

## **ABSTRACT**

The primary purpose of this research was to investigate the extent to which rural schools understand and perceive the concept of participative management. The concept of participative management has been viewed as an ideal style of leadership and management for school development purposes. In South Africa's case, it is an educational policy which is expected to reign in all school management bodies. Many theorists envisaged participative management as enhancing active involvement of relevant stakeholders and it has been advocated by many scholars who believe it is the best leadership style in implementing democratic values to education, particularly South African rural education, which is still in a transitional stage.

As an interpretive orientated study, this research had an interest in understanding the research participants' subjective experiences as well as their general perception of participative management. As case-study-driven research, it sought to investigate their understanding of the concept in their natural setting. This included various meanings they aligned with and attached to participative management, their attitudes, their interpretations and feelings towards it. The study employed a focus group data gathering technique in collecting data.

The findings of this study suggest that participative management has been embraced by rural school management to a certain extent. There are potentially positive aspects that have been brought by participative management to the school, namely, shared vision, common goals, shared decision-making and general involvement of relevant stakeholders. However, the study has depicted a lack of ethical values on the side of some stakeholders and this hinders the smooth implementation of participative management.

The study has also revealed that there are challenges facing rural schools in terms of parental involvement in school governance. Challenges such as lack of commitment

to the school, illiteracy among adults and communication breakdown between the school and its parents are still rife in rural schools. Besides these challenges, the blood of participative management is flowing steadily in the veins of the rural school communities.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Hennie van der Mescht for his tireless effort in assisting me and for being my valuable source of both encouragement and inspiration. Hennie, you have always been there for me and that is why I have managed to transform stumbling blocks into stepping stones. Thank you.

A word of thanks goes to the school in which I conducted my research. Thank you very much to all research participants, namely, the SGB, RCL, SMT and Educators. Without your contributions, this research would not exist. A special word of thanks to the Headmaster. Though you were not physically part of the research, your willingness to open the gate for me is greatly appreciated.

I am grateful to the staff of Alexandra High School and the school's resources I utilized for this study. In one way or another, my colleagues at Alex contributed a great deal to making this research a success. A special word of thanks goes to Jean Moore. Jean, you are a star.

My special gratitude goes to my beloved family. I thank my wife, S'lindile, our two sons, Sokwanda and Andiswa and their aunt Phindile for their emotional support from the beginning to the end of my study. Without your love and support, this research would not have been completed.

My dear mother, S'thembiso, I dedicate this thesis to you posthumously. May your soul rest in peace.

## **DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, Weekend Sehlulamanye Ngubane, hereby declare that this study is my own, and that it has not been submitted for a degree or examination in any other university and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been acknowledged by complete references.

Signed.....

December 2005

## **ACRONYMS**

<b>ANC</b>	<b>African National Congress</b>
<b>DoE</b>	<b>Department of Education</b>
<b>EHR</b>	<b>Education Human Resources</b>
<b>EPU</b>	<b>Education Policy Unit</b>
<b>FET</b>	<b>Further Education and Training</b>
<b>HOD</b>	<b>Head of Department</b>
<b>SGB</b>	<b>School Governing Body</b>
<b>SMT</b>	<b>School Management Team</b>
<b>RCL</b>	<b>Representative Council of Learners</b>
<b>WSD</b>	<b>Whole School Development</b>

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **1.1 Introduction**

As an educator who has served in the field for more than six years, I became interested in researching particularly the aspect of participative management as embodied in the new educational policy. The mere fact that I serve as an acting head of department also prompted me to pursue this study, focusing on certain dynamics of the school management. Quite interestingly, the new education policy calls for active involvement of relevant stakeholders in all aspects of school governance. My research aimed at investigating the extent to which rural schools understand, perceive and implement this democratic aspect. There has been a trend which has become a cultural tendency that things will start in the urban areas, then take a snail's pace to reach rural communities. So, too, in the educational arena, policy based on democratic principles takes some time to filter down to rural schools.

The democratization of the South African political stratum in 1994 triggered the education system to do likewise. It is this demand, which calls for change in school management that made me want to investigate stakeholders' perceptions regarding change in management. Change can be a very strange phenomenon. It can bring expectation and excitement on one hand and apprehension and confusion on the other. It is this democratization of South Africa that has made decentralization a focal point in school management. As an acting head of department in an ex model C school, I have worked with other stakeholders and realized that change has been embraced gracefully. I came to realize that this transformation process has placed school principals (as leaders and managers) in the front seat of social transformation in South African communities. With my understanding of the intricate and complex conditions the rural principals and School Management Teams work under, I became interested in finding out how they were coping.

This study seeks to draw data from the rural school SMTs, RCLs, SGBs and educators, with the aim of attempting to investigate the extent to which they have understood and embraced the concept of participative management. As an investigative study, this research also identifies areas that have made it hard for this rural school to implement this concept and then suggests alternatives for future reference.

## **1.2 Context of my research**

The idea of participative management is generally viewed as an ideal style of leadership and management in education today (Johnson & Ledbetter 1993, DoE 1996, Bush 2003). Johnson and Ledbetter (1993) argue that participative management has been widely promoted as a means of formalizing a new conceptualization of management to bring about school improvement. In South African education, the key challenge to education management is that most of the structures, processes and systems inherited from the pre-democratic past are inappropriate. According to the Task Team Report (DoE, 1996: 25), new education policy requires managers who are able to work in democratic and participative ways to build relationships and ensure efficient and effective delivery. This view is supported by recent literature (e.g. Peters cited in Smith, 2003: 6) who advocates the development of organization systems, structures and processes that are conducive to, and supportive of participation, empowerment and change. This view challenges school managers to promote transformation of schools and ultimately the education system as a whole.

The concept of transformation in the South African education system was formally propounded after 1994. The provisions of Department of Education White Papers One and Two, the report of the Review Committee on School Organization, Governance and Funding, the National Education Policy Act and the South African Schools Act, as well as provincial legislation and policy documents, all point South Africa firmly towards a transformation agenda in which moving towards school-

based systems of education management is a corner-stone (DoE, 1996: 12). Schools are expected to form Governing Bodies with the aim of involving parents in the school matters as well as Representative Council of Learners (RCL) to allow learners active participation in school matters. According to the *Guidelines for Representative Councils of Learners* (DoE, 1999a: 11) democracy should be consolidated at school level with the introduction of these bodies.

Developments in the field of organization theory support this move towards participative management. Kurt Lewin's principle (Smith, 2003: 4) that "we are likely to modify our own behaviour when we participate in problem analysis and solution and likely to carry out decisions we have helped make" is central to participative management. Participative approaches emphasize management processes rather than outcomes only, and "high involvement" is seen as the ultimate key to the shift from autocracy to participation (McLagan & Nel, 1995: 105). Hargreaves (1994: 48) shares the sentiment and argues that the increasing emergence of participative management in schools reflects the widely shared belief that flattened management and decentralized authority structures carry the potential for achieving the outcomes unattainable by the traditional top-down bureaucratic structures of schools.

Participative management is also at the heart of Bush's (2003) collegial model of management. According to Bush (2003: 64) "collegial models include all those theories which emphasize that power and decision-making should be shared among some or all members of the organization." One of the major features of collegial models is that it is strongly normative (*Ibid.*: 65). Bush (2003: 65) mentions that the normative dimension of collegiality is particularly evident in post-apartheid South Africa. He believes that there is now a commitment to democracy, evidenced in the establishment of SGBs and RCLs. This seems to support the idea of participative management as envisaged by various theorists, researchers and even policy in the South African case. The only shortcoming of the collegial models, according to Bush (2003: 67) is that the decision-making process may be drawn out by the search for

compromise but this is generally regarded as an acceptable price to pay to maintain the ideal of shared values and beliefs.

The implementation of participative management has been most challenging in rural schools. A recently published report on rural education highlights the fact that rural education in South Africa “lags behind educational development in other parts of the country... despite the fact that the vast majority of school-going children in South Africa live in rural areas” (Nelson Mandela Trust, 2005: 132). More than twenty years ago Sher (1981: 4) argued that the political isolation of rural schools caused rural parents to become apathetic towards their children’s schools and that this posed an enormous challenge to notions of participative management. This seems to still be the case, and the vision of involving other stakeholders – such as parents – in school management seems hard to attain. Most rural community members view the school manager as the sole ‘head’ of the school.

Against this background, this study set out to achieve the following goals:

### **1.3 Goals**

- To explore various stakeholders in a rural school’s understanding of participative management.
- To identify challenges regarding the implementation of this approach in schools as a foundation towards finding potential solutions to problems identified.

### **1.4 Methodology**

This is an interpretive case study. According to Janse van Rensburg (2001: 16) an interpretivist methodology reflects an interest in contextual meaning-making, rather than generalised rules, involving individuals and small groups in ‘naturalistic’ settings (Janse van Rensburg 2001: 16). Since I seek to obtain a deeper understanding of a

participant's interpretation of a situation in their natural context, the interpretative approach seems appropriate to my purpose.

Gorman, Hammersley and Foster (2000: 3) define the case study as referring to research that investigates a few cases, often just one, in considerable depth. The value of a case study lies in the potential richness of the data, and the extent to which the researcher can convey a sense of how the case functions.

Among the advantages of case study is the notion that case studies present research or evaluation data in a more publicly accessible form than other kinds of research (Bassey, 1999: 23). This is a significant advantage considering my purpose of stimulating interest among education managers and policy makers.

## **1.5 Structure of my thesis**

Chapter two presents the literature review based on South African educational policy, international and South African writing on collegiality. It tends to highlight key tenets regarding participative management in relation to South African schools. It also highlights some facts about rural schools and the stumbling blocks to participative management.

Chapter three deals with the methodology that I have employed in this research work.

In Chapter four I present and analyse the data.

I have devoted chapter five to a summary of the main findings, recommendations for the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education (and perhaps the National Education Department), recommendations for practice and suggestions for further research. This last chapter also considers the limitations of this study.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The new political dispensation in South Africa has brought its own unique set of changes in other spheres. South African education has been the focal point in terms of management change since the new era. Participative management is the management type which has been mostly advocated by not only government education policy, but also various researchers and literature. The purpose of this chapter is to present the notion of participative management as it appears in policy and literature and to consider its implications for schools.

#### **2.1 Democratic governance**

According to the EPU Summary of ANC Draft Policy Framework for Education and Training (1994: 1-3) a reconstructed education system will have to deal with the legacy of administrative fragmentation and with a bureaucratic and authoritarian top-down style of management. It further highlighted that a new system of democratic governance requires the co-ordination of the responsibilities of the different levels of the system and the involvement of all legitimate interest groups at all levels (p.3). This proposal directed education management towards a more participative one by relevant stakeholders as it was stipulated by the same Draft Policy Framework (p.3) that the foremost principle at all levels of the system will be to maximize the democratic participation of all stakeholders.

The view on the democratic governance of schools was echoed by the Ministry of Education in the White Paper 1 (DoE, 1996:16) which announced that the decision-making authority of schools in the public sector would be shared among parents, teachers, the community and the learners, in ways that would support the core values of democracy. This idea of collective decision-making envisaged in the White Paper

1 has been revisited and revised slightly by the White Paper 2. White Paper 2 (1996: 16) makes mention of the fact that educational policy should allow the fact that such capacities may be underdeveloped in many communities and therefore need to be built.

The challenge of capacity underdevelopment with regards to participative management appears to be rife particularly in the rural communities. In the case of KwaZulu-Natal, community schools are situated on land which in virtually all cases is owned by the President or the Zulu King in terms of the Ingonyama Trust Act, in trust for future generations (DoE, 1996: 46). The idea of participative management in rural schools has been difficult to implement. White Paper 2 (DoE, 1996: 46) states that in theory, community schools are managed by the community. This clearly denotes that the practical aspect of participative management has not taken its course. Researchers and recent literature on this issue have not given adequate attention as to why this is happening. More attention has been focused on urban schools, yet the White Paper 2 (1996: 46) makes it clear that the structures in terms of which the community was, or should have been, in management control have largely broken down. Little has been done so far to reconstruct structures that will facilitate participative management in rural schools. This is evident in the management challenge upheld by the Task Team Report (1996: 25) when they say very little systematic thinking has been done to conceptualise the education management development strategies relevant to the South African experience.

Tyala's (2004) theoretical framework on the study of democratic governance of schools draws attention from the concept of School Management Teams (SMTs). He traces the emergence of this concept from the birth of political democracy of South Africa in 1994. He states that because of the democratic nature of this kind of a structure (SMT), it is required that educators work co-operatively and as a team. However, the challenge that faces principals, as Tyala highlights, is that some principals are used to the traditional method of taking decisions on their own without any input from relevant stakeholders. Tyala also revealed the problem that lies with

the educators themselves. He reveals that through the legacy of apartheid, teachers themselves have dogmatically been oriented to being the recipients of instructions and to view management as the prerogative of the principals only.

Most significantly, Tyala's (2004) study found that although the concept of team management is well-received, there are significant obstacles to the acceptance of teamwork as an alternative form of management. He makes an assumption that this may be the result of disempowerment over the decades. His study confirmed that team-management is the preferred approach for a variety of reasons. He states that team-management usually results in enriched decision-making, the sharing of responsibilities and higher levels of support. In South Africa's Educational Case, as stated by Tyala (2004) there is an absence of meaningful training in democratic educational management.

Internationally, the idea of participative management has been viewed in a positive light by most school managers as found by Cottons (cited in Sagie and Kowlosky, 2000: 231) in the studies conducted in United States, the United Kingdom and Netherlands. The findings indicated that managers in the Netherlands viewed participation as a social obligation, while the American managers saw it as a means of improving performance. However, managers in Britain viewed participation as a threat to management control... as a means of increasing performance. The British view of participative management is different in that British managers saw involvement as less desirable. Mungunda (2003: 22) states that the effectiveness of the use of a participative approach to management has not matched its popularity. Mungunda (*Ibid.*: 22) also observed that different nations attach different meaning to the concept of participative management and that a meaning assigned to the concept in one country may be completely foreign to people in another country.

## **2.2 Involvement of legitimate stakeholders**

An avalanche of both South African and international literature stipulates the significance of involving relevant stakeholders in education management. This was advocated by the Department of Education Task Team Report (1996: 27) by stating that management should not be seen as being the task of the few; it should be seen as an activity in which all members of educational organizations engage. This relates very much to the idea of school-based management advocated by the South African Department of Education (1996: 31) in an assertion that school governors are integral partners in the process. This idea of involvement calls the community at large to be involved in school matters. It involves parents in the form of governing bodies, teachers and even learners in the form of Representative Council of Learners (RCLs). According to the Education Department (1996: 27) management is about doing things and working with people to make things happen. It is a process to which all contribute and in which everyone in an organization ought to be involved.

### **2.2.1 Parental involvement in school matters**

In her study of European School Governance, Riley (1998: 7) notes that schools do not exist in a vacuum. According to literature in general, parental involvement in school matters has been a negative one. Many schools, as Riley (1998: 131) outlines, adapted the “no parents beyond this point” principle in the 1960s. In the 1970s, Tyndale (cited in Riley, 1998: 131) brought the parental issue to the fore and questioned the legitimacy of parents in school governance. His findings were that parents are legitimate partners and that they should be given a legitimate say in the management of the school through representation on governing bodies (*Ibid.*: 131).

Many countries (including South Africa) are beginning to think about how to develop policies which will involve parents more closely in the education of their children (Riley, 1998: 131). The studies conducted in Canada, Denmark, England, France and

USA on parental involvement in management, points out that children's learning becomes more effective if their parents participate in education (Riley, 1998: 132). It was due to this approach that the South African Schools Act (DoE, 1996: 28) envisaged the school management approach with responsibility that rests heavily on school principals, their management teams and the governing bodies. The rationale behind this motive is to make schools become more effective and efficient. A British scholar, Poster, (1982: 155) argues that by and large, it is in the structure and composition of the school governing bodies that change has been most marked in recent years. His concern is that the number of parents in the governing body is inadequate to fully represent them. He states that (*Ibid.*: 153) he does not believe that parent membership of the governing body is sufficient in itself to achieve the full involvement of all parents in the life and activities of the school.

The literature on parental involvement in school management has not suggested methods to maximize their involvement. Consequently, parents in most rural schools of KwaZulu-Natal are less involved. There are still challenges that make maximum parental involvement impossible as they are highlighted by the Task Team Report (DoE, 1996: 22). To name a few:

- Dysfunctional structures
- A mix of old and new styles of management
- Insufficient appropriately skilled people
- Absence of an appropriate work ethos and management vision to drive integration and delivery.

Hatry, Morley, Ashford and Wyatt (1994: 58) came up with the following finding in their research on parental involvement in American educational administration. They found that parents continue to be uninvolved or under-involved in school operations or activities despite the presence of the School-Based Management programmes or policies. This finding is crucial and very appropriate to the South African educational management, especially rural education. Hatry *et al.* (1994: 58) examined a number of American schools and they discovered that parents are less involved in the

decision-making process through membership on school governing bodies such as site councils and school management teams. They reported that some schools structured their governance councils to include more parents than teachers or other school personnel (*Ibid.*: 58). All these efforts to involve parents reaped minimal fruits.

The key question about parental involvement in educational management stands like this: why are parents less involved? Researchers and the various literature findings do not give an explicit reason why parents are less involved in educational management of their children. An assessment made by the American researchers, Hatry *et al.* (1994: 59) discovered that the science and mathematics faculty members (interviewed) did not perceive substantial influence of the parents in their educational activities. These researchers then made an assumption that it was an accurate assessment or that parent input might not be obvious as it filters through site council decision-making (*Ibid.*: 59).

One of the recommendations made by Hatry *et al.* (1994: 63-64) to enhance parental involvement is that: principals and site councils should increase parent participation on school site councils and other advisory bodies by including parents on the school advisory bodies; creating linkages between the site council and the parents association. They also make mention of the fact that parents should be invited to attend site council meetings, let them speak and present issues, keep them abreast of issues affecting the schools, disseminate copies of meeting minutes, and so on (*Ibid.*: 64). While making these recommendations, these researchers overlooked the financial implication of this and did not take into consideration the time constraint the principal may face since there are other issues that need his/her immediate attention.

In her Belgian study of Parent Representatives in the new Participatory School Council, Verhoeven (1999: 415) has suggested that parents are generally insufficiently aware of their rights and obligations in the participatory bodies. Verhoeven continued outlining that parents readily accept that only teachers have a

professional understanding of the problems of children at school and ascribe to them a great deal of autonomy. In terms of communication, she highlights that teachers are not easily contacted and always available for meetings (*Ibid.*: 415). In her research on the issue of parental apathy she found that some parents felt that the principals tried to keep their participation to a minimum (*Ibid.*: 415). Fine, Deem, Johnson and Ranson (DoE, Vol. 27, 1999a: 416) unanimously concur that some parents feel patronized by the teachers or even antagonistic to them. All these studies conducted in Belgium, UK and USA prove that parental participation in educational management is still a problem, and it seems to be a universal issue. In his study of school governance, Wilson (DoE, Vol. 29 January 2001: 49-51) propounds the following aspects as major hindrances in parental participation, namely: limited influence, unrealistic expectations, role conflict, internal division, inadequate training and support of governors, an unclear role for governors and unclear financial arrangements.

South African educational management has, over the years, been based on trends in overseas countries. Since parental involvement has been a difficult goal to achieve in many well developed countries, my assumption is that it will be more problematic in South Africa. It is not something one can attain overnight. It is a process and involves a number of aspects. In order to ensure that parents are represented in the school management, the education policy in South Africa has legalized the establishment of School Governing Bodies (SGBs). The SGB structure should look like the one below:

### **2.2.2 The School Governing Body in South Africa**

The Education Human Resources (DoE, 1999b: 10) provide a clear picture of how the school governing body should be structured in South African Education management. Here is the structure presented by the EHR:

- Principal
- Elected members

- Parents
- Educators
- Non-educators
- Learners (secondary school; grade eight and higher)
- Co-opted members

### **2.2.3 Learner involvement**

Riley (1998: 125) states that it is rare that children's voices are heard in educational debates. She proceeds arguing that (p. 126) children have much to learn, much to be taught, but they are not empty vessels, and they also have much to give. Riley's view (1998: 126) that learners' voices deserve to be listened to and that they can make a significant contribution to creating a vibrant school community of learners which includes teachers, as well as pupils, has been part of international thinking that has given birth to the Representative Council of Learners in South African educational circles. The Greek Philosopher, Aristotle (cited in Riley, 1998: 137) stated that the citizen should be moulded to suit the form of government in which s/he lives. This connects to the democratization of school management in South Africa in order to make learners adapt to the political dispensation.

A recent South African study on learner involvement reveals that this aspect is still a challenge in many schools. Nongubo (2004) found that learner involvement in school governance is still problematic, though it is presently provided for by policies that govern schools, including the South African Schools Act. Nongubo (2004) suggests that the reason for minimal learner involvement is that there is an indecisive and autocratic mindset among educators regarding the issue of learner involvement in governance and management. Nongubo (2004) states clearly that the democratic potential of learner participation is undermined.

Many schools, historically, have a prefect tradition (DoE 1999b: 11). With the passing of the South African Schools Act, democracy was consolidated at school

level with the introduction of the Representative Council of Learners (RCL). A short definition of a RCL, according to the Education Human Resources (DoE 1999b:11) is an official body representing all learners in secondary schools. The RCLs are representative bodies that have a more definite function because they have a greater say in fundamental policy matters (*Ibid.*). The Education Human Resources states clearly that it is compulsory for all schools to have learners on their governing bodies if they provide education for learners in the eighth grade and higher (*Ibid.*: 9). This serves to provide learners with a legitimate role to play in school governance and management. Learners are therefore empowered because they do not only get represented at school management, but also (the RCL members) get basic training to acquire skills that would help them assume responsibilities.

The South African study conducted by Bisschoff and Phakoa (1999: 89) indicates that learners are not satisfied with the status they presently enjoy in the governing bodies and that they would like to be given the same status as that enjoyed by all other stakeholders. The literature survey conducted by Bisschoff and Phakoa (1999: 89) was based on the position of minors in governing bodies of public secondary schools in England, Japan and Kenya. According to the studies conducted, South African learners appeared to be dissatisfied with their representation, however, the findings of these scholars revealed that, compared with England, Japan and Kenya, South Africa represents a unique educational scenario in terms of learner representation (*Ibid.*: 92). In other words, learners are hardly represented in other countries.

The most shocking finding was that none of the three countries used in the study allows their learners to participate in the governance of their public secondary schools (*Ibid.*: 92). The only limitation they highlight about South African learner-representation is that they are not involved in financial decision-making. Participants in the research process concurred that section 32 of the South African Schools Act should be scrapped and replaced by one which stipulate that learners be given voting and contracting rights with respect to the financial management of their schools (*Ibid.*: 93). The recommendations made by the researchers were that members of the

school governing bodies should be given training with respect to financial management (*Ibid.*: 93) and that all stakeholders need to ensure that they have access to copies of the Act, failing which they cannot possibly fulfill their function (*Ibid.*: 93).

## **2.4 Decision-making**

Mungunda (2003: 23) reveals that much of the current second wave of educational reform has been couched in the language of teacher participation and empowerment. He cites Kanungo who analysed alienation at work as the most pervasive phenomenon of the post-industrial society. Management in both private and public sectors are engaged in a constant struggle against it for their own survival. According to Kanungo (cited in Mungunda, 2003: 23) alienated workers are apathetic, frustrated and uninvolved in their work. Mungunda asserts that the principal strategy to solve this problem is to replace authority-based management with participative management.

In South Africa, decision-making in schools is now a collective activity but this does not mean that the individual's voice is forgotten. According to Fullan (cited in Singh, 2005: 18) individualism and collectivism must have equal power. With regard to decision-making, the challenge facing school leadership is the balance between the individual and collective decision-making processes. Singh asks the following questions: What decisions should a school leader take on his/her own? What decisions need to be arrived at after consultation? He then offers the following solution (Singh, 2005: 19).

Certainly, the move towards collective decision-making is in line with the values of democracy, transparency and equity. Collectivism is also important as it allows access of all stakeholders to the system.

Fullan (1999: 1) states that at the micro level, moral purpose in education means making a difference in the life chances of all students. At macro-level, the moral purpose is education's contribution to societal development and democracy. This new shared approach is democratic in the sense that it encompasses stakeholders in decision-making rather than the principal as the sole decision-maker.

Many scholars emphasize the need for school effectiveness and school improvement. Fullan upholds the argument raised by Shee, Weiner and Tomlinson (cited in Fullan, 1999: 2-3) that there is a failure to focus on power and that school effectiveness research tends to concentrate on management issues and broad generalizations rather than on the complexity of the issues faced by teachers operating in disadvantaged circumstances. Fullan's prime concern is cooperation. He draws attention to Ridley (cited in Fullan, 1999: 6) who advocates evolutionary theory when stating that co-operative groups thrive and selfish ones do not, and that co-operative societies have survived at the expense of others. Fullan concurs with this idea when he says, "learning is done best in groups" (Fullan ,1999: 10).

The idea of collectivism has been supported by Bush (2003) in his collegial model. Bush (2003: 64) reveals that the collegial model assumes that organizations determine policy and make decisions through a process of discussion leading to consensus. This model was closely associated with school effectiveness and school improvement (Bush 2003:64). Little (cited in Bush, 2003: 64) discusses the benefits of this approach as follows:

The reason to pursue the study and practice of collegiality is that, presumably, something is gained when teachers work together and something is lost when they do not.

In terms of leadership, the collegial model assumes that policy is determined "within a participative framework, therefore the head or principal is expected to adopt strategies which acknowledge that issues may emerge from different parts of the organization and be resolved in a complex interactive process" (Bush, 2005: 75). This collegial model goes hand in hand with transformational leadership. Bush

(2003: 76) states that this form of leadership assumes that the central focus of leadership ought to be the commitments and capacities of organizational members. Littlewood (cited in Bush, 2003: 77) conceptualizes transformational leadership along eight dimensions:

- Building school vision
- Establishing school goals
- Providing intellectual stimulation
- Offering individual support
- Modelling best practices and important organizational values
- Demonstrating high performance expectations
- Creating a productive school culture; and
- Developing structures to foster participation in school decisions.

The last dimension connects to Fullan's (1999) complexity theory in that though developing structures may cause its sets of problems, they are essential. Complexity theory according to Fullan (*Ibid.:5*) focuses managerial thinking on the interrelationships between different parts of an organization and as the trade-off of less control for greater adaptation. Hoy and Miskel (1982) support the participative system as a typically good organizational structure. They (*Ibid.: 194*) state that supportive leadership and highly motivated employees who share in the decision-making process characterize this kind of organizational structure.

Transformational leadership culminates in organizational change. Norris (2001: 220) defines transformation as a form of enacted change that is planned and is intended to bring about significant changes in how an institution is managed. He suggests that this form of change is unlike other changes, in that it is intentionally planned to alter organizational structures and relationships (*Ibid. : 220*).

Thomas and Robertshaw (1999) maintain that transformation as it relates to the internal environment of companies in South Africa can be described as a process for developing and maintaining a work environment in which everyone can be developed

to his or her potential and be allowed to contribute fully to the life of the company and its objectives. Oxtoby (cited in Norris, 2001: 220) complained that the vast majority of the South African workforce still operates under management structures, which by overseas standards are to a significant extent authoritarian in nature. Norris (*Ibid.*) asserted that what is required is to develop an organization in which the human relations culture is such that people are inspired rather than driven, and where the intrinsic motivation for delivering superior performance is reinforced by management communication styles, and where meeting the organization's needs is the individual's pleasure rather than his or her duty.

## 2.5 The learning organization

The idea of a Learning Organization emanated from Kurt Lewin's management thinking that every change requires a new, participative experiment (Weisbord cited in Smith, 2003:12). Weisbord (*Ibid.*) argues that this thinking is the central tenet behind the concept of a learning organization. Smith's (2003:12) definition of a learning organisation is that it could be said to be an organization that systematically, frequently and critically asks itself: "How are things going?" and "How can we do better?" Smith (*Ibid.*) states that apart from having the desire, courage and capacity to reflect itself, a learning organization has the capacity to adapt readily to rapidly changing environmental demands. Senge (cited in Smith, 2003: 12) offers five disciplines that should be mastered to create a learning organization:

- personal mastery
- mental models
- building shared vision
- team building and
- systems thinking

One significant advantage of creating a Learning Organization as a management system is that, according to Garratt (2000: 102), a learning organization has a higher

chance of survival and development in a turbulent world than other organizations. Garratt (*Ibid.*) emphasises the idea of participation of staff and other stakeholders in the creation of a learning organization. However, he acknowledges that in the 1960s, the word “participative” caused major blockages to organizational learning. The word “participative”, according to Garratt (*Ibid.* :102) derives from a Latin root with two distinct, yet linked meanings, namely “joint responsibility” and “joint ownership”.

Garratt’s worry is that many directors and executives encourage ‘participation’ when they mean their staff must accept more joint responsibilities for their actions and that many trade unionists say ‘participation’ when they still mean only ‘joint ownership’. Garratt is aware of the fact that at present, there are relatively few adventurous organizations actively seeking to take organizational learning theory and practice forward. The idea of learning organization, according to Garratt (2000: 103) is the democratization process of an organization. Garratt (*Ibid.*) reveals that the old Henry Ford complaint that “when I hire a pair of hands, I get a person as well” is giving way to the increasing realization that “when I hire a pair of hands, I get a free brain as well”.

Garratt (*Ibid.*) makes his assumption that people are the key to organizational learning. He emphasizes that indeed people are the only organizational resource that can learn and that they need to be accepted increasingly by directors and senior executives as more of a key part of the critical review and debate processes within their organizations. Garratt (*Ibid.*: 107) maintains that these organizations that are seeking to invest in and capitalize on organizational learning are seeking specifically to establish a legal property over the outputs from their staff’s learning.

In their study of educators’ perceptions of the school as a learning organization in the Vanderbijlpark – North District, Moloi, Grobler and Cravett (2002: 88) unanimously agree that the school can function as a learning organization by cultivating a climate where a collaborative culture and beliefs that stimulate educator commitment can

develop. Their recommendations are that principals can do this by creating a culture that values and caters for individual and group needs, which will advance the teaching and learning practices in the school (*Ibid.* : 93).

Personal beliefs that foster collaborative cultures and the strengthening of subject knowledge need to be fostered to create successful schools. Moloi *et al.*'s (2002) conclusion supports Senge's collaborative disciplines (as cited in Smith, 2003: 12) when they stated that it is possible to change the school into a learning organization if the five learning disciplines of personal mastery, mental models, a shared vision, team learning and systems thinking are positively used.

## **2.6 Whole School Development**

According to Singh (2005: 16) whole school development is a 'catch phrase' in education circles with a variety of meanings and definitions. It is about taking the whole school through a process of development. The whole school means every part of the school, both academic and otherwise. He continues revealing that whole school development involves changing the school culture and direction by:

- involving all stakeholders in planning;
- looking globally at all aspects of a school by conducting an audit of circumstances and conditions in a school;
- prioritizing needs of a school;
- striking a balance between development and maintenance activities within a school.

Whole School Development is the vital aspect of leadership and management and it leads towards effective governance of the school. Drakeford and Cooling (1998: 45) state that the focus (of the WSD) must be on impact rather than intentions and that the essence is about the quality of leadership and management in the school, rather than a particular style or pattern of leadership and leadership and management should be

judged as a whole, taking into account the contributions of the governing body and staff as well as the head teacher.

In their study into the leadership challenge facing South African schools, Sterling and Davidoff (2000: 3-4) state that the leadership challenge is to bring a sense of hope and possibility back into the terrain of the school, to rekindle a sense of working together to bring about localized transformation within a shifting environment. Whole School Development plays a positive role for the school as an organization, for individuals and leaders. According to Sterling *et al.* (2000: 46) an organization is living, dynamic and changing. They also state that WSD is closely related to an individual's process of personal development (*Ibid.* : 53) and they see leadership and management as the heart and mind of the whole organization (*Ibid.* : 54).

In order to manage change, and perhaps change management, teachers' realities should be understood. Fullan (cited in Hopkins, West, Ainscow, Harris and Beresford, 1997: 7) states that changes in teaching practice only occur when there is clarity and coherence in the minds of teachers. Hopkins *et al.* (*Ibid.* :7) argue that researchers and policy-makers may have clear strategies for change and improvement, but unless these connect with the understanding of realities of teachers, this increasing clarity at the top will only increase incoherence at the bottom.

The South African Education Policy, recent literature and both South African and international scholars concur with the idea of participative management. What is left now is for the school managers, parents, teachers, learners and other relevant stakeholders to embrace the concept of democracy as enshrined in the constitution. The kind of top-down management approach is now obsolete. In the past, orders and directives were issued without explanation or consultation. Teachers seldom felt committed to the tasks; training and changes failed to materialize. This has caused a long-term failure in behaviour, values and attitudes of the school stakeholders. It is therefore time to direct educational leadership and management forward to a more democratic dispensation just like our country, South Africa.

The participative management approach supports the idea of school-based decision-making. The idea of school-based decision-making is an effort to increase the autonomy of schools. In Britain, according to Chapman (1990: 13) the focus on decentralization has been the main target. In Australia, Chapman (1990: 13) refers to the term ‘devolution’ which has been used in their education circles to describe the quite sweeping change to the pattern of school governance which began with the enactment of legislation giving powers to school councils. In Western Australia, Chapman (*Ibid.*: 14) continues to reveal that school-based decision-making groups have been used over the years. They are self-managing schools.

In order to understand the concept of self-managing schools, I shall use Chapman’s (*Ibid.*: 14) definition. A self-managing school may be defined as one for which there has been significant and consistent decentralization of authority to make decisions related to the operation of the school. With regard to the South African approach, the Department of Education (1996: 30) mentioned that decisions related to concerns such as student learning, resource management, and staff management and development derive from premises founded on common, agreed principles. This approach links goal setting, policy making, planning, budgeting and evaluation at all levels of the school (*Ibid.*).

School-based decision-making calls for principals to do thorough consultation to ascertain that relevant participants are included. Chapman (1990: 228) makes the assumption that in a school-based system, the expanded role of councils and other school based decision-making committees, and the general expectation that, having been created, they will be consulted on a wide range of issues, operates to limit significantly the principal’s decision-making discretion. This has an implication for principals that they must adjust themselves to working with new participants.

Chapman (1990: 228) continues exposing limitations of this school-based decision-making. Her concern is that apparently these new decision-makers may have

different values from those possessed by principals and from those possessed by people with whom principals interacted in the past. This will presumably have negative effects resulting in principals' frustration at being forced to consult with younger, inexperienced participants. Chapman (*Ibid.*: 228) concludes by stating that unless principals are properly prepared to facilitate participative decision-making, it is inevitable that they will encounter problems in managing the conflict which will arise when attempts at collaboration fail. Decision-making in the school environment is not solely an adult or professional-based aspect: it also allows learners to participate. The South African Schools Act Section 11 of 1996 (Education Human Resources 1999: 9) provides for greater participation by learners in the democratic functioning of schools. Regarding decision-making, the Act (*Ibid.*: 11) states that the council (RCL) is to provide learners with an opportunity to participate in school governance and to participate in appropriate decision-making. In South African educational management, this aspect is imperative and has legal implications.

## **2.7 Rural schools: Case studies**

It is important to note that when we talk about change in school management, principals cannot be left out. In transformation, a leader is an important agent of change. Principals are leaders and should drive change in education towards active involvement of stakeholders. With regards to rural schools, two case studies have been conducted related to the role principals play in educational change. Given the fact that there are complexities of management and leadership in education, the following case studies have been done in the areas of structural changes, leadership and management behaviours.

### **2.7.1 Case Study 1: Thailand**

Harper (1992) conducted his study in Thailand as part of a bigger study that included England and Botswana. The Thailand component is relevant to the South African case

in that in both of these developing countries, the principals' image in rural communities in many ways is the same.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To ascertain which factors influence the quality of rural schools in Thailand.
- To study the actual roles and functions of rural schools
- To compare them with the expected roles and functions as specified by law and stated by educators.
- To describe the actual teacher-learning process.

As part of the contextual background, it surfaced that in most cases principals in Thailand are always away from school, either attending departmental meetings and workshops or attending community functions. Their absence from school had detrimental effects on the functioning of the school.

The findings of this study revealed that:

- Principals were always away from school attending meetings or community functions, where they felt obliged to honour invitations from the community, considering that they were held in high esteem by the community.
- By not honouring invitations from the community, principals could be viewed in a negative light by the community, whereas their attendance reinforced their place as key figures in the community.

This study is relevant to rural South African schools where principals are also held in high esteem, and they play certain roles that are peculiar to rural communities. This study by Harper clearly indicated that in rural communities, principals have to sacrifice their school management time in order to fulfill the expectations of their school communities, and that if they fail to do so, they are likely to be less influential in those communities. This will obviously mean resistance from the community in terms of participation in school affairs.

### **2.7.2 Case Study 2: South African Research: General and Rural**

In order to make sense of South African case studies, I refer to the concept of decentralization. A number of studies undertaken in South Africa in the recent past have focused on school improvement through improved management structures or improved school leadership (Christie and Potterson (1997), Sayed (1997) and Naidoo (2001). Another study jointly conducted by Lewis, Naidoo and Weber (2000), entitled “The Problematic Notion of Participation in Educational Decentralisation: the Case Study of South Africa” is mainly a documentary analysis, and it attempts to conceptualise decentralization as emanating from modernization and neo-liberalism. Lewis *et al.* (2000) have pointed to a number of assumptions on which the government seems to have based its notion of participation and devolution of powers to local schools. Here are some of these assumptions:

- Participation is divorced from politics. It is assumed that communities are united as well as homogenous, and therefore participation is an all-inclusive process, and not an elitist one. Decision-making regarding school governance is consensual, and not contentious. Lewis *et al.* (2000) feel that such a position denies communities their political lives, and such behaviours are in line with modernization framework. If local politics exists, it is assumed to be benevolent, and underlying this assumption, democracy is equated with acceptance, and not debate.
- Participation is a positive intervention that will improve schools. Such an assumption - that greater local participation will improve the relevance, quality and accountability of schools - is held worldwide.
- Schools, parents and other community members are receptive to taking on new responsibilities. Everyone is committed to the national modernization project. Schools’ personnel will welcome greater autonomy and new decision-making roles, likewise, parents and other community members want to be

involved in the schooling of their children and will be open to any way in which their involvement can be expanded.

- Lastly, participation is a rational and morally correct act.

It would be interesting if these above-mentioned assumptions were tested practically in rural schools. The study conducted by Gordon (1997) on rural schools seems to challenge most of these assumptions. According to Gordon (1997), rural areas generally, have been overlooked by people who do not live in them.

The South African Schools Act of 1996 has devolved responsibility for school development and management to school level. School Governing Bodies have the powers to promote school development by acquiring and managing funds and implementing projects. Gordon (1997) cautions against over-optimism regarding these policies, in that many households in rural areas do not have the capacity to cover direct costs of schooling, and therefore SGBs may not be successful in eliciting funds, which in turn hampers school development. Bhengu (2005) highlights that there is a need for research in the rural communities.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

Participative management sounds like a wonderful concept. It has been advocated by various scholars and particularly South African Educational Policy and researchers alike. There are still areas that seem to be a problem in implementing this concept practically and this is why more recent researchers become interested in this field.

In the next chapter I discuss my research design.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

The study I am conducting utilizes an interpretive research methodology. It is a case study that makes use of focus group interactions. In this chapter, I explore the rationale behind using a qualitative approach.

#### **3.1 Summary of Goals**

My goals for conducting this study are as follows:

- To explore the extent to which various stakeholders at a rural school understand the participative management approach.
- To identify challenges regarding the implementation of the participative management approach in schools as well as to work towards bridging the gap.

I have opted for a naturalistic enquiry and an interpretive paradigm which seemed most relevant to my study. Since this chapter sets out to explain the method and the methodology underpinning the methods used, I draw on Harding's (cited in Gough, 2003: 3) words to best distinguish between methods and methodology: Methods are techniques or tools that I used to gather data. To define methodology, Harding (*Ibid.*), states that methodology is:

A theory of producing knowledge through research and provides a rationale for the way a researcher proceeds. Methodology refers to more than particular techniques, such as ‘doing a survey’ or ‘interviewing students’. Rather it provides the reasons for using such techniques in relation to the kind of knowledge or understanding that the researcher is seeking.

It is thus appropriate that I examine the underlying “reasons” for this research project, the fundamental thinking that underpins all research. To achieve this I begin by discussing the notion of research paradigms.

### **3.2 The notion of a paradigm**

The choice of paradigms is guided by what the research seeks to achieve. According to Bhengu (2005: 61) positivists and empiricists aim to predict, control and explain, while interpretivist/constructivists aim to understand and reconstruct. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) postulate three paradigms, namely, positivist, interpretive and constructionist. Of the three research paradigms listed above, the interpretive seems to offer more than the others, particularly in this study. It makes the researcher fully involved as an instrument of data production as outlined by Marshall and Rossman 1995: 59). The ‘I was there’ element in the portrayal of the picture of the phenomenon being studied is part of the design (Bhengu, 2005: 61). This view is evident in Marshall and Rossman when they state that:

... presence in the lives of the participants invited to be part of the study is fundamental to the paradigm whether that presence is sustained and intensive as in ethnographies, or whether relatively brief but personal, as in in-depth studies, the researcher enters into the lives of the participants (1995:59).

In my case, my involvement with the participants stimulated interest and accelerated discussion. I entered into their lives and in this way they offered me in-depth knowledge. Covey (1989, cited in Mungunda, 2003: 30) refers to a paradigm as a frame of reference or ‘mental map’ through which we see the world. Mungunda (*Ibid.*:31-32) continues outlining that researcher’s work from different beliefs about the nature of reality and how one sees the nature of reality, as influenced by one’s frame of reference or ‘mental map’.

Paradigms, according to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999: 6), are all-encompassing systems of interrelated practice and thinking that define for researchers the nature of their enquiry along three dimensions: ontology, epistemology and methodology. Ontology specifies the nature of reality that is to be studied, and what can be known about it. Epistemology specifies the nature of the relationship between the researcher (knower) and what can be known. Methodology specifies how the researcher may go about practically studying whatever he or she believes can be known.

Following, here is a table of three paradigms that will be explored. They have been summarized by Terre Blanche and Durrheim. (1999: 6).

**3.2.1 Table 1.1**

	ONTOLOGY	EPISTEMOLOGY	METHODOLOGY
Positivist	- Stable external reality - Law-like	- Objective - Detached observer	- Experimental - Quantitative - Hypothesis testing
Interpretive	- Internal reality of subjective experience	- Empathetic Observer intersubjectivity	- International - Interpretive - Qualitative
Constructivist	- Socially - Constructed reality - Discourse	- Suspicious - Political - Observer constructing versions	- Deconstruction - Textual analysis - Discourse analysis

Following, will be an exploration of each of the three paradigms, namely, positivist, interpretive and constructivist.

### **3.2.2 Positivist paradigm**

In what have been called “the paradigm wars” (Gage, 1989, cited in Hammersley, 1995: 2) or “paradigm shift” (Kuhn, 1962, cited in Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 1999: 4) writers have portrayed the positivist paradigms as the deposed paradigm. Hammersley (1995: 2) views positivism as a mode of social research whose essential feature is that it is founded on certain distinctive philosophical assumptions which the new paradigms reject. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000: 8) highlight that the central

underlying belief of the positivists is that the meaning of a statement is, or is given by, the method of its verification. Bassey (1995: 12) observed that for the positivists, discoveries about reality of human actions could be expressed in statements - statements about people, about events and about relationships between them.

Though the positivist paradigm is still referred to, today hardly anyone refers to themselves or their own work as positivist (Hammersley, 1999: 1). Hammersley continues and states that positivism is rejected not just in intellectual but in moral and political terms, for instance on the grounds that it involves the disguising of value biases as objective knowledge and/or implies support for the socio-political status quo. Due to its claims to objectivity, this research paradigm is inappropriate in relation to my study. I intend to investigate internal reality of subjective experience.

### **3.2.3 Interpretive paradigm**

The interpretive paradigm came to compliment the positivist paradigm. Mungunda (2003: 31) reveals that researchers in the interpretive (or hermeneutic) tradition came to realize that the social realm is different from that of the natural sciences and cannot be investigated in the same way. He states that this paradigm is concerned with human actions, but not human behaviour, as in the case with scientific tradition. Janse van Rensburg (2001: 16) outlines that the interpretivists reflect an interest in contextual meaning-making, rather than generalized rules. The advantage of this paradigm is that it can be implemented in individual and small groups in ‘naturalistic’ settings (Janse van Rensburg 2001: 16). This is the most appropriate paradigm for my study which seeks to provide deeper understanding of a particular situation in its naturalistic setting.

The interpretive paradigm is known for its subjectivity, qualitative nature and empathetic-orientation. It deals with internal reality which, according to Mungunda (2003: 31) is seen as subjective and multiple, seen through the eyes of the participants within the contexts of their frame of reference. Is the interpretive so suitable?

According to Bassey (1995), the purpose of the interpretive research is to describe and interpret the phenomena of the world in attempts to get shared meaning with others. This research paradigm will be relevant to my study since I am interested in understanding the subjective experience and perceptions of relevant stakeholders regarding the aspect of participative management. Methodologies are influenced by the aims of researchers. For an interpretive design such as this one, the researcher is a vital instrument (Marshall and Rossman, 1994: 59). The researcher is fully involved as an instrument of data production.

### **3.2.4 Constructivist paradigm**

The research approach that seeks to analyse how signs and images have powers to create particular representations of people and objects – that underlie our experience of these people and objects – is called social constructivism (Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 1999: 148). Since the constructivists deal with social constructs, they are concerned with broader patterns of social meaning encoded in language (*Ibid.*: 149). The assumption about constructivism is that, of all paradigms, it is perhaps the most attuned to the real-world political consequences of texts, including the texts produced by social science researchers (*Ibid.*: 169). The constructivist paradigm is most suitable for those who wonder how the social world gets constructed as one which contains ‘facts’ (*Ibid.*: 8). In relation to this paradigm, Terre Blanche has collapsed what Connole (cited in Gough, 2000: 9) has kept separate and he has called it, critical and deconstructive/post structural research, into one category, and he calls it, ‘constructivist’. Though this research paradigm is not relevant to my study, it is significant to highlight it and others since this helps to clarify my own position.

## **3.3 Limitations of interpretive research**

Human bias can never be underestimated, nor can the notion of objectivity/subjectivity. Ruddock (cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000: 120) argued that qualitative methodologies are criticized for being impressionistic (based

on reaction or opinions rather than on specific facts or details), biased, commonplace, insignificant, ungeneralisable, idiosyncratic, subjective and short-sighted. The subjective involvement of the researcher makes him/her part of the research and it becomes easier for him/her to share the experiences with his/her research participants. Wolcott (1995: 165) on the other hand, cautions researchers to **guard against** bias rather than deny it, because as he sees it, the researcher's values and theories stimulate the inquiry, and sustain it. That is why he advocates what Erickson, (1984:61 cited in Wolcott, 1995:165), calls "disciplined subjectivity". Duell-Klein (1983, cited in Cotterill & Letherly, 1994:109) refers to the same process of guarding against bias as "conscious subjectivity", while Coe (1994: 21) calls it "consensus" or "intersubjective agreement" which has been echoed by Terre Blanche *et al.* (1999: 6).

The section that follows is about the method I used to collect data. Various research writers highlight various methods of data collection, but my research paradigm found the case study method most appropriate.

### **3.4 Research method: A case study**

The case study is described as referring to research that investigates a few cases, often just one, in considerable depth (Mouton, 2001: 149, Gorman, Hammersley and Foster 2000: 3). This is evident in Casley and Lury (1987: 64) as they assert that the essential methodological feature of a case study is that it provides in-depth, detailed analysis. Lindegger (cited in Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 1999: 255) states that case studies are studies of particular individuals but they could also be studies of single families, units or social policies. This view is supported by Cohen and Manion (1994: 106) by stating that the case study researcher typically observes the characteristics of an individual unit. It is due to this view that I intend using a case study method in my research because I will research only one school instead of a number of schools, and I believe that this will help me gather adequate data within a real-life context.

Chinyemba (2003: 58) states that the method identifies a phenomenon of interest and then selects a case to investigate the manifestation of the phenomenon in real life. The intention of this study is also to present an in-depth ‘description’ of understanding the concept of participative management. The case study method best suits this study.

The strength of the case study is its ability to study a situation within its context. It also presents research or evaluation of data in a more publicly accessible form than other kinds of research report in a narrative form (Bassey, 1999: 23). In one way or another, case studies subscribe to the interpretive paradigm. They help the researcher see the situation through the eyes of his/her participants.

### **3.5 The research site and participants**

I conducted my research in a rural district of Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal. The problem I had in mind was a clear description of ‘rural’ since the school I wanted to conduct my research at was about 20 kilometres from the city. The school I conducted my research at is called Sokwanda (pseudonym). It was chosen because of its close location to my home and that it would be convenient in all aspects for my research. I had known the school principal before, and the first time I approached him about allowing me to do my research in his school, he gave me a warm welcome.

Since my research used Focus Groups, I selected four members of the School Management Team (SMT), six educators, six learners from the Representative Council of Learners (RCL) which was basically one representative from each grade (equals to five, from grade 8 to 12) and its chairperson, and I selected 6 parents, two of whom were members of the School Governing Body (SGB). The school principal was excused from participating in order to allow other participants free expression.

I used such small numbers of participants and selected only one school because, according to Patton (cited in Cantrell, 1993), interpretive research uses small samples

or even single cases, selected ‘purposefully’ to allow the researcher to focus in depth on issues important to the study.

### **3.6 Data gathering technique: Focus groups**

My only data gathering tool was focus group interviews. It is significant that participants benefit from a research endeavour, and this is an approach that encourages both participants’ active involvement in the research as a learning process at the same time as facilitating data generation. The use of focus groups appeared to be most suitable.

Morgan (1997: 6) defines focus groups “a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher”. According to Vaughn and colleagues (cited in Puchta and Potter, 2004: 6) a focus group usually contains the two following core elements:

- a trained moderator who sets the stage with prepared questions or an interview guide; and
- the goal of eliciting participants’ feelings, attitudes and perceptions about a selected topic.

What is remarkable about focus groups is that its moderation is task-oriented, that means both moderators and participants orient to the task of producing opinions (Puchta and Potter, 2004: 17). Focus group interviews are not really interviews, but rather discussions that can happen in a less formal and threatening environment. This view has been supported by Krueger (1994: 6) in his definition of focus group writing when he states that “a focus group is a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment.”

The goal of focus groups is to elicit perceptions, feelings, attitudes and ideas of participants about a selected topic (Vaughn cited in Puchta and Potter, 2004: 5). This

enhances participants' active involvement in that participants are generally guided in discussion to generate rich understanding of their experiences and beliefs.

One more interesting point about focus groups is that the researcher works with people who share something in common. For example, the RCL focus group is involved in representing learners, so there is something in common. The assumption is that if they share something in common, they are likely to express themselves freely and in an informal way. Cohen and Manion (2000: 288) uphold the principle that a group should have homogeneity of background and should feel free to talk openly in front of each other.

Unlike individuals interviews, in focus groups the researcher can access a number of people within a short space of time. This serves to avoid a waste of time, especially when all participants honour their interview appointment.

### **3.6.1 Limitations of focus groups**

Sifunda (2001: 42) states that the presence of the researcher as a facilitator in focus groups and the fact that the researcher's interests drive the focus groups can contaminate data. Morgan (1997) argues that there is a very real concern that the facilitator in the name of maintaining the interview focus will influence the group interaction. Krueger (cited in Morgan, 1998: 49) highlights these limitations or possible problems about focus groups, namely:

- distractions; this was true of my focus group interview with learners who kept on being distracted by other learners . These learners wanted to enter the venue in which interviews were being held.
- too few or too many participants; in the case of educators, they were fewer than I had expected. This was caused by the fact that interviews were conducted during the times of departmental courses offered to equip educators with FET knowledge and material.

- lack of equipment; and
- the problem posed by the size of the room in which an interview is conducted.

In my case, the room was too big for the RCL focus group interview and the room in which I conducted the SMT focus group interview was a bit small. The size of the room was too big for the focus group to operate effectively. It was further aggravated by the noise factor that came from learners since the interviews were conducted at break time.

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

Ethical issues are often deemed to be resolved by procedures such as voluntary participation, informed consent, absence of risk or harm, confidentiality, and anonymity. Janse van Rensburg (2001: 28) describes research ethics as referring to the moral dimensions of researching – about what is right and wrong while engaged in research. In order to ensure that all participants are happy, the use of consent forms is highly recommended. In the case of focus groups, anonymity is impossible; that is why I decided to make a verbal agreement with my research participants and informed them that they were free to withdraw in case they felt uncomfortable. The principal gave permission for the school's name to be used; however, I decided to give it another name (Sokwanda).

I was familiar to almost half of the staff of the school where I conducted the research. We frequently hold cluster meetings with them; we meet in extra-murals and even in professional workshops. I also happen to have a friendly relationship with the school principal in that he was my teacher at high school and I teach his children in my school. So, during parent evenings we meet and discuss many issues around our profession. This means that I should not encounter 'resistance' during my research, and that the most crucial ethical consideration I should consider would be confidentiality. One of the dangers of knowing the participants personally is that they ought to tell you what they think you want and avoid telling you what you want.

### **3.8 Data analysis**

I made use of a tape recorder when conducting focus group interviews as well as taking notes as the discussion proceeded. I allowed my participants, particularly learners and parents to express themselves in isiZulu. In data analysis, I had to first classify data into different themes, then translate into English where necessary. Cohen and Manion (2000: 282) state that in qualitative data, the data analysis is almost inevitably interpretative. The only thing which was left for me was to make sense of things and give meanings to impressions (Stake, 1995: 71).

### **3.9 Limitations of this case study**

The language issue seemed to be a problem. Rural learners express themselves badly in English, so this meant that I had to conduct my interviews in Zulu in order to accommodate both learners and parents who could not speak English. This meant the immense task of translating into English later on. Since the researcher is competent in both English and isiZulu, there was no loss of meaning.

Another challenge was that since rural communities are not easily accessible, particularly parents, I had to visit the school now and then, and at times visit during weekends when all parent participants I wanted to interview were there. This was time-consuming and tiring.

Lastly, the findings reflect a particular school in a particular time and context, and are not necessarily generalisable.

I now move on to present and discuss the data gathered through focus groups.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings derived from the data generated during focus group interviews. Focus groups interviews were conducted with four different stakeholders, namely, the School Management Team (SMT), the School Governing Body (SGB), the Representative Council of Learners (RCL) and educators. A brief description of Focus Groups interviewed will be given, as well as the characteristics of the participants. The school in which the research was conducted will be briefly described here. A literature control is employed to provide a framework for the participants' understanding of participative management. As part of research ethics, I assured the participating school and research participants of confidentiality and anonymity. In order to ensure this, names of participants and the school's name are not used in the discussion. Participants were referred to as "respondents" and numbered (1, 2, 3, ...).

#### **4.1 The context of the school**

Since I opted for a Case Study Method, only one school (case) was researched. The school is situated in KwaZulu-Natal, an Eastern Province of the Republic of South Africa. It is about forty kilometres from the capital city of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg. Provinces containing former homelands, like KwaZulu-Natal, tend to have a larger proportion of their population in more rural settings and a higher than average population density. According to the Demographic Profile of South Africa (1999: 1), these populations are further from education, training and employment opportunities present in urban areas, and the challenge to the education system is to improve access to such opportunities for non-urban populations. Though the school

is not too far from the city, it is rural in character. It is an African school with teachers mainly from the city and children from the surrounding rural areas.

The school has electricity, but only in the principal's office, the staff room and the photo copier room. Electricity in the classrooms has been vandalized. There is no library, no hall, and even classrooms are inadequate. The school serves a very poor socio-economic community. Learners wear what their parents can afford. As a result one cannot obtain a sense of what constitutes the school uniform since there are various colours and different garments. The school consists of about nine hundred learners and it is a secondary school.

## **4.2 Characteristics of participants**

The research participants had different experiences as they occupied different positions at different levels. Their age, responsibilities and gender varied.

### **4.2.1 The School Management Team (SMT)**

The SMT Focus group consisted of four members, three Heads of Departments (HODs) and one deputy principal. The principal was deliberately left out to allow members of the SMT to talk freely even about him, without being intimidated by his presence. Three HODs were females between the ages of 30 and 40 years. They have been in management for two to five years. The deputy was a male, with six years of experience in management and he was between 35 and 45 years old.

### **4.2.2 The School Governing Body (SGB)**

The SGB Focus group consisted of three participants. Two of them were females ranging between 30 and 40 years. The other participant was a male between 40 and

60 years of age. His position in the SGB is vice chairperson. All participants have served on the body for just one year.

#### **4.2.3 The Representative Council of Learners (RCL)**

The RCL focus group consisted of six participants, one representative from each grade and the chairperson of the RCL who came from grade 12. There were three boys (including the chairperson) and three girls. They have served as learner representatives for one year, except for the chairperson who has two years' experience as a learner representative.

#### **4.2.4 Educators**

The Educators' focus group consisted of five participants: three males and two females. The male educators ranged from 30 to 40 years while females ranged from 35 to 45. Females had more teaching experience than males (in terms of years of service).

All Focus group participants expressed themselves freely in the presence of their colleagues and they appeared to be interested in the study. They even expressed how grateful they were at the end of each interview for not only getting involved, but for what they learned from the focus groups.

### **4.3 Methodology**

I used a tape recorder to capture data. The use of a tape recorder has both advantages and disadvantages. For Patton (1990, cited in Hoepfl, 1997) for instance, the tape recorder is "indispensable". It keeps accurate and true records of interviews (Powney and Watts, 1987). Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999), on the other hand, point out the disadvantages tape recorders may have during interviews. They point out that

some participants either withhold some of the information or ‘play for the tape’. I was not aware of any problems or impediments brought about by the use of a tape recorder.

One of the common mistakes neophyte researchers make is failure to ensure that all mechanical aspects are taken care of to avoid any distraction that may result, such as the shift of focus from the interview to paying attention to the recorder and its functionality (Bhengu, 2005: 65). To avoid such technical failures outlined by Bhengu, I employed an assistant researcher to take down notes as the interviews proceeded. Research participants were informed about the research assistant and they were quite happy with her presence.

In order to familiarize myself with the data gathered I spent some time listening to the recorder repeatedly. I then managed to categorize the data into different themes. Since the research participants spoke isiZulu, I took advantage of my competence in both English and isiZulu and transcribed the data into English. There were four different Focus Groups, namely, SGBs, RCLs, Educators and SMTs. Each group had its own unique set of questions (see Appendix A). All research participants were referred to as “**Respondent 1 or 2 or 3**. They have been abbreviated to **R-1 or R-2**, and so on.

#### **4.4 Data Analysis**

Most of the research participants viewed participative management as an integral aspect of their school improvement. They align participative management with the achievements of the school.

According to the governing body research participants, participative management should be promoted because “the school is there to serve the child. And the school is three in one. It is the child, the teacher and the parent, and they must all work together” (R-2). “The school cannot function properly without parents’ input....” (R-3).

Since learners are expected to play a role in their education, the research participants who represent learners in the RCL believed that they play a major role in participative management. “I make teachers and the principal aware of the existing problem....” (R-4).

Another RCL respondent also believed that she plays a role in the school management because “...if the teacher does not pitch up for his/her lesson, I go and tell them that they are supposed to be teaching” (R-5).

There were very few RCL members, however, who felt that their role in the school management is significant. Others stated clearly that they had no role, and seemingly they appeared to be in the midst of confusion regarding what is expected of them. This confusion has been identified by Sithole (1995: 93) as follows:

Although it is the stated policy of the national educational ministry of education that students at secondary level, for the purpose of school governance, constitute one of the main stakeholders, how students are going to participate in school governance and over which issues is yet unresolved.

This claim by Sithole obviously clarifies the fact that there is still ice to be broken in order to promote learner participation in school management. Some adults, like teachers, are very uncomfortable with the idea of working with learners. One of the research participants in Nongubo’s (2004: 60) study stated the following:

They are seen by the law as minors, for instance even if we have got some committees and we want to put up a tender they can’t come into that subcommittee, because if there are legal implications there could be problems, and in the appointment of teachers they are not there but when we report to the SGB they are there.

Recent studies have shown that even members of management in some schools are not for the idea of learner participation due to the following reason highlighted by one of Nongubo's (2004: 58) research participants:

....it is difficult to handle working with children, especially because we could not discuss things on the same level.

The idea of learner participation seems to be a good thing to do but most institutions are not sure how to involve them and to what extent. Learners on the other hand are keen to be involved in all aspects. To them, this is a learning process and there is no way they can acquire skills if they are alienated.

Learners seem to be involved only in insignificant structures:

I only serve the school in terms of cleanliness, that is, I supervise learners when they clean the school (R-4).

I become involved in uniform inspection and that's it (R-3).

Sometimes when they make noise in the teacher's absence, I try to calm them down (R-6).

By assessing these responses from learners, it becomes clear that though these duties are necessary, but learners are not truly involved in the governance of the school. In matters such as decision-making, budgeting, and other key aspects, learners are hardly involved. In fact most educators referred to the RCLs as "prefects", which is the outmoded terminology in educational circles. This in itself tells something about their attitudes towards learner participation. Prefects were not involved in governance, but in general maintenance of order and disciplinary measures only.

Research participants in Mungunda's (2003: 48) study asserted that "Participative management ensures that members in the organization take ownership of the decision, and are willing to defend decisions taken through collaborative means" (R-1). This

assertion was supported by the same respondent stating that “Participative management results in a greater sense of commitment and ownership of the decisions” (Mungunda, 2003: 48).

The understanding of my research participants of the concept of participative management varies. There are some commonalities, however. The SMT research participants had this to offer in their understanding of participative management.

It means an active participation of every school member in whatever activity taking place, either within or outside the classroom (R-3).

Another respondent from the SMTs stated:

Participative management is a school management with an open door policy, involving all relevant stakeholders. It could be the parents, the community, teachers and learners. It is the kind of management which is based on democratic values which allows other people’s views. This kind of management allows sharing of views and information (R-5).

The broad definition of participative management was supported by other respondents who added that it needs people with a strong sense of taking initiative, pulling together and making sure that you have an input.

All SMT research participants concurred that participative management contributes positively to the whole school. They agreed that it leads to the smooth running of the school. One participant felt that it contributes to personal growth and it is a source of empowerment (R-3). Another respondent stated that participative management promotes the culture of teaching and learning within the school because there is less resistance from stakeholders (R-4). Another respondent stated that this form of management encourages transparency and promotes accountability since everyone is involved (R-1).

These findings resonate strongly with Weisbord's (cited in Smith, 2003: 5) understanding of participative management. He highlights some fruits or benefits of participative management, namely:

- participation overcomes resistance
- participation increases organization commitment
- participation is energizing and enhances performance.

William (1978) sees participation as a key ingredient for successful management. In a democracy, he states, participation should be second nature to us. Cangenu, Kowalski and Claypool (1985: 1) state that "there is a form of leadership behaviour which will yield consistent, superior results in terms of better-than-average employee performance, employee cooperation, and employee attitudes". This style of leadership behaviour is employee-orientated; it is referred to today as participative management.

The notion of participative management stems from the democratization of school managements as envisaged by the Department of Education (1995). The reconstruction of education, according to the DoE (1995, cited in Le Roux and Coetzee, 2001: 42) is aimed at the empowerment of people to participate effectively in all processes of a democratic society, economic activity, cultural expression and community life. To enhance the notion of democracy in a participative management, one of the research participants had this to say:

We are entitled to help the principal and give him our advices since we were elected by the people, democratically, to represent them at governing body level (R-3).

Most of the RCL representatives shared the following sentiment: "An election was held in my class; democratically, I was elected as class representative in the RCL" (R-1).

Participative management, according to research participants, has done wonders for the school.

#### **4.4.2 Fruits of participative management**

French and Bell (1995: 94) asserted that most people desire increased involvement and participation, which has the ability to energise greater performance, produce better solutions to problems and greatly enhance acceptance to change, increase commitment to the organization, reduce stress levels and generally make people feel better about themselves and their world. Positive remarks surfaced from research participants about the things they have observed in their school since the inception of participative management.

One of the respondents stated the following: “I cannot complain. In this school, there is about 80% of cooperation between learners and teachers” (R-1).

All the educators who participated in the research agreed upon one point: “Participative management has increased good relationship between us (educators), the principal, learners and the school management” (R-2).

The SMT research participants believed that participative management contributes towards the smooth running of the school. They mentioned that in this type of management individuals grow and feel empowered. They argued that it results in the promotion of the culture of teaching and learning in the school. One of the respondents highlighted that in participative management, everyone gets to know what is happening in the institution and feel part of it.

The same participants highlighted specific aspects the school has achieved through participative management. They argued that the matric results have improved tremendously from what they used to be. They even stated that their school has a bigger enrolment compared to other schools in the vicinity. They created

participative management for that, and also for the fact that learners, teachers, parents and the community are happy. One summarized it by saying: “Through participative management, we are a happy school” (R-2).

#### **4.5 Decision-making**

William (1978: 3) believes that participative management is the process of involving subordinates in the decision-making processes. He goes on stating that it stresses active involvement of the people. It uses their expertise and creativity in solving important managerial problems. Lewin’s principle that “we are likely to modify our own behaviour when we participate in problem analysis and solution and likely to carry out decisions we have helped make” (cited in Smith, 2003: 4) is central to participative decision-making. This principle has been embraced by what Bush refers to as a “collegial” model which emphasizes that power and decision-making should be shared among some or all members of the organization (Bush, 2003: 64). “Whether we like it or not, the SMT cannot take decisions on its own” (R4).

This above-cited statement was made by one member of the SMT Focus group in support of participative decision-making and was supported by an educator: “The school decision-making process is transparent in that we get to know about all decisions taken at governing body meetings” (R-4).

The educators felt that they are part of the decision-making process, though they do not all attend governing body meetings. One respondent felt that since there are two educators representing educators in the governing body, all educators are part of decision-making because the fact is that educators cannot all attend the meeting. Interestingly, one respondent pinpointed that after decisions have been taken at governing body meetings, educators then get an opportunity to make an input regarding those decisions.

When asked if their input affects decisions already taken, the respondents laughed. One of them was captured saying: “Regarding that, there is nothing I can say” (R-2). Teachers, according to Mungunda (2003: 43) have had relatively little influence over the broader spectrum of school life and have experienced little involvement in decision-making. There are some moments when the school principals find themselves making unilateral decisions due to time constraints and other reasons. The time factor is acknowledged even by the collegial model in terms of decision-making. Bush (2003: 67) states that the decision-making process may be elongated by the search for compromise but this is regarded as an acceptable price to pay to maintain the aura of shared values and beliefs. In most cases, seemingly, principals are reluctant to compromise “time”. It is not always easy to wait for other stakeholders when pressure is upon the principal to make a decision within a limited time frame. One of the RCL representatives exclaimed: “No, I am not part of decision-making!” (R-4).

The other RCL participants shared the same sentiment with R-4 except for two who said the following: “It depends; in sports I decide with the teachers which school to play with” (CR-1). The same respondent commended their chairperson for letting them make decisions. “The RCL chairperson makes us decide on certain cultural and sports activities” (R-1).

The RCL chairperson seemed to be the only one of all learner representatives who had access to the principal and thus felt that he was part of decision-making. He revealed that the principal calls him into his office if there is a learner who has done something wrong and he asks for his advice, then they decide together what to do with that learner. The same chairperson stated that: “Other teachers ask me what should be done if there is a problem, and we decide together” (R-2). It is without doubt that while the RCL chairperson is “involved”, the manner in which he is involved benefits the few at his expense because they only call him to participate when there is crisis. Under normal circumstances, they do not need him. He is therefore being utilized manipulatively. It might be true that in the process, he has

nothing to lose, but the question is: is he really fully involved in the school governance? The answer is undoubtedly no. He is only invited to participate in conflict resolution. The fact is he is a learner from the area and he is being “manipulated” or “exploited” in Marxist terms to maintain order, and once there is order he is not needed.

This discrepancy between educators, learners and SMT participants discloses that there are some challenges and complications in the process of decision-making. The South African Schools Act (1996) calls for the replacement or attenuating of unilateral decision-making in favour of consensual decision-making. Bush (2003: 64) emphasizes that collegial models assume that organizations determine policy and make decisions through a process of discussion leading to consensus.

One governing body respondent stated the following regarding decision-making:

At times we find ourselves unsatisfied, especially when the principal informs us that he has done this and that, and I was unable to find you. I believe and feel at times that the unilateral decision he has taken, without us, was uncalled for.... The way I know it, is that the school principal is not supposed to make any decision without involving us, but he does give explanations afterwards (R-2).

#### **4.6 Some day-to-day facts about RCLs**

Though the RCL is an official body to represent learners, the study has revealed some challenges in their representation, especially when it comes to significant governing body meetings. Here is what some governing body members said about learner representatives:

One day we held a significant meeting, where some important decisions were to be made and I asked: where are those two learners who always attend governing body meetings? There was no response (R-1).

Another respondent from the same group added the following:

At times when we make decisions, we need to work closely with these learners, because there will be moments when the very same learners will account, especially when tough moments emerge (R-2).

The same respondent uttered the following words after making the above statement: “In some cases, you can feel that learners, as children are not needed in certain decision-making” (R-2).

The reason why respondent 2 complained about the absence of learner representatives in some significant decision-making meetings resonates with Mungunda’s respondent who stated the following:

The fact that you involved as many people as possible, who you may call them expert in their respective discipline of decision-making, carry the potential that the decision taken will be supported, defended and ultimately carried out by everyone, even those that appear to be negative or defensive of decisions taken by the majority (Mungunda, 2003:41).

He concludes that the realization of democratic management requires teachers (and in this case learners and parents as well) to be involved in a variety of tasks and responsibilities that they have previously not been part of. Collaborative decision-making will require them to become familiar with issues that previously were the concern of the principal only (Mungunda, 2003: 43).

#### **4.7 Some challenges facing involvement of stakeholders**

In terms of the general running of the school, whether it is budgeting, human resource management, academics or decision-making, it is true that most stakeholders still find themselves either unconsciously or deliberately excluded from such matters. The mere fact that some governing body participants highlighted that sometimes the

principal makes decisions without them, but informs them about those decisions, is an example of such exclusion.

The issue of parental apathy regarding their children's education is of serious concern. Most of the research participants complained that parents are not actively involved in school management. When the SGB participants were asked the reasons why parents are so apathetic towards the running of the school, here was the response:

Our predecessors, particularly the treasurer and the chairperson were implicated in fraud and corruption. They signed a number of cheques that benefited them at the expense of the school. When parents heard about it, the matter was referred to the police. The treasurer is in jail right now. So when the principal requested the nomination and election of another SGB representative, parents refused, fearing that they too would be tempted to steal the school's money (R-3).

Another respondent retorted in support of what was said by R-3: "Appointing someone who is unskilled and unemployed in a financial position means disaster to the whole organization" (R-2). As part of the study, the SGB participants revealed that the school had problems of the treasurer and chairperson who were involved in fraud. Such lack of fiscal discipline may be the result of poor skills in financial management; people get appointed to financial positions when they themselves have no idea of finances. This fraudulent incident is one of the aspects that make it difficult to implement participative management. We must bear in mind that this style is based on trust, and trust is based on honesty. If members of the team do not abide by their organizational values, morals, and principles, their organization is in danger. In this respect, members of the SGB were trapped in an ethical dilemma and had to take the right direction as depicted by the "compass" Covey (1992) refers to. Covey (1992: 94) concludes:

The compass orients people to the coordinates and indicates a course or direction even in forests, deserts, seas, and open, unsettled terrain.

The research respondents revealed that the treasurer who was involved in fraud was referred to the police. This matter resulted in his imprisonment and they were happy, though some community members were worried that the same members of the SGB would be in trouble.

Covey extends his compass metaphor to support what was done by the SGB members. According to Covey (1992: 94), principles are like a compass. A compass has a true north that is “objective and external”, that reflects natural laws or “principles”, as opposed to values that are subjective and internal. Because the compass represents the verities of life, we must develop our value system with deep respect for “true north” principles. And that is exactly what was done by the SGB members.

No matter how hard it was to deal with the fraudulent situation, the SGB members felt obliged by their moral principles to follow the right course. Values-driven leadership is essential in creating organizational integrity. It remains an undoubted fact that the SGB risked to solve the issue of the school’s lack of fiscal discipline. And it takes only morally disciplined leaders to take this venture. It takes one’s self-esteem to enforce ethical behaviour as Peale and Blanchard (2000) put it:

Both of us agree that ethical behaviour is related to self-esteem. We both believe that people who feel good about themselves have what it takes to withstand outside pressure and to do what is right than do what is merely expedient, popular, or lucrative. We believe that a strong code of morality is the first step towards its success.

These two factors appeared to be a threat among the governing body participants. There were more issues that came up revealing major challenges in the involvement of parents. Other obstacles were reported by research participants as follows:

When you get appointed to serve in the governing body, it is because you are a parent or guardian of a certain learner/s who are still at that particular school. Obviously teachers know your child. Here in the rural areas there is a tendency among teachers that if you as governing body

member says something or makes a comment against something happening in the school, the teachers victimize your child in one way or another (R-2).

The response by R-2 seemed to be a shocking blow and a major obstacle that makes parents dislike serving in the governing body for the safety and well-being of their children. This means that if you serve in the SGB and you want your child to be safe, learn to keep quiet and this means that you are useless. It defeats the purpose of service. Again here, there is no sense of morality or ethics. Democratic values are also violated in this kind of incident. What these stakeholders should understand is that in order for the process of SGBs to be highly and actively involved in school matters, there must be a sense of “liberty” and democracy in the school itself. This challenge highlighted by the SGBs signals that the school community, especially professional educators who should be highly instrumental in implementing democracy, are not democratic. They still have elements, not only of authoritarian leadership but of dictatorship as well. Participative management calls for leadership with ethics. People are allowed to exchange words in a constructive manner. Even in democracy, there is criticism, but that does not call for intimidative response. Johannesen (cited in Lumsden and Lumsden, 2000: 37) states that:

From the moment a team forms - from the very first words you exchange - you are invested in that team and its outcomes. This is an investment both of self and of conscience. Your ethics are involved.

If stakeholders can understand and practise what Johannesen states above, morality will prevail and the sense of democracy will make them feel that other individuals have a stake,; so silencing them is unethical.

Another issue that came up was the cultural aspect, where female voices are less heard than male voices. Two SGB female participants agreed that:

If one of us, as females, raises a suggestion, no matter how valid and significant it is, it is ignored. But a male one is entertained. And we have

observed this for quite some time and we have discussed it privately as victims (R-2).

Hoy and Miskel (1996: 19) state that feminists argue that organizations are dominated by a male culture that emphasizes conformity, defense to authority, loyalty, competition, aggressiveness and efficiency. It transpired from the interview that both female participants choose not to oppose the dominant male discourse of the organisation. To support Hoy and Miskel's view on conformity, here is what was said by another female participant: "We keep quiet when they dominate us, and by so doing, we give them their place" (R-1).

This means that these female participants are not fully recognized in the SGB as valued members but seem to be there for the sake of window-dressing so that the organization appears in public as if it involves women. This confirms Hoy and Miskel's (1996: 19) argument that the "feminist side of relations is devalued in bureaucratic organizations." This means that as long as bureaucratic organizations exist, women's voices will not be heard and they will remain subordinated to convention in male-dominated structures. This is a major challenge facing involvement of stakeholders in school management.

Illiteracy also plays a major role in parental apathy, especially in the rural areas. According to Baatjes (*The Natal Witness*, September 2004) "close to two million adults are poorly educated and lack the basic knowledge and skills for active participation in society" (*The Natal Witness*, September 2004). Lack of skills and basic education cause many rural parents to undervalue themselves. As a result they distance themselves from their children's school matters. In that way they leave everything up to the teachers with the attitude that teachers are experts and they can best do the job. In my research, it transpired that most parents are illiterate, so it becomes hard for them to serve in the governing body. Some teachers also have a tendency to look down on parents, treating them as inferiors and this has a negative impact on parental participation.

To show how serious this problem is, the research participants stated the following when they were asked about skills and knowledge regarding governing body duties: “There was no training whatsoever, that was provided to us to serve in the governing body” (R-1). And “You get appointed to the SGB not knowing exactly what to do. We end up following steps of the principal” (R-3).

The SGB research participants revealed that though they could read and write, only one of them had completed matric. They made it clear that this is a real problem and many parents do not want to serve because they believe it is the duty of the literate and well educated people. Another research participant complained that when they interact with teachers, teachers do not attempt to make them feel comfortable. She complained that teachers do not accept their views, they do not cooperate and they just treat them badly as a way of telling them that there is nothing they (parents) can contribute to the teaching profession. Most rural parents lack the necessary skills to participate in democratic and professional settings. If they can acquire basic skills and knowledge, undoubtedly, the attitude some teachers have given them (parents) is likely to change. Baatjes (2004: 3) concluded that “the education of adults is particularly significant because they are in the position to use what they learn immediately and can participate in the building of a new, participatory democracy.”

It must be borne in mind that most of the unemployed citizens of South Africa reside in the rural areas. This may have a direct impact on parent participation in the school matters. Rural dwellers need financial motivation to take part in certain matters. The financial status of the rural dwellers may be regarded by Marxists as “alienated workers” (Bowles and Gintis, cited in Haralambos, 1980). According to Bowles and Gintis (cited in Haralambos, 1980: 181), since alienated workers cannot be motivated by intrinsic rewards, since they cannot find satisfaction and fulfillment in work itself, they must be motivated by extrinsic rewards such as pay and status.

The lack of full involvement was also raised by RCL participants when asked if they had any knowledge and skills regarding their duties. All of them except the

chairperson answered in the negative. They also made it clear that there was no workshop or training course offered to them, and that caused them not to participate to their fullest potential.

Failure to develop parental involvement in school management is therefore crippling the system in a number of ways. However, there are few positive aspects this study has observed, namely, ownership, commitment, shared vision and values.

#### **4.8 Ownership, commitment, shared vision and values**

The South African Schools Act of 1996 called for the creation of school governance and management that would guide governance and transformation. It even stated that governing bodies will, among other things, be expected to articulate the mission and vision for the school, monitor its performance and hold staff accountable (DoE, 1996: 41). It is the significance of vision in relation to leadership that made Romeche *et al.* (cited in Leithwood, 2000: 55) state that:

...powerful leaders of the past and present were dreamers and visionaries. They were people who looked beyond the confines of space and time to transcend the traditional boundaries of either their positions or their organizations.

Most of my research participants revealed that they had common goals and a clear vision for their school.

Our mission is to make this school a better one, by working together with the principal and the community at large and make people know that it is their school (R-3).

Another respondent stated:

Our vision is to see the school achieving the best results it can, and beat all other neighbouring schools in all aspects (R-2).

From the two mentioned responses it is clear that stakeholders take ownership of the school and that together they want everybody to participate in crafting the mission and vision of the school. They made it clear that in order to do it, participative management is important. The school had its mission statement publicly pinned on the walls and notice boards. The SMT research participants highlighted to me that it was arrived at through consensus after all relevant stakeholders had been consulted. A meeting was held and they came up with the mission statement together. They stated that almost everyone has taken ownership of it and learners can say it as if they were singing their school anthem. The SMT disclosed that the most active stakeholders at the crafting of the mission and vision statements were teachers. This is in accordance with what Sergiovanni (1991: 26) defined as collegiality where teachers are to become an integral part of the management and leadership processes of the school that are guided by that school's shared vision. It is a process of assimilation that involves encouraging personal visions to establish a vision built on synergy. It is a vision that is both personal and congenial. Sharing a common vision and having values makes the school work better. Research respondents outlined that though these aspects are so crucial, they are not easy to attain. This has been supported by Dimmock (cited in Walker, 1994: 40) who, in view of such a challenge, suggests that tight coupling and synergy can be achieved when all parts of a school share common values, goals, and practices. In this case, it is clear that the school may have vision, values and goals, but if there is no practice, all is defunct.

The question of ownership can also prevail due to shared decision-making. Pashardis (1994: 15) states that individuals who are affected by the decision have input and involvement in the process of making decisions and therefore have a feeling of ownership in the decision processes. This enhances the idea of collective decision-making or shared decision-making in order to avoid the situation where organizational individuals alienate themselves just because they were not involved.

But if they are involved they take ownership of whatever happens, as long as it is related to their own decision.

According to Smith (2003: 11) leadership plays an important role in developing and maintaining organization vision, purpose, values and processes. This idea is supported by the systems theory. According to Smith (*Ibid.*) organization members together construct a system that best meets their aspirations, goals and needs. This is not to deny the value of others' experience or the results of good research. But ultimately it is those who are there who are best placed to decide "how we are going to do things around here". Smith's argument shows that while organizations can establish a "shared vision", individual's visions also come to the fore.

## **4.9 Teaming**

According to French and Bell (1995: 97-98) teams are important because:

Much individual behaviour is rooted in the socio-cultural norms and values of the teams. Changing the norms and values of the team automatically changes the behaviour of individual.

Many tasks are complex, they cannot be performed by individuals; people must work together to fulfill them.

Teams create synergy- the sum of the efforts of members of a team is far greater than the sum of the individual efforts of the people working alone.

Teams satisfy people's needs for social interaction, status, recognition and respect.

Teaming has been idealized by some scholars and theorists as best for organizational performances. As part of this study, teaming appeared to be an important aspect of management. It is the concept that embodies the idea of ownership. The RCL participants (as locals) revealed that members of the community used to vandalise and steal the school property. But that bad habit has subsided. They mentioned that when community members get involved in school matters, they take ownership of it and

instead of doing bad things to it, they protect it. They stated that since teachers, parents, learners started to work together as a team, there are fewer and fewer problems in the school. One governing body participant stated this:

Before the arrival of this current principal, there was chaos in the school. But this one calls us if there are problems and we are always willing to go and solve them and we work as a team (R-2).

Working together as a team has worked effectively for the school. Smith (2003: 13) refers to learning as a coined term and he states that teams are the building blocks – the bricks/pillars – of effective and satisfying organization life. One SMT participant stated that “working together as a team has made our school emerge as the best in terms of results in the vicinity” (R-3).

Smith refers to the power of synergy (people working together can achieve more than a group of individuals working alone) as outstanding in learning (Smith 2003: 13). Smith proceeds and states that “the fact that much individual behaviour is anchored in the socio-cultural norms and values of intact groups, are core considerations for teams (*Ibid.*). The governing body participants made it clear that the school principal cannot lead the school alone. This assertion finds support in Smith (2003: 13) when he states that “it goes without saying that some tasks are too complex for individuals alone to cope with.” Teaming, shared vision and values and ownership all contribute towards commitment of stakeholders to their organization. According to Murgatroyd and Morgan cited in Mungunda (2003: 48), the vision of an organization becomes a reality only once it is widely shared and begins to permeate all aspects of the organization’s activities. Mungunda (*Ibid.*) concludes that the vision of the school is more likely to command a high level of commitment among the school community if the various stakeholders have been involved in the formulation thereof.

Teaming also plays a role in terms of decision-making process. It promotes the idea of “consensus” rather than the process of voting. When consensus is fully comprehended and well facilitated, group members will feel that they have personally

contributed to the decision (Kayser, 1994: 108). Besides decision-making, when a group of people work together all have teamwork skills and the group has created a condition where it has learned to learn (Maers and Voehl, 1994: 2). Team management has been seen by Lindlow and Bently (1989: 135) as an effective method. In terms of planning and other management aspects, teaming allows people with different skills and knowledge to participate and share what they have with the whole organization. This is evident in Walker (1994: 38) when he states that much planning should be carried out in teams, at the management level and among staff in their areas of interest and expertise. Since educators are involved by the school senior management in their areas of expertise, they feel comfortable to execute their duties and they know it works to the best interest of the team and the school as a whole.

## **4.10 Leadership and governance**

In his study of leadership perceptions, van der Mescht (1996) produced the following findings:

Findings suggest that leadership is a complex, intensely human phenomenon, driven by values, past personal experience, strong personal role models and identification with larger than life role models. The act of leadership emerges as a mixture of a way of being – as opposed to doing – and conscious role-playing behaviours. The contexts in which leaders operate, combined with defining personal characteristics emerge as partial determinants of leaders' perceptions of their success or failure. Leaders who experience a high degree of congruence between personal attributes and their leadership contexts feel at liberty to be creative, daring and experimental, and are essentially able to "tell their own stories" through their leadership. By contrast, leaders who feel threatened by their contexts doubt their ability and perceive themselves as victims (van der Mescht, 1996: ii-iii).

In participative management leadership plays an integral part in enhancing the concept by influencing followers, develop their skills and abilities and to give light. In order to achieve this, leaders are not expected to perform miracles, but to adopt collegial models of leadership as envisaged by Bush (2003). Bush (2003: 69) gives us the picture of a pre-participative dispensation where the formal position was that of

a principal alone, responsible for the organization and management of school to a collegial model that has acted as a brake on some heads who wish to share their power. According to research participants the kind of leadership that prevails throughout the school allows everybody to participate in a democratic way. Each individual stakeholder feels empowered in a certain way to participate. Many of these themes emerged in my findings and they are highlighted in chapter 5.

One respondent stated the following about the leadership of the school:

Our principal is a good leader who calls us to participate in problem-solving and other important issues of the school management (R-3).

Another participant said:

If we do not agree with the principal, he gives us a chance to debate the issue and he is open to criticism (R-2).

This ‘openness’ of leadership as manifested in the participants’ statements about the school principal is characteristic of a collegial leadership model. It states that the head or principal is expected to adopt strategies which acknowledge that issues may emerge from different parts of the organization and be resolved in a complex interactive process (Bush, 2003: 75).

The educator participants highlighted that the principal is a good leader who is approachable and serves as a ‘fatherly figure’. They stated that he prompts them to participate and even delegates various duties to different people; in that way he is always happy just like the staff which is always relaxed. This leadership approach is evident in the participative leadership style and its assumption that “it will succeed in bonding the staff together and ease the pressures on the school principal” (Sergiovanni, 1984: 13). This view of leadership distribution was echoed by Copland (2001: 6) when he stated that:

Leadership is embedded in various organizational contexts within school communities, not centrally vested in a person or an office... exciting work

is under way that explores specific ways in which schools might distribute leadership more broadly... [There is] a need to identify and support aspects of leadership beyond the role of the principal.

This, Copland stated in support of participative leadership that eases the burden on principals. In this way the principal spearheads participative leadership to benefit the whole organization that imposing things on the organization in order to become ‘super-head’.

One educator respondent mentioned that the school principal likes to share his power; he does not want to be seen as the sole figure of authority. Another educator participant stated the following:

Our school is properly governed by all of us. The school leader likes to delegate duties, you find teachers performing various tasks and that makes them feel part of the school (R-5).

Another educator stated:

The school leadership and governance is effective in that we each get duties to perform and the management believes that we all have abilities and if you don't understand, they guide you (R-3).

From all that was said by educator and research participants about their school leadership, it is without doubt a transformational leadership style that prevails in their school. Transformational leadership assumes that the central focus of leadership ought to be the commitment and capacities of organizational members (Bush, 2003: 76). In this style, the aims of leaders and followers coalesce to such an extent that it may be realistic to assume a harmonious relationship and a genuine convergence leading to agreed decisions (Bush, 2003: 78). Research participants agreed with this aspect of transformational leadership in terms of harmonious relationships that have been established at school. They stated that the principal and SMT are very supportive, approachable and amicable. This makes them strive for excellent in their

teaching. It is without doubt that if there is sound leadership in the school, some fruits will just surface. According to Pashardis (1994:15):

Teachers, other staff members, parents and citizens will be more involved in the schools. Improved communications skills will emerge between administrators, teachers, parents, community members and students. New teacher leaders will emerge throughout the school and the overall climate within the school will improve. In addition, schools will become more efficient and productive, in part because staff, students and community members help to identify ways of financial waste and improve the delivery of services.

As an aspect of an ideal leadership, one educator participant mentioned that:

Our principal allows us to say our views openly and freely. He invites us to participate in problem solving, in decision-making and general governance of the school (R-5).

This is what Bhengu (2005: 125) calls an open-participatory management approach where management is characterized by inclusion of all relevant stakeholders. He proceeds stating that in such an approach, structures for participation are established and educators receive staff development training from outside experts. Their participation in school management affairs is open, free and without hidden personal agendas by the principal. Educator participants agreed that the open participatory climate they work in makes them view decentralization or devolution as providing them with personal and institutional space to pursue creativity and innovations in the ways they do their school business.

Referring back to the statement made by R-5 on the manner in which they get ‘invited’ to raise their views, this displays that the school principal advocates an invitational leadership style. As a leader, one needs to communicate invitational messages to the people around them in order to develop a shared vision and plan for the school. According to Stoll and Fink (1996), invitational leadership is built on four basic premises, namely:

- Optimism – holding high expectations of others so that they can perform at their best level
- Respect – for the individuality and opinion of others
- Trust – a mutual belief in the honesty and integrity of the other person
- Intentionality – deliberately caring, supportive and encouraging.

All these ideas are exhibited by the school leadership of the school I researched, according to research participants. As a result, they said leadership in the school does not only emanate from the management but they as educators have assumed that role of leadership to their learners. Leadership skills that have been displayed by some learners prove that educators lead by good example.

In terms of general school governance, the SMT participants complained that the lack of full parental involvement hinders proper governance of the school. They stated that it is their principal's ideal to govern the school together with parents, but parents do not attend school meetings in big numbers. This is what was said by one SMT participant:

In most cases, communication of meeting dates, agendas, minutes, plans, ideas cannot be achieved in written language since this study has highlighted that illiteracy is the hindrance to parental involvement. In addition, transport and phone communications are difficult. This situation is aggravated by the fact that when you send a letter to parents via their children, children think that they are in trouble and that you want to discuss them and make their parents punish them, especially when those children are naughty at school (R-4).

Educator participants and governing body participants highlighted that there is a degree of participative governance of their school, but they meet only when there are problems to be solved. The SMT participants, on the contrary revealed that stakeholders attend meetings in big numbers as well as to avoid calling meetings in terms of emergencies, frequent meetings are held. They believed that their school leadership and governance is improving day by day.

## **4.11 Conclusion**

The research participants, namely educators, SMTs, RCL and SGB were all willing to participate in this study and they presented the data that were very helpful and relevant to the research question. From the research, it transpired that participative management has been established in the school under research. Benefits of participative management are, for example, good results, harmonious relationship among stakeholders, ownership of the school, common goals and shared vision, were among the positive things participants highlighted.

There were challenges, however, that seemed to be stumbling blocks in attaining full involvement of stakeholders. Challenges like parental apathy, illiteracy, and gender stereotypes were highlighted in the research. The research participants commended the leadership and general governance of the school. The issue which was raised by the SGBs that at times the principal makes decisions alone, and then conveyed to them what he has decided due to the urgent nature of certain matters is against the principles of participative management. Leaders should note that the classic argument that consensus in decision-making is time consuming is now inappropriate and it devalues participative management. Leaders should engage other stakeholders in decision making process no matter what. If they do so, there will be consensus. According to Kayser (1994) when consensus is fully comprehended and well facilitated, group members will feel that they personally contributed to the decision. The reward is that group members will have a greater ownership in the outcome, greater feelings of group unity, and higher commitment to carrying out the decision. Two leadership styles, namely, transformational leadership and invitational leadership were seen as dominant in the leadership structure of the school. These styles were reported by research participants as ideal for their school and they revealed that such leadership styles make them feel at home. Though most research participants raised the fact that meetings are only held when there are problems, the SMT stated that efforts are being made to promote the culture of attending meetings by all stakeholders, particularly the parents. Conducting this research was both interesting

and enlightening to the researcher and the research participants. The following chapter concludes the study. Here I present the key findings of this research, recommendations for further research, and a critique of the study.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

## **CONCLUSION**

This study has focused on the implementation of participative management and an investigation into the understanding of this concept in a rural school in the Pietermaritzburg district. Its main objective was to gain the stakeholders' perceptions of participative management. This chapter will comprise the following aspects: the main findings discussed in the preceding chapter, recommendations for practice, recommendation for the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, suggestions for further research and the limitations of this research will be highlighted.

### **5.1 Summary of main findings**

The research participants were asked different questions during focus group interviews. All questions posed during focus group interviews had only one common aspect: they were around the concept of participative management. Though all four groups had different questions, the data received show that all research participants had something in common.

Parents in the form of SGBs, learners in the form of RCLs, the management team and educators all revealed that involving stakeholders in the governance of the school is a crucial aspect. The three groups, namely educators, SMTs and SGBs all agreed on the idea of shared decision-making. Except for most RCLs, the other groups revealed that they participate in decision-making and that their participation in decision-making is an integral aspect of their school effectiveness.

The SMT appeared to be keen to involve other stakeholders in the process of decision-making. They revealed that even though there are decisions that are taken at senior management level, they ensure that staff members are aware of them, and at

times such decisions are subject to change if the staff members so feel. Educators also highlighted that shared decision-making is an integral aspect of participative management. They appeared to be happy with the process of decision-making. What transpired was that there are decisions that are made by all staff members together, that is, management members and educators. It remained evident, however, that some educator respondents considered the process of decision-making as an SMT responsibility.

The findings further revealed that learners are hardly involved in decision-making. In most cases it is only the chairperson of the RCL who gets an invitation from the principal, particularly to share decisions on pressing and problematic matters. Other learner representatives have not yet been empowered to participate in decision-making. This was confirmed by one of the SMT respondents who made it clear that “learners can be involved in decision-making to a limited extent. There are critical decisions we cannot make with children”. As highlighted in the previous chapter, one of Nongubo’s (2004) respondents made it clear that since children are not on the same level with staff members, it is hard to work with them.

The SMTs’ attitude towards learner involvement and participation in democratic governance is undoubtedly negative. They have not yet grasped the concept and they still regard learners as “children” not as “partners in education”. The SMT should be aware that learner participation in the governance of their school is not a choice, but it is law and has legal implications if not done accordingly.

Meetings regarding the general governance of the school are seldom held. It became clear that the school is aware of the need of frequent meetings between teachers, SMT, parents and learners. There seems to be a problem in that most parents do not respond positively to the invitations made by the school to the meetings. The members of the SMT acknowledged that they only call a meeting if there is a crisis. Under normal circumstances, there are no meetings held. Some SGB respondents also echoed this view. One of them complained that “at times, the principal would

call us to a special meeting which was unscheduled, and when we get there, we realize that the crisis he is calling us to settle could have been avoided by frequent meetings.” The SMT was grateful that the study made them aware of the significance of having frequent meetings and they promised to consider this issue seriously.

The notion of collegiality which is manifested in participative management was greatly appreciated by mainly SMT and educator respondents. They stated that it has brought a number of positive aspects in the general running of the school. They emphasized teamwork as the most crucial benefit that has accrued. Research respondents made it clear that working together as a team among stakeholders has resulted in academic excellence and a healthy environment. Educators felt strongly involved in planning and highly involved in specific duties as delegated by the SMT. This encourages teamwork to each and every member of staff. Since educators are involved by the school senior management in their areas of expertise, they feel comfortable to execute their duties and they know it works to the best interest of the team and the school as a whole.

Leadership was considered to be crucial in participative management. Respondents, particularly educators, appreciated the manner in which their school is led. Various leadership styles, especially transformational and invitational leadership styles seem to be dominant in a positive way. Educators revealed that the school principal exhibits good leadership traits that make them feel at home. They stated that he is a “fatherly figure” who has embraced “change” for the progress of the school. He gives advice where necessary. He shares his authority with his minors and makes each and every one of them feel worth to the school. Without such good leadership, the respondents said: there would be no happiness, no progress, no unity, but only disaster in the school. Leadership, in most cases, determines the future of the school. If there is no good leadership in place, participative management is likely to lack.

As part of the findings, aspects such as ownership of the school, commitment to the school, shared vision and values are considered crucial in the running of the school. The fact that educators felt that they are part of decision-making, either by being involved in decision-making meetings, or by being represented by staff members at governing body level, that was considered as one aspect which makes them take ownership of such decision and of the school.

The procedure of involvement, according to research participants, has even made community members take ownership of the school. The community members used to vandalise the school and even steal school property, but the respondents revealed that community members are very protective of their school.

The SGB respondents revealed a sensitive story of an ex-treasurer who collaborated with his chairperson in misusing school funds. The matter was dealt with by a number of parents who displayed a sense of ownership of the school and the culprits were jailed. The SGB respondents highlighted that this was done to show that even parents have taken ownership of the school. This incident also indicates a kind of ‘moral’ involvement of parents, further strengthening the fact that they feel ownership of the school. Moral buying-in is arguably one of the strongest forms of expressing belonging, and also suggests a kind of leadership Covey would refer to as “principle-centered (this has been outlined in chapter 4).

No matter how hard it was to deal with this situation, the SGBs felt obliged by their moral principles to follow the right course. Values-driven leadership is essential in creating an organizational integrity. It remains an undoubted fact that the SGB risked to solve the issue of the school’s lack of fiscal discipline. And this takes one’s self-esteem to enforce ethical behaviour as Peale and Blanchard (2000: 143) put it:

Both of us agree that ethical behaviour is related to self-esteem. We both believe that people who feel good about themselves have what it takes to withstand outside pressure and to do what is right rather than do what is

merely expedient, popular, or lucrative. We believe that a strong code of morality is the first step towards its success.

At the same time, commitment to the school appeared to be an aspect to be reckoned with. This is obviously due to the fact that relevant stakeholders have something in common. They have shared vision and values and they work towards achieving common goals. Working together has made the school effective in many aspects. The respondents stated that achieving this aspect is not easy. It is a great challenge in many schools, particularly, rural schools, for all parts to have something in common, but the respondents stated that all seem to have shared vision and they are committed towards achieving common goals.

As part of research findings, it became apparent that though the school has embraced participative management, there are still challenges, especially regarding full parental involvement. Illiteracy seemed to be the biggest stumbling block parents are trapped in. There is no easy communication and parents are not confident enough to partake in school matters. Male-domination seems to be a threat as well. Most female respondents revealed that at times their lack of active involvement is caused by societal gender stereotypes that make them succumb to male domination.

Distances between parents and the school, and between the school and teachers' homes, lack of transport and no communication lines all make it impossible for the school stakeholders to meet frequently. If these obstacles could be eliminated, the concept of participative management will be implemented to the fullest extent, and thus, other schools in the vicinity will tend to copy what the school I researched is doing.

This leads us to the recommendations for practice, recommendations for the KZN Department of Education and suggestions for further research.

## **5.2 Recommendations for practice**

It is significant that schools, particularly rural schools, devise strategies to actively involve parents, learners and educators in school management. The strategies should consider societal values, norms and traditions. Most rural learners are groomed and socialized not to engage critically and actively in many aspects. This is the same case with women. So, in order to ascertain that they get involved actively in school matters, the school policy and management strategies should be more responsive towards these issues.

Principals, as school leaders, should play an integral role in ensuring that transformational leadership prevails in their schools. This style of leadership will apparently introduce positive changes to the life of the school as a whole. In terms of leadership, decision-making processes, policy determination, problem-solving process and general governance of the school should be participatory in nature. This is in line with transformational leadership (or collegiality) style. Collegiality encourages commitment of organizational members and it sees them as people with capabilities. If implemented properly, transformational leadership will enhance participation and satisfaction to all organizational members.

The school leadership should consider training parents and learners, not only to involve them in SGBs or RCLs, but also in general school activities. This will be achieved when school principals improve communication with parents as well as work towards bridging the distance between teachers and learners, which has been caused by societal traditions. In order to reach parents and get them attending meetings, principals should address them in the language they understand and organize meetings at appropriate times in consultation with the employer (DoE) and also request the employer to provide transport for the parents and teachers who work far from their homes.

### **5.3 Recommendations for the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education**

The following recommendations may not only benefit the KZN Department of Education, but also the National Education Department because what prevails in this rural school in KZN may be rife in other provinces as well.

The National Department of Education stipulated the need for democratic governance in schools. This means active involvement of stakeholders in decision-making, policy formulations and other aspects. The DoE, however, has not yet practised what it is preaching in terms of democratic values and consultation. Decisions are imposed on schools even if they are hard to implement. This means that this issue should be thoroughly reviewed.

Since parents have shown a lack of interest in school matters, the DoE should devise a strategy where parents who are involved in the SGBs get some kind of honoraria for the hours they spend at school in meetings, or any activity. Such incentive will motivate them to be more active. If the DoE is reluctant to incur such a financial burden, it should consider devising a policy that all learners whose parents serve on the SGB for those particular years must automatically qualify for rebate of exemption from paying school fees. This will make parents become more interested in participating. We must bear in mind that most South Africans, especially rural dwellers, are unemployed and they are not used to voluntary services. The financial status of such rural dwellers who serve in the SGB may be understood by Marxists as “alienated workers” as referred to in the previous chapter.

Workshops or some type of thorough and intensive training is essential in order to equip parents who serve in the SGBs with necessary skills. Parents need to possess relevant knowledge, especially regarding educational policy and current educational affairs. The school principals should therefore come in after training provided by the

DoE and organize internal frequent workshops, targeting parents, learners, teachers and SMTs.

The democratic procedure of holding elections when appointing governing body members is fine, but it needs adjustment. It would be wise if, after nominations, candidates were subjected to an interview to assess how broad their scope is when it comes to school governance. This would develop the school governance in that people who serve there will have displayed competences relevant to their positions. This should be done by a special committee set up by the education department. After nominations, then interviews should be conducted instead of elections. Other factors when nominating, such as age, educational background and perhaps criminal records, should be considered. It is pointless to appoint aged people to the SGB when they have no energy and no interest in school affairs. It is even worse to involve people who have criminal records in school affairs, especially those related to financial matters. There must be an age restriction to candidates, for example, no one below the age of twenty five and no one above fifty five. The assumption here is that younger people are more enthusiastic and energetic compared to seniors.

So far, the maximum period of service in the SGB is three years. This period should be extended to at least five years. Many SGB members reach an expiry period of their service when they are just getting into it. They should be allowed more time to learn and experience things. This will enable them to learn from their past mistakes and strive for a better future. An organization like the school consists of individuals, and if we want schools to become learning organizations let us allow its individuals to learn and let us remember that it is a process, so it needs some time.

My last recommendation to the DoE is that the clause which stipulates that only parents/guardians who serve in the SGB should have their children enrolled in that particular school should be altered. Parents/guardians in the rural areas who are from literate and affluent families tend to send their children to urban schools. Rather than appointing someone to the SGB because his/her child goes to that school, parents

whose children go to other schools should be considered. At least a limited percentage of such parents should be considered, as long as they reside around the school and are willing to serve. Of course, the drawback with this kind of recommendation will be that such parents will be less enthusiastic to render their full service when their children are not going to benefit, but it is better than appointing people who are completely dysfunctional. Rural parents do not even understand the implications of the powers given to them by the legislation, unlike for instance, their counterparts in the ex-Model C schools. This is because their levels of education confine them to just appreciating what the school could be proposing or initiating without them leading the process, despite the fact that it is the area of their jurisdiction. This calls for the DoE to play a more active role in ensuring that there are enough ABET centers in the rural areas and that they are effective and efficient.

#### **5.4 Suggestions for further research**

This case study investigating the implementation and understanding of participative management in a rural school in the Pietermaritzburg district has revealed that there are potential areas to be further researched. The value of case studies is believed to lie in their ability to provide insights that may be pursued in subsequent studies. It is due to this fact that I have identified the following potential areas as still fertile ground for further research.

This study on participative management tended to research SGB parental representatives, the RCL, few educators and the SMTs. There is a need to focus on a broader scope of parental understanding of the concept as well as a bigger number of learners and educators, rather than so few members.

A number of researchers have explored participative management, but they have only focused on decision-making, thus under-estimating other significant aspects of what constitutes participative management. It is therefore crucial that more attention is given to other domains of participative management in the future studies.

The societal (environmental) forces which rural schools operate under, which are both positive and detrimental to participative management have been overlooked. Future researchers should consider such forces in their studies.

## **5.5 Limitations of the study**

This study deliberately left out the school principal during interviews. This was to allow participants to have more “freedom of expression”. The assumption behind this was that if he was part of the focus groups, other respondents would have difficulty in revealing particular information. As a result, the cost that was incurred was to obtain no information regarding the principal’s understanding and implementation of participative management.

Since this was a case study, it tended to focus on a single case and therefore it is not statistically generalisable. However, there are understandings of the notion of generalisability that it is more appropriate to interpretive research. According to Greene (1990: 236) within interpretivist circles, the challenge of knowledge accumulation has been primarily addressed by the general concept of transferability. This concept shifts the inquirer’s responsibility from one of demonstrating generalisability to one of providing sufficient description of the particular context studied. So that others may adequately judge the applicability or fit of the enquiry findings to their own context.

This study is aimed at understanding people’s perceptions in a naturalistic setting, which is the notion of the case study as outlined by Smith (1994: 6) who makes the following comment:

Case studies make a “drama of the commonplace”...In making it vivid, even creating suspense, the researcher appeals to more than one way of knowing, to more than one epistemology.

A generic challenge to all interpretive researchers is the need to triangulate. In this study I had to rely solely on focus group interviews; was no observation of meetings or school document analysis which further made the study incur more limitations. Nevertheless, the researcher achieved what he set out to achieve, in this case – to explore stakeholders' perceptions and understanding of participative management.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

The concept of participative management was explored thoroughly. It became evident that it has been embraced by a number of research participants, and that the school has started to reap some fruits of participative management.

There are some obstacles, however, that are still a hindrance to participative management. Educators, parents and learners have not yet fully embraced the concept due to a number of factors. More active interaction between teachers and parents is essential. Learners should be given frequent workshops to empower them to participate actively in management matters. All these stakeholders should work collaboratively to rise above all the environmental obstacles that hinder progress towards participative management.

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## APPENDIX A

# INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Governing Body

1. Why is there a Governing Body?
2. How satisfied are the parents' representatives with their body?
3. Who are the parents' representatives?
4. Why did they become representatives and what do they know about the regulations of the body?
5. What do parents expect from their participation in the body?
6. What do they think the consequences of the body are for the school?
7. How often does the body meet? How do members get invited to the meeting?
8. What do you think is your role in management meetings? To what extent are your views heard?
9. To what extent do you influence decision-making?
10. How can active involvement of parents in the Governing Body be improved?
11. How can you describe your relationship with the principal?

### School Management Team

1. What is your understanding of the purpose of staff meetings?
2. How often do you have meetings and what are the factors that make you hold meetings?
3. What is the level of involvement in decision-making of the following stakeholders, namely: Teachers, Learners, and Parents?
4. How do you plan for each academic year? Who is involved and how?
5. How can you describe your relationship with the principal?
6. What is your understanding of participative management?
7. What do you think are the benefits of participative management?

8. Can you think of specific benefits (fruits) that your school has reaped particularly from participative management?

### **Representative Council of Learners**

1. How did you become learner representatives?
2. Are you happy with the way you represent other learners?
3. Do you feel that the learners you represent are satisfied with your representative? How do you know?
4. What are your roles in the school management?
5. How does the school management view your roles?
6. What have you done so far to improve the school management?
7. Where do you stand when it comes to decision-making?

### **Educators**

1. How often do you contribute towards general running of the school?
2. Do you think that you have any role to play in leadership and management of the school? Explain.
3. What is your relationship with the following stakeholders?
  - 3.1 School Principal
  - 3.2 School Management Team
  - 3.3 Learners and the RCL
  - 3.4 Parents (how and when do you meet with parents?)
4. How would you evaluate/rate your school management? Is the school poorly or effectively managed? Explain.