remain less evident within qualitative, interpretist research; although this is the preferred method of feminist research, because this places women at the centre and gives them their voice, there are some doubts raised as to the research rigour of this methodology. As Goodson & Sikes (2003) have observed, from their extensive life history work with both male and female teachers, there are dissenting researcher opinions on the ways in which this methodology can be seen as valid and credible, or trustworthy and reliable, which may therefore be a limitation in any such studies.

However, in this study the richness of the data stands as intended, and what it has brought out clearly is the sense of personal agency as an enabler, that mitigates the impact and effects of artificially imposed societal barriers and gender stereotyping. In a patriarchal society such as South Africa, there is clearly a need for further research studies, on a larger scale, which

consider the factors enabling women to achieve career success. As I have previously indicated, the research focus in many gender studies internationally and nationally tends to have been on the barriers to progression, which help to explain why women don't take on principalship but, "we still know very little about why [they do"] (Gunter, 2001, p.97). In this study, I believe that we have moved a little closer to an understanding of the why and further longitudinal life history research may provide some more definitive answers.

I therefore recommend now that further research with a focus on the enablers to women's careers and the impact of personal agency would be immensely valuable. I would also suggest that such research should use life history methodology, which would offer substantial benefits in enabling women's voices to be heard, and their views fully articulated through narrative enquiry. This research methodology and its more positive focus would, I believe, move forward significantly the gender debate in the field of school leadership and women into principalship, nationally and internationally.

"Women's agency, and the ways in which they choose to exert it, are key influences in career-decision making. [A move] beyond a focus on barriers to progression … [would] allow alternative accounts … to be considered, taking into account questions of power and resistance, values and positive choice (Smith, 2011a, p.22).

## Reflections on the study

When I chose to embark upon a life history research study in a gender field of intense personal and professional interest to me, I was fully aware that this was; in part because of my own personal and professional pathways and experiences; in part because I am a liberal feminist; but largely because my ontological position firmly locates me as "a penetrating observer of the human scene". As Goodson & Sikes (2003) have said of themselves, life history researchers are by nature "insatiably curious" (Goodson & Sikes, 2003, p.21), and this is both an enabling and also a problematic factor in the research process. As I have shown in previous chapters, the position of any life history researcher is a delicate one as it is based on building absolute trust between the researched and the researcher: this trust building process

requires empathy, diplomacy, discretion, humour and, for the researcher to survive, the ability to maintain professional detachment whatever revelations are made through the participants' narratives. Life history researchers must be curious, probing and thorough: but never intrusive or judgemental and definitely must never assume the role of the participants' counsellor, however much they may want this.

I strove to rein in my over empathetic tendencies as the conversations drew me closer into the participants' lives than I would ever have expected. It seemed that their willingness to share so much intimate detail of their lives was an unburdening they needed after the journeys they had made to achieve their principalships, against all the odds that they had faced. So I had to balance my curiosity about people's lives, and the natural empathy that seems to make me someone to whom "people want to talk" (Goodson & Sikes, 2003, p.20), with the detachment that kept a professional distance between me and the women. Their stories were in various measures funny, positive, happy, moving, emotional and downright tragic. I allowed myself to laugh with them, to joke with them, to listen in silence as various events and emotions were graphically narrated: I passed them tissues, briefly touched a hand as a gesture of understanding, but I never allowed myself to cry with them because I knew that this would cross the line that I had imposed on myself. But I did cry in private as I wrote up the conversations afterwards, and revisited the worst parts of their stories: without doubt their lives had touched mine and no impartiality in the conversational interactions with the four women as their stories were told over time could alter that. This is the nature of life history research I now fully realise; and this is what has made this research journey so rewarding, personally and professionally. I have been privileged to hear the voices of these women principals, have heard about their experiences on their successful journeys to principalship in a school sector that remains predominantly a male leadership domain in the very patriarchal society that is South Africa.

But what next for the women involved in such a lengthy research relationship? They asked this question too and I felt that it would be impossible to leave them in the position in which we all started. We are not strangers, or unconnected professionals by virtue of what has been shared: but we are not friends in the accepted sense of that word. The trust built between us, and the empathy for who and what they are, and where they have come from to achieve so

much, against so many odds provides a basis for continued interest in their lives, and their careers, albeit at a professional distance. As a woman researcher researching women it would be 'unsisterly' (Weiner 1997; Smulyan, 2000), to abandon them at the end point of the research, and not suggest ways of support to them as they continue their professional lives. The burning question for me was what positive ways could be found to offer some practical support, given the findings of this research into their lives and careers?

A lack of networking and mentoring in the schools has been established as a key factor in hampering women's promotion to leadership: a factor highlighted in this study and in the wider research studies cited. These are four women who have such collective experience between them that to share this with each other seemed a positive way forward. They had not met during the research process as all our conversations, deliberately, were on an individual basis; one to one. But when I contacted the women a few months ago, and asked if they would be interested in meeting up with me for coffee, to close our research relationship, each one agreed very enthusiastically. That meeting led to them forming their own network and support group: their idea and their arrangements. I know of their 'get-togethers' but am not involved.

So, as the women continue their work, they are benefitting from further support, as their involvement in this research process has, though not in the design itself, brought them together, Networking is a positive way to share and manage the problems of the promotional ladder route and this has helped them to look at ways in which they can develop and grow and cope, whether they are nearer the beginning or the end of their leadership careers. It is also a means by which their school's staff development policies can be implemented more effectively: to take this from the realms of policy rhetoric to policy in practice. This can strengthen the career prospect ladder for women and help to overcome gender barriers and discrimination so evident in the deeply traditional and patriarchal society in which the four women work. This support group, which they want to widen, has every prospect of becoming a successful movement of women principals helping other women to break through the 'glass ceiling' whilst ensuring that they don't create a 'glass floor'.

# APPENDICES

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## **Appendix 1**: Landmark legislation for gender equality in South Africa

A brief synopsis of legislation which impacted directly/indirectly on women's rights from 1948-1994 (apartheid era) and to the present day.

**Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act no 55 of 1949**
This Act prohibited marriages between whites and members of other racial groups. Commenced: 8 July 1949 and was repealed by s7 of the Immorality and Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Amendment Act no 72 of 1985.

**Immorality Amendment Act No 21 of 1950**
Extended the 1927 Immorality Act to all black people- including coloureds. Commenced: 12 May 1950 and repealed by s23 of the Sexual offences Act no 23 of 1957.

**Black Building Workers Act no 27 of 1951**
Prohibited blacks (this includes black woman) from performing skilled work in the building industry in white urban areas, repealed by s 11 of industrial Conciliation Amendment Act no 95 of 1980.

**Separate Representation of Voters Act no 46 of 1951**
This Act purported to remove coloured people from the common voters roll (this affected both men and woman). This act was however, declared invalid by the Supreme Court in Harris v Minister of interior 1952 (2). SA 428 (AD).

**Black (Native) Laws Amendment Act no 54 of 1956**
The Urban Consolidation Act was amended to specify that all black persons, men and woman, over the age of sixteen were to carry passes and that no black person was to be allowed to stay in the urban areas longer than seventy-two hours unless they had permission to do so. Section 10, which governed who could stay in the urban areas, stated that black people who had been born in urban areas and had lived there continuously since then, and those who had been in continuous employment for ten years or continuous residence in the urban areas for fifteen years, were the only categories of black people legally entitled to stay in urban areas.

**Black Education Act no 47 of 1953**.
Formalised segregation of black education and laid the foundations for Bantu Education. (this affected both woman and man). Commenced: 1 January 1954 and repealed by s 45 of the Education and Training Act no 90 of 1979.

**Black Labour relation Act (Black Labour and Settlement of Disputes Act) no 48 of 1953**.
Amended the industrial Conciliation Act, changing the definition of employee to exclude blacks so that they could no longer be members of registered unions. Repealed by s 63 of the Labour Relations Amendment Act no 57 of 1981.

**Industrial Conciliation Act (Labour Relations Act) no 28 of 1956.**
This Act repealed the 1924 and 1937 Industrial Conciliation Acts. A new provision, s 77, provided for job reservation. Although excluded from the provisions of the Act, blacks were included in the definition of employee for the purposes of this section. Black trade unions, though they could not be registered under the Act, were not illegal. Commenced: 1 January 1957 and Repealed by the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995.

**Separate Representation of Voters Amendment Act 30 of 1956**
Amended the 1951 Separate Representation of Voters Act to remove coloureds from the common roll. The Senate was enlarged to obtain the required majority. Commenced: 18 May 1956 and repealed by s 4 of the Separate Representation of Voters Amendment Act no 50 of 1968.

**Sexual Offences Act (Immorality Act) no 23 of 1957. (s16).**
Made it an offence for a white person to have intercourse with a black person or to commit any immoral or indecent act. Act repealed the 1927 Immorality Act and the 1950 Immorality Amendment Act.

**Extension of University Education Act 45 of 1959**
Empowered the Minister of Bantu Education to designate colleges for specific African ethnic groups. Black students were prohibited from attending the University of Cape Town or the University of Witwatersrand without a permit. Commenced: 19 June 1959 and repealed by s 21 of the Tertiary Education Act 66 of 1988.

**Industrial Conciliation Further Amendment Act no 61 1966.**
Prohibited strikes and lock-outs for any purpose unconnected with the employee/employer relationship. Bothe man and woman rights were affected by this Act. Commenced: 4 November 1966 and repealed by Labour relations Act 66 of 1995.

**Prohibition of Mixed marriages Amendment Act no 21 of 1950.**
Invalidated any marriage entered into outside South Africa between a male citizen and a woman of another racial group.

**Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 110 of 1963**
Provided for the establishment of tri-cameral Parliament, consisting of separate legislative houses for whites, coloureds and Indians (both man and woman). Matters before Parliament were to be divided into general affairs (to be discussed by all houses and applying to all South Africans) and own affairs (relevant to one particular race group). Commenced: 3

September 1984, except s48, 49(1).-(3)., 50 and 102(9).: This commenced 24 February 1984. Repealed by the Constitution of Republic of South Africa Act 200 of 1993.

**Promotion of National unity and Reconciliation Act 34 of 1995**
Provided for investigation towards the establishment of a complete picture as possible of the nature, causes and extent of gross violations of human rights committed during the period from 1 March 1960 to the cut-off date contemplated in the Constitution

Commenced: 1 December 1995 (still in force) as amended by the Promotion of National Unity and reconciliation Amendment Act 87 of 1995.

**African woman's resistance to the pass Laws in South Africa 1950-1960/sociological implications of apartheid laws**
In 1952 the Natives (Abolition of passes and Coordination of Documents) Act was passed. The Act stipulated the African woman at unspecified further date, would for the first time be required to carry reference books. The government announced that all African women would be required to carry reference books as of February 1, 1963. after this date, it would be a criminal offence for African women, as well as men, to be caught without a reference book. Moreover, it would be illegal for anyone to employ an African of either sex who did not possess a reference book.[1] Unrest spread throughout the province and hundreds of women were sent to prison. Civil disobedience and demonstrations continued sporadically for several years. Ultimately the permit requirement was withdrawn.[2]

No further attempts were made to require permits or passes for African woman until the 1950s. Although laws requiring such documents were enacted in 1952, the government did not begin issuing permits to women until 1954 and reference books until 1956. The issuing of permits began in the Western Cape, which the government had designated a 'coloured preference' area. Within the boundaries established by the government, no African workers could be hired unless the department of Labour determined that coloured were not available. Foreign Africans were to be removed from the area altogether. No new families would be allowed to enter, and women and children who did not qualify to remain would be sent back to the reserves. The entrance of the migrant labourers would be strictly controlled. Male heads of households, whose families has been endorsed out or prevented from entering the area, where house with migrant workers in single-sex hostels. The availability of family accommodations was so limited that the number of units built lagged far behind the natural increase in population. In order in enforce such influx control measures, the government needed a means of identifying woman who had no legal right to remain in the Western Cape. According to the terms of the native Laws amendment Act, woman with section 10 (1). (a), (b), or (c) status were not compelled to carry permits. Theoretically, only woman in the section 10 (1). (d) category-that is, work seekers or woman with special permission to remain in the urban area-were required to possess such documents. In spite of their legal exemption,

[1] Muriel Horrell, ed., Laws Affecting Race Relations in South Africa, 1948-1976, p. 175.
[2] Ibid.

woman with section 10 (1). (a), (b), and (c) rights were issued permits by the local authorities which claimed that the document were for their own protection. Any woman who could not prove her ( a), ( b), or ( c) status was liable to arrest and deportation..

**The Federation of South African women and the marches on Pretoria in 1955 and 1956**
The federation was composed of women's affiliated groups, African, Indian, Coloured and white political organisations, and trade unions. According to its constitution, the objectives of the federation were: 'to bring the woman of South Africa together to secure full equality of opportunity for all women, regardless of race, colour or creed, to remove social, legal and economic disabilities, to work for the protection of the women and children of our land'[3]

In October 27, 1955, when 2,000 women of all races marched on the union buildings in Pretoria, planning to meet with the Cabinet ministers responsible for the administration of apartheid laws. The minister of Native affairs, Dr Verwoerd, under whose jurisdiction the pass laws fell, pointedly refused to receive a multiracial delegation.[4] African woman fought the pass laws as they had fought no other issue. Passes were the symbol of their deepest oppression.

Women without reference book could not rent houses in the urban areas, or they lost those that they had. They could not register the births of their children or be married according to common law. Without reference book, woman could not receive old age pensions or maintenance grants. They were also not issued with drivers licenses. Teachers and nurses without passes were dismissed from their jobs. Some woman claimed that their rent money was not accepted, and they could not get licenses to sell beer until they had produced a reference book.[5]

**Acts purporting to protect woman rights in democratic South Africa**

**Introduction**
It was not until the introduction of the Bill of Rights that all woman in country received formal recognition as equal citizens. South African woman-under the social and even legal control of their fathers or husbands-were second-class citizens for many years.[6]

Black woman were obviously doubly disadvantaged as a result of their race and their gender. The law, in various forms, has had a significant role in this prejudice. Customary law, for instance, gives black woman the status of minors and excludes them from rights regarding children and property. South Africa's common law deprived white women of guardianship and various economic rights.

[3] Constitution of the Federation of South Africa Woman. Reel 19B of the Carter/ Karis collection.
[4] Helen Joseph, tomorrow's son, A Smuggled Journal From South Africa (New York: The John day Co., 1966)., p.73.
[5] ' the fight against passes is On!! We Call upon All Men and Women!!' Flyer for the nation Anti-Pass Conference ( African National Congress), Saturday 30 May. Reel 3B of the Carter/Karis Collection.
[6] http://www.constitutionalcourt.org/text/rights/know/woman.html

Nowadays woman and black woman in particular, are still economically disadvantaged: they make up a disproportionate section of unemployed and tend to occupy more of the lower paid jobs, as domestic and farm labourers. And they often earn less than men for the same tasks. South African women also have to contend with extremely high rates of rape and domestic violence.

**The constitution and woman rights**

**Section 9- Equality**[7]

Women are presently protected by the full range of rights guaranteed in the new constitution- the rights to life, dignity, privacy and others. But they receive specific protection in section 9, entitled 'Equality'. It says: the state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origins, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth'.

The prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of gender, sex, pregnancy and marital status is clearly intended to protect woman.[8]

**Key constitutional courts judgments that have affirmed woman's rights**

**Brink v Kitshoff No 1996 (4). SA 197 (CC) 1996 (6). BCLR 752 (CC).**

Section 44 of the Insurance Act of 1943 deprived married woman, but not married man, of all or some of the benefits of life insurance policies made in favour by their husbands. The court held, that since the common-law rule prohibiting donations between spouses had been abolished,[9] the argument that the section provided married woman with a benefit was no longer applicable. The court also rejected the argument that the section was necessary to prevent collusion between spouses: such collusion could as easily occur where husbands rather than wives were beneficiaries.

The court ruled that section 44(1). and 44 (2). were invalid as from 27 April 1994, but exempted payments already made on the strength of those provisions.

**Carmichael v Minister of safety and security and another 2001 (4). SA 938**

This case concerned the constitutional obligation on the courts to develop the common law to promote the Bill of rights. The specific issue was whether the High Court and the supreme

[7] Section of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 108 of 1996
[8] Ibid note 6.
[9] The common law is that body of law which has developed over many centuries and which forms the basis of our legal system.

court of Appeal ought to have broadened the concept of wrongfulness in the law of delict in the light of the state's constitutional duty to safeguard the rights of women.

The applicant sued the two ministers for damage resulting from a brutal attack on her by a man who was awaiting trial on charges of having attempted to rape another woman. Despite the man's history of sexual violence, the police and the prosecutor had recommended his release without bail.

The applicant alleged that this had been a wrongful omission. She also relied on the duties imposed by the rights to life, equality, dignity, freedom and security of person and privacy. The High court said she could not establish that the police or the prosecutor had wrongfully failed to fulfil a legal duty owed specifically to her. On appeal to the Supreme Court of Appeal, it held that the police and the prosecutor had no legal duty of care towards her and could not be held liable. The constitutional Court however, granted the application for leave to appeal and upheld the appeal.

Regarding the police, the court held that the state was obliged to prevent gender-based discrimination and to protect the dignity, freedom and security of woman.

**New legislation which promotes the protection of woman rights:**

**The Choice of Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1996**
The Choice of Termination of Pregnancy Act was passed to recognise women's reproductive health rights and prevent the sometimes fatal consequences of illegal abortions. The Act says a woman who wishes to, may terminate a pregnancy in the first 12 weeks. From week 13 to 20, abortion is available if a doctor advises, and after that only if there is risk to the woman or the foetus.

**The Domestic Violence Act of 1998**
The domestic violence Act was passed to extend the protection provided by its predecessor, the prevention of Family Violence Act. The recognises that domestic violence in not a private matter but is a serious crime against society. The act broadens the definition of domestic violence to include not only married woman and children, but unmarried women who are involved in relationships, mothers and their sons, and other people who share a living space.

**Maintenance Act**
The new Act, a response to problems with the old maintenance laws, makes some major changes. Maintenance may be automatically deducted from a person's salary. If maintenance is not paid, a magistrate can seize property belonging to the person who is supposed to pay. The state has to trace people who fail to pay maintenance. Typically, it is man and fathers who are obliged to pay maintenance to women and children, but this is not necessarily the case.

**Recognition of Customary Marriages Act**

This Act provides for the recognition of customary marriages, specifies the requirements for valid customary marriage and regulates the registration of customary marriages. It sets out some of the consequences of such a marriage and gives spouses in customary marriage equal status and capacity. The Act also regulates the dissolution of customary marriages. This legislation repealed the section 11(3). of the Black administration Act of 1927, the mechanism that gave married black woman the legal status of children.

**The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair discrimination Act of 2000**

This Act was passed to ensure that constitutional rights are enjoyed by all persons. This Act ensures that women have equal enjoyment of rights and freedoms as opposed to the era of apartheid.

## **Appendix 2:** Participant's letter of information

**UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG**
**WITS SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**
Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Participant's letter of information and consent

**RE**: Request for research participation

Dear ……..

My name is Caroline Faulkner (student number: 295128), a full time lecturer, and part time PhD student, in the division of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. I am researching leadership and gender for my PhD degree. The research topic is: **WOMEN PRINCIPALS IN CO-EDUCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOLS IN SOUTH AFRICA- A LIFE HISTORY APPROACH.**

I am seeking your consent to collect data for my study on why women become leaders of co-ed high schools, an area of interest both in South Africa and internationally, given the social and professional barriers to gender equity in leadership positions in secondary schools. This research is focused on individual life histories, and is concerned with the person and her leadership career decisions. The research is not concerned with leadership styles, or the school in which the participant is principal. No access to the school, or school information, will be required.

You will be invited to respond to semi-structured questions, and to participate in informal and unstructured conversations with me (Caroline Faulkner) on the career pathways, the influences, experiences and choices made which have resulted in you achieving principalship of a co–ed high school. The meetings will take place away from school settings and at times most convenient to you. It is anticipated that approximately 25 hours of your time over a two-month period will be needed to develop the conversations and for any follow up discussions to ensure accuracy of points you make. Notes may be taken by me during the conversations, and an audio recorder may be used to ensure the accuracy of my transcription.

Your participation in the study is voluntary and you can decline to participate at any point without prejudice to you. All information obtained through this research will be treated in strictest confidence, and complete anonymity of participants, and all schools in which they have worked, will be ensured through the use of pseudonyms.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Faulkner
Division of ELPS. Wits School of Education
011 717 3089 / 082 574 1788

## **Appendix 3**: Participant's consent letter

**UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG**
**WITS SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**
Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

**Research Topic: WOMEN PRINCIPALS IN CO-EDUCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOLS IN SOUTH AFRICA– A LIFE HISTORY APPROACH.**

**PARTICIPANT'S INFORMED CONSENT**

I confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, Caroline Faulkner, of the nature of the study.

I have also received, read and understood the Information and Consent Letter regarding the study.

I understand that notes may be taken by the researcher (Caroline Faulkner), and that audio recording of the conversations between us may be made.

I am aware that all information that I provide will be anonymously processed in the Ph D research thesis, and in any related research work, journal articles or conference presentations undertaken by the researcher (Caroline Faulkner).

I am aware that any information I provide will be used for the purposes of the completion of the Ph.D research and thesis and may be used by the researcher (Caroline Faulkner) in articles within research journals and for presentations at research conferences.

In light of the requirements of the study, I agree that the data collected during the study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher (Caroline Faulkner).

I am aware that the raw data gathered by the researcher (Caroline Faulkner) including audio tapes (if used) and written notes, will be kept safely and will then be destroyed after three – five years, in accordance with University requirements.

I may at any stage, withdraw my consent and participation from the study without prejudice to me.

I give my consent to participate voluntarily in the study, and my consent to any audio recording of the conversations between me and the researcher (Caroline Faulkner).

**Name of participant:** ……

**Signature of participant:** ……...

**Date:** ……..

## **Appendix 4**: Interview questions

Provisional semi structured interview questions to inform and develop 'conversations with a purpose' (Life History approach).

### Provisional semi structured initial interview questions

These are designed to inform and help develop the 'conversations with a purpose' (Life History approach) between participant and researcher (Caroline Faulkner).

**1.** The participant will be asked to provide information on:

- Formal qualifications
- Marital status
- Age

2. Is this your first principalship?

3. Were you a deputy principal or did you hold some other leadership position previously?

4. Was this post held in another school or the same school of which you are now principal?

5. What 'training route' did you take to become a teacher?

6. At what stage of your life did you formulate a career plan that included principalship?

7. Who or what has had a major influence on your career path to principalship?

8. If you are, or have been, married or in a permanent relationship, do you have children?

.

9. How has this affected or influenced your career path to principalship?

10. Have you had support from family at all stages of your career?

11. How would you describe this support (or lack of)?

12. Have you ever been aware of, or experienced, sexist attitudes in your career or in promotion applications?

13. Was there a time in your career when you thought you would not achieve principalship?

(This instrument draws loosely on that devised and used by Marianne Coleman (2001) in her research on women headteachers in the UK.)

## **Appendix 5:** Broad areas for narrative development

**Broad areas for narrative development regarding the research sub-questions**

Subsequent to the initial semi-structured questioning, (appendix 4), the emerging 'conversations with a purpose' will be assisted by three broad areas pertinent to a life history approach, on which the participant will be invited to expand as narrative.

Tell me about:

- Family and home experiences (from childhood)
- Own school life, and subsequent school teaching career
- Your aspirations to principalship

## **Appendix 6:** Nine broad autobiographical areas for narrative development by participants

I would like you to use this guideline (and the original questions) to frame a reflective response - but it is not prescriptive and you are welcome to add to this and structure as best suits you. I am not proposing any word or page restriction -you can decide this just as the guidelines are not meant as a question and answer document -but a framework for telling of your story.

---

Autobiographical story: structure /guidelines

Nine broad areas:

1. The influences of your childhood and early family life that shaped your personal development /values(you may wish to broaden to include political/ academic development)

2. The influence of your race, class, culture, religion, language background of family and schooling on your personal identity/values/actions/beliefs

3. Significant events/actions (by, and/or with, others) which influenced you (positively and/or negatively) during childhood, adolescence

4. Impact or influence (positively and /or negatively) of societal structures/attitudes in the country/countries and community/communities in which you grew up

5. How, when and why were your decisions made re tertiary and/or higher education

6. How significant was this education experience in and on your life

7. What were the reasons/motivations/influences causing you to embark on a teaching career at secondary level?

8. When and why did you consider principalship?

9. Who are/or have been the role models in your life and how has this impacted on/influenced you in any way?

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