

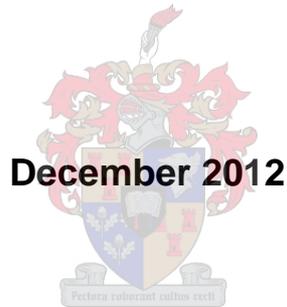
# **NEW PRINCIPALS AS AGENTS OF CHANGE**

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Stellenbosch University**

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## DECLARATION

I declare that "New principals as agents of change" is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

**Signature:** .....

**Sydney Williams**

**Date: August 2012**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the critical role of the new principal as agent of change. “New principal” in this context is a principal who has been at a specific school for between one and five years. He or she may have been promoted from a post at the same school or have been a principal at another school beforehand. The thesis highlights the tangible changes these principals made during their time at these schools, from raising the morale of educators, to improving academic results of learners, to increasing the level of involvement of parents as well as community members.

The literature survey focuses on change in school contexts where urgent and far reaching change is necessary. It shows how complex the process is and the various stages that are involved. The literature underlines that change and resistance are sides of the same coin. It seems that successful change requires that the principal as an agent and initiator of change has a clear set of strategies to handle the inevitable resistance to the process. The literature review also explores the different stages of resistance and the considerations necessary to ensure that the change process leads to a peaceful conclusion that benefits the school as a whole.

The main collection instrument used in this qualitative research is a semi-structured interview on the theme of change. The study uses the narratives of four principals, two from secondary schools and two from primary schools from dysfunctional and low-performing schools that emerged, to explore the reasons for their success. Findings show all these ‘new’ principals were at schools affected by socio-economic factors that had a negative effect on the academic results of learners. The attempts these principals made were initially met with resistance, particularly from educators who had been at the school for some time, who did not see any need to make changes at the school. It seems the findings show that the principals in this study always had an appropriate strategy to deal with the situations that arose. This makes them truly transformational leaders, i.e. leaders with the necessary expertise who can enable their followers to perform better than they thought they could and work for the good of the institution rather than their own self-interest. These are the type of leaders that schools need to make our education system as effective as it needs to be.

In the interests of making dysfunctional or poorly performing schools a better place of teaching and learning for all learners and educators, further research should build on the work done here. Particular attention should be given to the management style of effective school such as the new principals at these particular schools. This will provide us with better academic “lenses” to observe the necessary passion and commitment with which these changes are made, and the ways in which principals are able to endure and overcome any resistance to change.

### Opsomming

Hierdie tesis fokus op die kritieke rol van die “nuwe prinsipaal (skoolhoof) as agent van verandering”. “Nuwe prinsipaal” in hierdie konteks bedoel prinsipaal is n persoon wat tussen een en vyf jaar by n spesifieke skool was. Hierdie persoon kan in hierdie pos as

prinsipaal by hul huidige skool bevorder geword het, of as prinsipaal by n ander skool in die pos as prinsipaal gewerk het. Hierdie tesis bring na vore die sigbare veranderings wat hierdie prinsipale aangebring het gedurende hul termyn by hierdie skole, van die opheffing van die moreel van onderwysers tot die verbetering van die akademiese uitslae van leerders, tot beter betrokkenheid van ouers en gemeenskaplede by die skool.

Die literere navorsing fokus op verandering binne die skool konteks waar dringend en vergaande verandering n noodsaaklikheid geword het. Dit bewys die komplekse aard en die verskillende stadiums verbind daarmee. Die literetier beklemtoon die feit dat verandering en weerstand twee kante van dieselfde muntstuk is (gaan saam). Dit blyk suksesvolle veranderings verg van die prinsipaal as agent en inisieerder van verandering, duidelike strategie om die onafwendbare of onvoorspelbare weerstand te bestuur in die proses. Die literere oorsig ondersoek die verskillende stadiums van weerstand endie nodige vermoens om die proses van verandering te ondersteun, en tot voordeel van die skool as geheel te bevoordeel.

Die vernaamste instrument wat in die kwalitatiewe navorsing gebruik is, was n semi-struktuere onderhoud gebaseer op die tema van verandering. Hierdie studie gebruik die verhalende aard van die vier prinsipale, twee van sekondere skole, en twee van primere skole, almal van disfunktionele en lae-voerende skole, wat die rede vir hul sukses bepaal het. Bevindings wys dat al die “nuwe prinsipale” by skole was wat beïnvloed was deur sosio-ekonomiese faktore wat n negatiewe uitwerking gehad het op die akademiese uitslae van leerders. Die pogings van die prinsipale was aanvanklik met weerstand gepaard gegaan, veral van opvoeders wat vir n aantal jare by die skool was, en nie die nodigheid vir veranderings gesien het nie. Bevindings in die studie toon dat die prinsipale altyd gereed was met die gepaste strategie om die situasie te hanteer. Die het van hulle ware transformele leiers gemaak, m.a.w. leiers met die nodige vaardighede, wat hulle in staat gestel het om hulle volgelinge bemagtig het om beter te doen as wat hulle gedink het hulle in staat was, en gewerk het tot die voordeel van die skool as instansie en nie tot hulle eie belange as prinsipale nie.

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n die belange en voordeel om van disfunktionele of swak akademiese skole n beter plek van onderig en opvoeding vir alle leerders en opvoeders te maak, word voorgestel dat verder navorsing. Daar moet veral gefokus word op, die bestuursstyl van geaffekteerde skole soos die nuwe prinsipale van hierdie spesifieke skole. Dit sal ons met beter

akademiese lense toerus om die nodige passie en toegewydheid te observer waarmee hierdie veranderings gemaak was, en die maniere waarmee die prinsipale gevolhard het teen die stryd om weerstand teen te staan in die proses tot verandering.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND DESIGN

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the investigation into how newly-appointed school principals were able to **change** the culture of teaching and learning at particular schools within a specific time frame. It also looks at the factors like resistance that can have a negative impact on the change process, and how principals can address them. In addition, the methods used during the research process are outlined, including how the data for the research project were collected and then analysed.

### 1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question was: How do new school principals, as agents of change, get staff and the community involved in the sustainable academic performance of schools? There were two sub-questions:

- What type of resistance do new principals have to deal with in the change process?
- How do new principals deal with the resistance they encounter during the change process?

### 1.3 AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The central aim of this research was to determine the extent to which new school principals as the agents of change were able to transform the academic results at their particular schools.

### 1.4 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

During my teaching experience at different schools, I discovered that certain schools do all they can to entrench a traditional academic approach. This is the approach that they trust and it informs their teaching and learning style. The principal, especially one who has been newly appointed to an institution, soon recognises that the staff members are divided into two camps. Members of the old guard (the teachers who have been at the school for a number of years) are not willing to adopt new teaching styles – not even ones that are

better or more productive. The new guard, the teachers that are relatively new at the school, tend to be more creative and adaptable. These new teachers are recent graduates with new and innovative ideas.

It is important for the changes principals initiate at certain schools not to be viewed as a threat to learners and staff. Instead, the changes should be seen as meeting the need for a healthier approach to teaching and learning at the school. When one considers some of the problems that schools in our country are faced with, it becomes evident that principals, acting as agents of change, have a number of urgent problems to address. Two are the need to raise the pass rate and the need to get learners to develop a sense of responsibility for their own future. It is important to know what is needed to establish a culture of teaching and learning in these schools so principals are able to develop sustainable ways of achieving success.

Naidu, Joubert, Mestry, Mosogo and Nob (2008:285) argue that changing contexts, especially in South Africa, demand educational leadership and management development. The school managers are faced with the challenge of maintaining high quality education for all, which is especially difficult in rural or township areas to which learners migrate in significant numbers from areas where there is economic hardship. In many cases the level of these learners adds to the difficulty of providing quality of education for all. It is thus extremely challenging for township schools that have been affected by migration, as well as other poorly performing schools, to provide quality education that is sustainable.

Dealing with these challenges requires a new understanding of management roles as well as the development of management competencies of staff at all levels in schools. Fataar (2009) points out how important it is for school principals to adapt to the particular needs of the school and the surrounding area. Principals should become aware of and sensitive to the social dynamics of the townships where their schools are located, so they can make changes that are to the advantage of the learners and that will serve the interests of the community.

Changes are continually occurring in all sectors of a rapidly developing society. The education sector, with the school at its centre, is no exception. The school has to ensure the future of the nation. The education system in South Africa, along with all sectors of society, needs to change to be really effective and to be comparable to education systems in the rest of the world. Since the inception of the democratic government in 1994, South

Africa has focused on transforming its educational legacy. One example of this is that the number of different racially-based curriculums has given way to one non-racial, democratic curriculum for all learners. However, school principals face the huge task of constantly having to change the academic environment of the school' to comply with the rapidly changing curriculum policies. These changes should be made with the vision that the education should unlock the full potential of all learners so they can meet the needs and demands of an ever-changing society. Principals therefore have to make changes that make effective teaching and learning possible.

The results of the international comparative research study done by Howie (2004:149) on the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS) in 1995 are disquieting. For the first time an international measuring instrument had been used to assess South African learners. South African learners' average scores were far below those of learners in other developing countries, including some in Africa. This makes it imperative for school management to change.

The countries with the highest scores, including some developing ones, have a system where principals are constantly rotating. In first world countries, for instance, principals are appointed on a three to five year performance contract to encourage quality education. This is the route which the national education department proposes in its occupational specific dispensation (OSD). They intend giving school managers and deputies an all-inclusive salary package which requires them to sign a performance agreement. However, the greatest obstacle to this is the teachers' unions. I have heard them argue that the OSD would not work because principals cannot be held responsible for unsuccessful learners. It may be true that the principal, and the staff for that matter, cannot be held directly responsible for learners' failure, but we should be asking them to give an account of the effort they have made to create a positive learning environment for learners to succeed at school. If a few individuals as new principals at schools in different levels of society, regardless of whether they are at poorly-resourced or well-resourced schools have been able to raise the moral at their schools, and then surely others should be able to follow their lead and make the adjustments needed to achieve success.

#### **1.4.1 The Principal and Change**

Earley and Weindling (2004), who researched the tenure and performance of new school

principals for twenty years, found that it is not advisable for principals to stay at one school until the end of their career. It seems that principals move through stages of change over an average of about seven years. After reaching their peak, they move back to where they started at the same school. The majority of the respondents would prefer to move on to another “new” school so they can be effective agents of change in a place where change is needed. Some of the other respondents in the study suggested that they serve in an advisory capacity to help with change in schools that are struggling to make headway.

In their study “Do School Leaders [i.e. Principals], have a shelf life?” Earley and Weindling (2004) refer to the final stage as the “plateau out” stage or time for principals to move on to the next school. There is a growing body of evidence that shows that long periods in the same post as principal lead to a drop in levels of job satisfaction and performance.

School principals, particularly new ones, should constantly be aware that change creates the educational landscape for the future of a society. For many decades now, the pace of change in schools has been speeding up. This has left an indelible effect on the climate, culture and its decision-making process of the school. School principals or managers of schools (as they are termed these days) generally accept that change is natural and essential to the health and well-being of educational institutions. Principals, especially the new or younger ones, promote change that is embedded in the culture of the institution, while other individuals (the older ones) see change as being damaging to or even fatal for their particular institutions (Brower & Balch, 2005:95). This is why I intend investigating how new principals manage and lead change in the face of resistance.

Change is complex. It is often linked to a whole range of emotions, for instance: anger at the imposition of change and the denial of personal autonomy, sorrow because of the sense of loss of the old and comfortable, and anxiety about the uncertainties that the change brings (James & Connolly, 2000:16). School principals need to take account of this when embarking on the road to change at the different state institutions. It is imperative for principals to weigh the pros and cons of their decisions so they can make well-informed decisions. Furthermore, because people are not very happy when their comfort zone is threatened, principals sometimes will have to pay the price of becoming unpopular for the sake of cultivating an environment in which teaching and learning can thrive.

James and Connolly (2000: 19) identify the main reasons that agents of change, in this case the new principals, face resistance:

- 1) Lack of trust; people resist change because they do not trust the motives of those proposing it. They feel the changes have hidden and serious consequences that will only become apparent later.
- 2) People believe that change is unnecessary. When there is no clear evidence that there is a need for change resistance will be high
- 3) Changes feasible. Although the need for change may be recognised, resistance to it may be justified on the grounds that the proposed change will not work.
- 4) Proposed change is likely to be resisted if it threatens the job security of those affected by it. This threat could be perceived in a number of ways, like making existing skills and particular posts redundant, and may affect future job security.

New principals need to remain rational in dealing with those that resist. They should communicate with those who oppose the change and get to the root of their reasons for opposition by giving them a chance to speak openly about their fear of or their dissatisfaction with the change; by clarifying information and providing accurate feedback on how the change process will be implemented; and by emphasising the positive consequences of the change and how the individual or group will benefit. They should not waste time on rational analysis of why change is good and thus keeping resisters involved in face-to-face contact with supporters. This would mean that proponents have to empathise with opponents, recognise valid objections and relieve unnecessary fears, and always maintain a climate of trust, support and confidence (Hatch, 2009:445).

The principal as the agent of change should realise that change often provokes resistance. According to Dubrin (2004:232), resistance is an effort to influence the attempt, to stonewall the request, or to find ways either not to comply or to do a poor job. It also includes offering excuses why the task cannot be carried out, procrastination and outright refusal to perform a certain task. In any profession, but especially in the education sector, there are many reasons for resistance to change. Some teachers will argue socio-economic issues in township life constrain changes or that things will not work out as planned by the principal. Yet, the same people hope for better academic results in all grades of the school, specifically at matriculation level.

In education there is both change in the process and change in the way in which teachers (consciously and unconsciously) manage the emotional dimensions of the process in the classroom. The situation is made even worse because change that is initiated to improve

learner achievement is likely to involve taking risks. At a fundamental level this poses a risk to the changes in the lives of the learners for which the school principal and the rest of the staff are responsible (James & Connolly, 2000:20). These risks are the fundamental dilemmas in education that principals face. They need to weigh up decisions before making changes. Changes should not be made simply for the sake of change, but should yield fruit in the end. Making changes also means challenging certain deeply rooted traditions. The following comments reflect this: “We have been teaching and running the school like this for decades, why do you as new principal suddenly want to come make changes?” or “We have tried this before and it did not work. What guarantee can you give that you will succeed with your changes?”

Principals are expected to create a positive and healthy work environment for staff in order to get the best out of them. They should be sensitive to the needs and concerns of others and deal tactfully with others in emotionally stressful situations or during conflict. Principals should know which information to communicate and to whom, and the right time to do it. They should be aware of the level involved and that they are dealing with learners, parents and community members with varying ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. It will always build confidence in the school if principals act and speak in a very professional and humane way to those they deal with every day, even with those that are sometimes not so easy to deal with. Therefore, in some cases, principals need to change their approach to be successful.

If principals are to be effective agents of change, they have to be aware that the teacher, learner and the parent body play a vital role in the learner’s success. The schools that perform better are the ones where the principals lean heavily on the help of parents, especially those mothers that are at home during the day. These parents help the teacher, especially those who have large classes, to deal with learners that struggle with reading. Parents become an extension of the hand of many teachers in the classroom (Hopkins, 2001: 48). Parents also accompany learners on school outings and even act as sports coaches at primary schools. Obtaining additional help of this kind entirely depends on whether the principal recognises its value and is prepared to use it. There are schools in South Africa even amongst poor communities that have proved that when parents take pride in their school and extend a helping hand, the desired changes are speeded up. The other strong bodies that play a major role in a school’s day-to-day functioning are community forums, i.e. school committees that include members of the community. They

are made up of parent groups (those not working during the day), local businesses, and community-based groups in the form of sport clubs. Together these groups play major roles in the welfare of the school. Their help could take the form of financial or moral support or sport clubs or an offer by clubs to send skilful players to coach learners or to share equipment with them. The more involved community forums become with the school, the prouder they begin to feel. In a sense, the community forums are shareholders in the institution that helps their children learn.

The word “turnaround” has become the new buzzword in education in America, and I would like to see that happen here too. The principal, as the agent of change, should understand that school turnaround is quite different from school improvement which most principals are familiar with. Firstly, there should be a focus on resources, everything from personnel to technological aspects to using time wisely or what is termed as quality time management (QTM) (Salmonowicz, 2009: 154). In most cases learners in schools marked for turnaround were far behind academically and lacked technological resources. Since the turnaround process could not be done within the normal school day, on the initiative of the principal, the teachers created a longer school day for learners who needed more help. At certain schools, principals invited the parents of these learners to the school and asked them to give their written consent to getting them to school for a few hours on Saturdays. This made it possible for the principal and the staff to fulfil their chief role, namely to improve teaching and learning.

## **1.5 PRINCIPALS AS LEADERS**

This study focused its analytical lens on how school managers as agents of change make a difference at schools as state institutions.

The works of Brower and Balch (2005), Durrant and Holden (2006), Dallin and Rolf (1995) MacBeath (1998) and Naidu *et al.* (2008) were especially useful in marking out the conceptual terrain of this proposed study. Brower and Balch (2005) stress the fact that there is a common misconception that leaders or managers can change people. Many recognise that change can only occur when individuals themselves change. This implies that effective leaders or managers build capacity within an institution so the people in it can change. This is the main assumption of this study, which focuses on the strategies that school principals used to make it possible for the people involved to change and thus introduce quality education.

According to Durrant and Holden (2006:421), most commentators acknowledge that the education system worldwide is subject to rapid, constant and often unsettling change. They attribute the sense of disorientation experienced to the irony of applying rational modernist approaches to schooling in a globalised, post-modern world. They argue that those involved in managerial positions in education are caught up in a shift from a culture of certainty to a culture of uncertainty. These are the global factors that all school managers need to deal with. One of the challenges they face is to identify the factors that will promote the interests of a school in a particular area and situation.

Bennet, Crawford and Riches (2002:112) refer to the three factors Fullan identified as being vital for successful change. Firstly, the process is more effective when it is focused on the most important needs. Schools are faced with overloaded improvement agendas; therefore an identified need has to be weighed against other needs. Secondly, the precise nature of the change should be clear. Even when teachers agree that some kind of change is necessary in an area of the curriculum or the school as a whole, exactly what they should do differently may not be clear. For that reason, new or revised curriculum guidelines may be dismissed by some teachers on the grounds that they are already doing that. Thirdly, the changes required are very complex. Many changes require a sophisticated array of activities, structures, teaching strategies and philosophical understanding if effective implementation is to be achieved.

Change often provokes resistance. This kind of generalised resistance stems from a fear of losing the comfort of the familiar, no matter how inadequate it is. People cling to the comfort of the present in the face of uncertainty about the consequences of change. Change in educational institutions can involve a change in the anxiety-containing processes. If the curriculum is changed or a new teaching method is imposed, routines have to be changed and a new set has to be put in place to act as an emotional container (James&Connolly, 2000:17). This is likely when, for example, teachers are asked to teach outside their subject area, or to use computers in their teaching when they are unfamiliar with them. Working with resistance to change is one of the key leadership tasks which new principals have to undertake as an agent of change.

Resistance to change in organisations, to which schools are no exception, is often cited as a reason for difficulty in implementing and the failure of change initiatives. In their international research, Deloitte and Touche (cited in Erwin and Garman, 2010) discovered

this as the key factor in over 500 organisations. Erwin and Garman (2010) found members of organisations experienced four stages during the change process. The first is denial or refusal to really believe that change will be implemented. In my view, staff members are very likely to react strongly to a new principal's proposed change. The second stage is resistance in the form of avoiding participation, hoping that the implementation will never happen or that if it happens that it will be a failure, thus proving the new leader wrong. The third, one of the most important in the change process, is the staff's experimentation with new behaviours to see how this new method of doing things will affect their personality in their work environment. The fourth is the stage of commitment when the staff members realise that accepting and embracing change, especially when it serves to the good of a positive and healthy work environment, leads to better teaching and learning at their institution (Erwin & Garman, 2010: 40).

Dallin and Rolf (1995:321) write about the Institutional Developments Programme (IDP) that is built on a number of assumptions about schools as organisations, the way changes happen in schools, and the way young people learn. They highlight the fact that changes in the culture of an organisation starts with people—the way they act, alone and together. They suggest two parallel strategies that need to be worked on simultaneously:

1. Changes at individual level to help the individual teacher to overcome the aspects of the school culture that hinder personal growth and learning and the development of a new teacher role
2. Changes at group and intergroup level to enable individuals to function together within operational work units.

These suggestions by Dallin and Rolf are inter-linked in the effective running of every state institution. Again it boils down to how the different school managers can make changes that benefit the school.

Changes in the demographic profile in South Africa as a whole, as well as in schools, will have a particular impact on education in the country. The forces of change within the school environment need to be identified and classified in terms of the individuals, the groups and their organisational levels. Schools could have stagnated over the years. They have used the same practice over the years without much success, and most important, not even realising this. The appointment of a new principal with a different personality and management style is often the catalyst for positive and effective change in these schools

(Heystek, Nieman, Van Rooyen, Mosoge and Bipath (2008: 31). Most of the changes in education, such as a new curriculum for schools, changes in school design and structure, occur on an organisational level and have a ripple effect on schools. These changes have a major effect on interpersonal relationships, authority relationships, and ultimately attitudes and behaviour. Members of the staff respond more favourably and become more committed when they are invited to engage in the change process.

In their research on effective school leaders, Crossley and Corbyn (2006) discovered that strong leadership from the principal was a characteristic feature of all schools. The outstanding schools were the ones where principals were new in their positions, between three to six years at the most. They gave the school the impetus needed to develop and improve the quality of the teaching and learning environment for pupils in their respective schools. The other noteworthy factor was that these new principals were very experienced teachers that brought with them many years of management experience on a lower level which they were able to use in their new posts as principals. Fink, an experienced principal, who is referred to in Crossley and Corbyn (2006) says that “successful leaders use a variety of strategies and styles depending on what it takes to create an environment for learning, and they actively search out the many good practices that are out there, and adapt them to their particular context”.

Other authors such as Fidler and Atton (2004, cited in Earley & Weindling, 2004) refer to the summit of the new principal's tenure as the stage when they “plateau out” meaning a time to change so they can leave their present post on a successful and high note. There is a growing body of evidence that shows that long periods in the same post lead to deterioration, both in levels of job satisfaction and job performance. In answer to the question as to what do principals think is the period regarded as the most reasonable time for them to be in their posts, the most common response was between four and ten years, with many seeing seven years as about the right length of time. Two-thirds of the respondents expressed the need to start afresh somewhere else, either as new principals in building up struggling schools, or to serve in advisory capacities to other principals (Earley & Weindling, 2004). This shows their belief that the principal must not be in one post too long if the school is to sustain the desired high levels of performance.

### **1.5.1 Principals and Teams**

Studies by Erwin and Garman (2010) found that effective and good communication from

management was associated with positive attitudes to change. When the idea of possible change in the organisation was not properly communicated or people do not understand it clearly, negative attitudes and resistance to change were a great problem. It would be in the best interest of both the new principal as the effective agent of change and fellow teachers to make it a priority to ensure that the true reason for the change process is communicated clearly. It would be even better to incorporate some ideas from the staff to apply change more effectively. Lewis (2006) found the higher the perceived quality of implementation information (i.e. the better people are informed) the less the resistance to change.

Oreg (2006) found that a lack of trust in managers as the change agents was also another significant contributing factor in resistance to change. This means that the manager has to have the ability to manage and lead the change process in the interest of the organisation and all its members. Oreg (2006) found that reports of anger, frustration and anxiety, increased action against the change initiative, and strong doubts about whether or not management was able to make informed decisions were strongly related to a lack of trust in management. New principals will always have to face challenges when they try to change a school that is not performing at its best. It will not be very easy for new leaders to gain the trust of the staff. It becomes a matter of their needing to “sell themselves” properly so staff will believe that they can make the successful change they profess to be able to.

Curry, Lowey and Loftus (2010) looked at the link between change in the educational field at specific schools and how effectively leadership (principals) were able to create better teaching and learning environment in schools. They highlight three factors linked to change. Firstly, there should be mobilization where the system is prepared for change. This means the problem that stands in the way of achievements of goals has been identified and the leader has a clear vision that describes the way, the goal set will be achieved. Secondly, the solution to the problem that was identified in the mobilization period needs to be implemented. An example of this is the *No Child Left behind* legislation where the state measured the success of schools and interventions were put in place where necessary. Thirdly, organizational changes that were made have to be put in place during the institutionalisation phase (Curry *et al.*, 2010).

MacBeath (1998:263) argues that the accommodation of change, biologically and psychologically, will be more difficult for some people than others. Therefore natural

selection in the twenty-first century environment will favour those who not only know how to cope with change, but also thrive on it and are one step ahead of it. The logic of this argument for education managers suggests a natural selection of leaders requiring people who are change-friendly and agents of change. When MacBeath's research was conducted, education experts were cautious in their use of the word change. They used the term development, because it was less threatening to teachers.

In her study, Christie (2001) discovered that the schools that stood out as being highly functional were the schools with strong principals supported by a good management team and a very dedicated staff. The principal's management style included some sense of accountability to staff, and at least some degree of staff consultation and participation. Many of these schools had management teams working alongside principals. The majority of the principals stressed the importance of regularly motivating staff and learners. This motivation became a key factor for success. A striking feature in almost all the schools in the study was that they viewed teaching and learning as their primary purpose and the major focus of their attention. All the schools had educational visions that could be clearly articulated by principal, staff and learners. The research team concluded that these characteristics of success against the odds in disadvantaged schools in South Africa were all driven by dedicated and visionary principals.

Principals should be equipped to handle those staff members resisting change, whether as an individual or as a group. Resistance to change is normal because any change even change that is beneficial, requires psychological adjustments by the change target since it may change the target's work role and job security. Some resistance to change, however, results from the misunderstanding of the process of change. This resistance can be avoided or lessened if the principal gives detailed information about the cause, purpose, method, design and schedule for the process well in advance. Another possible cause of resistance is the personality or behaviour of the principal: a principal that is unable to inspire respect or trust meets with greater resistance than a more personable or inspiring principal (Gillies, 1996: 459).

Principals as agents of change should remember that whenever changes are made, there is the potential for conflict. Principals have to handle situations in which there is conflict between them and a fellow staff member, but they may also at times have to resolve conflict among subordinates. Conflict is unavoidable, but it can also be a valuable part of life. It helps to ensure that different possibilities are properly considered and further

possible courses of action may be generated as a result. Most conflicts have both rational and emotional components and lie somewhere along a spectrum between genuine conflict of interest on the one hand and personality clashes on the other. Whatever the reason or the cause of the conflict may be, it is important that it should be resolved. If this conflict is not resolved, there could be unhealthy consequences for both parties concerned or for the organisation, which in this case is the school. The principal should solve the conflict by listening empathetically to both parties, focusing on issues and facts and avoiding personalizing the conflict or looking for trade-offs (such as, “Is there something that I can concede to the other party that means more to them than it ‘costs’ me?”) (Everard, Morris & Wilson, 2006:99).

The principal, as the team leader of the staff, is expected to create, seek and encourage the involvement of team members. This implies modelling and encouraging the behaviours that enable the group to complete the task. Principals should develop a vision and establish clear goals. They should provide direction as to how they will achieve the stated goals, encourage the rest of the staff to contribute to goal achievement and secure commitment to a course of action from other individuals within the group (Flanary, 2009:185).

Flanary (2009) discovered that the people within the school have to change before it is possible to change it, or to increase its capacity to produce greater results. School change begins with changes in the principal, the deputy principals and the rest of the staff. These individuals must develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that would give them the capacity to promote better teaching and learning.

Flanary (2009:148) provides a few strategies of how to start building capacity for the principal and fellow staff members:

- Have a clear vision and use the leadership to improve the schools intangibles. A principal’s vision drives a school’s performance and a school’s culture echoes the principal’s expectations. It is important to express a vision verbally and in writing. The new vision for the school should be done in conjunction with the rest of the staff, and put over professionally to eliminate all confusion.
- Reverse the perception that time is a constant and achievement as a variable to viewing time as a variable and achievement as a constant.
- Convey to the school community the urgency of teaching each learner at a higher level. Without the principal’s commitment it is very unlikely that teachers will

understand the importance of teaching each learner at a higher level. Until the principal changes what teachers do in their classroom, there will not be any real change.

Partnerships with parents and the community are regarded as the key to improving pupil motivation and achievement, while service to and the involvement of the public reflects the broader responsibility of the school to promote education within communities and societies (Ranson, 2004:8). Principals should welcome parents into the life of the school as partners. They should establish a new style in which schools will listen and respond to parents, because teachers also need to listen, learn and respect. By doing this the great mystique about teacher autonomy is unmasked (Ranson, 2004:9). The principal should get parents involved in developing a shared understanding of the curriculum. This would establish a closer match of understanding what is intended and how it is to be pursued and achieved.

The various elements discussed in this framework will make it possible to use analytical lenses to examine the school manager as the agent of change.

## **1.6 METHODOLOGY**

In this research study, I focused on new principals who had been in their posts for a maximum of five years. They were either new to the school, or were principals at the school where they taught. I focused mainly on schools in areas such as Kuils River and Kraaifontein in the Northern suburbs of Cape Town where certain new principals had been successful in raising the average marks of learners significantly. The reason that I targeted schools in these areas is that their socio-economic circumstances are similar. Schools in these areas are poorly resourced. For example, the lack of libraries there means that learners need to go to great lengths to be able to do their homework properly or do research for their various learning areas. These issues have both a direct and indirect effect on the negative school culture in the area.

Schools in these areas accommodate a diversity of learners from different backgrounds and cultures. The post-apartheid period has led to numerous developments in these areas such as the houses built by the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). This has brought people from all over the country, and even from beyond our borders, into these areas. There is therefore an influx of different people with different languages that all have to be accommodated in the schools in this area. My research investigated the extent

to which principals have been able to make the necessary changes in the schools' programmes to effectively accommodate these learners, including making it possible for them to be successful in their matriculation examinations. My view is that principals have to take social issues into account but they cannot use them as an excuse for not being successful.

The conceptual focus of the study is how effective new principals as agents of change are at state institutions. The primary research unit of the study was thus the different school principals at schools in the delineated area of my research. I purposively selected four school principals, two at primary schools and two at secondary schools. The reason for selecting both primary and secondary schools was to determine if different strategies were used to get the desired results. The learners in these schools have working class parents and they stay in the areas. Most of these learners face social challenges like drugs, gangs, teenage pregnancy and parents with high unemployment rates.

The primary focus of my research will be to determine how a principal in an under-resourced school in an area with a number of social challenges can change a low or poor performing school into an almost top performing school, while others in the same environment are not able to do so.

Qualitative research methodology was employed in this study. I used in-depth semi-structured interviews which focused on the new principal as the agent of change at the school. The epistemological nature of qualitative research requires an interpretative, naturalist approach, so the principals were studied in their everyday work environment. I also interviewed the members of the governing body of these schools (which included some parents) to determine whether the members of the community were also aware of that the school had changed. It was also advisable to interview the community members, so that both the principal and the researcher could have a better view of how the school was seen through the eyes of the community. The interview with some of the parents was also valuable. My interviews also included some of the teachers in senior management, especially those that had been at the school for more than ten years. They needed to be objective in order to get a true reflection of how change led by the new principal had materialised. These in-depth interviews produced personal accounts of the individual dynamics of each of the four school principals while facing different issues and demands and how successfully they handled them.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

# **FACTORS THAT PLAY A MAJOR ROLE IN THE CHANGE PROCESS**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter explores the ways that key authors have conceptualised the different types of change. Specific attention is given to the factors that play a major role in the change process.

The focus is on the principal as an agent of change, with particular attention given to the new principal. The different types of resistance to change and how these can be managed in the change process are also discussed.

### **2.2 CONCEPTUALISING CHANGE**

The *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary* (2010) defines change “as a process of replacing something old with something new, different, or even more effective than the previous system that was in place before the change was made”. Therefore the principal as change agent has to have a fully worked out and tried and tested system and to feel convinced it will work at that particular school.

The word ‘change’ is both a noun and a verb; used as a noun, ‘change’ refers to an alteration, while the verb change refers to the process that brings about an alteration. Change as a process should be seen as a means of transition to a different end or of moving away from one system to a more effective one. This definition forces the change agent to contrast the throughput, output and feedback loops of the present system with the new system that is to replace it (Saunders, 2000:451). Change is only worth undertaking if the process will be effective and if there is evidence that it will be successful in the end.

Although it is not always welcome, change is inevitable if there is to be growth. Even when planned, it can often be threatening because it produces anxiety and fear of the unknown. The process of making something different from what it was results in a sense of the loss

of the status quo. Consequently, those who manage or initiate change often encounter resistance from those experiencing a sense of unease and, possibly symptoms of anxiety and grief (Sullivan & Decker, 2000:428). Furthermore, change in any organisation or institution, and the field of education is no exception, is not popular. This means that the new principal as a change agent has to have a great deal of courage and daring. Introducing change in schools where there is a long-standing tradition or an embedded culture which has been to the detriment of the institution is like disturbing bees in a beehive. The change agent must be able to take the initial flack from the staff in the knowledge that what he or she is doing is for the good of the school as a whole.

McMillan (2008) refers to a “deep-level change or transformation that describes the kind of change that radically transforms people and their organisations”. He also refers to this as second order change and double-loop learning, meaning that people have had to learn not only to do things differently but also to think and behave significantly differently. Some writers see it as “a self-renewing change which affects the structures of organisations as well”. This type of deep-change would be a valuable tool for any principal who has to be an agent of change, but it would be especially useful one for the new principal to use to make deep-rooted change in the structures of the school. As a result, staff and learners, especially, would probably need to undergo a complete paradigm shift for the future benefit of the institution. Achieving this kind of change could seem like wishful thinking, but the dedicated agent of change could make it a reality.

Everard, Morris and Wilson (2004) define change as a phenomenon that engages both our intellect and our emotions. It impinges on people’s value systems, and not only affects individuals, but also the structures, norms and environment of organisations. Consequently, change will not be successful unless it is promoted, steered or facilitated taking all these crucial factors into account.

Conley (2000) links change to three “R’s” in education: Renewal, Reform and Restructuring. Differentiating between these three can be important in that almost every school needs to introduce change of some sort at some point which usually affects the life of the school significantly. (This will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.)

Smith (2008) takes a different approach. He defines change in education or any other system as a journey of moving people to a new place to which they often do not want to go. They use excuses like: “That seems too risky” or “let’s get back to basics – it worked all

the years, and there will be unforeseen consequences should we go the new intended way” (Smith, 2008:245). It is human nature for people, especially those in organisations and institutions, to feel really comfortable with the way they have been doing certain things for years. When the principal as change agent tells them to do things differently, it is a “bitter pill” to swallow, even harder to swallow when the principal is an external appointee. People will go to great lengths to avoid being taken out of their “comfort-zone”. The principal as the change agent will need a great deal of determination to convince them that the proposed change process will eventually yield fruit.

### **2.2.1 Leadership Styles for Change**

Saunders (2000) speaks about change at four levels. First level change involves an alteration to the change target’s knowledge .At this point, the approach of the change agent is likely to be seen as an obstacle. A survey revealed that autocratic management styles used by the president of the institution right down to the lowest level of management negatively affect employee morale. The new principal as the agent of change should be aware of the importance of management style when he or she approaches the very important and often delicate process of change. In the case of a principal, a choice of management style that makes the staff feel uncomfortable could defeat the whole process. The principal’s choice of management style will inevitably affect the way change is perceived: whatever goes wrong at the top will have a negative “ripple effect” in the future.

A second level of change is an alteration in the attitudes of change targets. If the president and management team in the example described above had recognised that they were responsible for low employee morale and changed to a more acceptable management style, this would be second level change. In the case of a school, the principal as the agent of change with the Senior Management Team (SMT) would have to reflect on how they could change in their approach towards the rest of the staff, who form part of the target group. A change on the part of management would facilitate the process.

A third level of change is an alteration in the change target’s behaviour. After recognising the system-wide effects of autocratic management style, a change to democratic leadership style could lead to third-level change. At this stage, the rest of the staff have a more positive perception of the change introduced by the new principal as the agent of change and the SMT and they are prepared to buy into the change process. This would

benefit the whole institution, because the valuable input that comes from the floor now could accelerate the change process.

A fourth-level of change is a complex alteration of forces affecting an entire social system. When their leadership style changes from being autocratic to being democratic, the relationship between the president and other members of the management team and the rest of the staff improves. This, in turn, leads to better productivity and job satisfaction. This system-wide alteration is seen as fourth-level change (Saunders2000:451). The school as an institution and a “system” for the benefit of society can only function well when all its constituents understand one another and work together as a team. The principal, who drives the change process, bears the responsibility for creating a better environment of teaching and learning, but he or she needs to be backed by a happy staff.

### **2.2.2 Systems of Change**

A Systems View of change argues that the direct road to change relating to teaching and learning is through structuring the work flow of schooling. Teaching is human-intensive, which means that no matter how hard one might try to introduce change, it will not occur if the role of teachers is not taken into account. They make the day-to-day and minute-to-minute decisions that influence what happens to learners in class. For proposed changes in teaching to count, they must be directly linked to teaching behaviour. This means the attitudes and beliefs of individual teachers have to change, because teaching and learning can only change when teachers change.

A Systems View stresses that teachers do not work in isolation. Teachers are members of social groups that make up the larger school staff, and these social groups create the norms, customs and traditions that determine the values of the school. These values define what teachers and learners see as acceptable and desirable goals and behaviour. Acceptable limits of behaviour and beliefs are a powerful factor in promoting or resisting change or school improvement.

School climates and environments are influenced by the actions and attitudes of the teachers' unions, governing bodies and education officials. Their influence trickles down the various levels of the school to the individual teacher and is finally reflected in the work flow. All these levels interact with each other so principals have to pay attention to them when they try to promote change and improvement in schools. Effective change cannot be

only top down or only bottom up (Sergiovanni, 2006:343). The success of systemic change would entirely depend on how well the new principal as the agent of change drives the complete system. The school and the process can only improve when all the stakeholders have a say in what would benefit an institution as a whole.

Everard *et al.* (2004) support a Systematic Approach to change. This approach is largely based on the work of Berckhard and Harris (1987) as modified by Fullan (2001) during his long experience of it during his work with principals. It was thus amplified in the educational context. The approach uses six key stages that have to be done sequentially:

1. A preliminary diagnosis or reconnaissance, preceding a decision to undertake a change programme: Is the change sound? Is it inherently likely to succeed?  
The reason for the change by the new principal should really be one that is worth all the effort that will be put into it.
2. Determining the future: What do we want to happen? What will happen if we do nothing?  
The new principal has to be a visionary person, who is able to envisage what the academic standard of the school should look like in the future.
3. Characterizing the present: What are we here for? What are the demands on us? What is stopping us? What is working for us?  
This would need a good summary from the change agent and his or her team to determine the way to get workable plans in place.
4. Identifying the gaps between present and future to determine the work to be done: Who is resistant? Who can help the change? Who should manage it?  
When the current system is not very effective it stands to reason that it needs to be changed, to get a more productive one and take the institution to a higher level. The change agent has to take the initiative but this important decision needs to be taken together with the team. The team has to identify the people who are blocking the success of the system and address the problem.
5. Managing the transition from present to future: Who does what by when? How do we gain commitment?  
This will require working out a type of timetable with the people involved being held responsible for work to be done.

6. Evaluating and monitoring the change: Was success achieved? Will the change endure? What has been learned?

Changes need to be evaluated at regular intervals, it would be futile to put change processes in place and then discover that the method does not work, making it necessary to look at something else.

### **2.2.3 Reform-driven Change**

Renewal activities help the institution to do better and/or more efficiently in the future than it is doing at present. Most schools change projects fall into this category. These activities include staff development programmes and more innovative methods of addressing teaching and learning problems. This could take a great deal of energy, but reform-driven change has shown that it is capable of yielding positive results. By implication this type of programme does not require schools to examine any of their fundamental assumptions or practices (Conley, 1999: 10). This is a more “people friendly” method of dealing with change. In the past people have felt frustrated just hearing about renewal activities from an external body such as the Education Department or even internally from within the school. It has therefore become difficult for them to discern between policy change which could be of a lesser value, and better and effective change within the school which could be of great benefit.

Conley (2000) argues that the change process in schools should also be linked by “reform-driven” activities which are those activities that remain after existing procedures, rules and “new policies” have been put in place. In other words, the school as an institution should adapt to function in new circumstances or to meet new requirements. Two important points help to identify and define reform-oriented efforts. First, changes centre on procedural elements that determine the basic “rules of the game” for all participants in the system. Secondly, the impetus for reform should come from the change agent, the principal, but he or she can be assisted by a management team which supports the change process (Conley,2000:12).It is safe to assume that effective changes in schools are made with the aim of bringing about lasting change otherwise all the effort and energy put into it would be futile. Since the changes were made so learners could perform better, the changes should be monitored and maintained by all beneficiaries, i.e. educators, learners and the parent community.

The third “R” Conley (1999) refers to in the change process is the restructuring of activities, practices and even sometimes sets of norms and values within the organisation and the outside world. One very important element of restructuring is the idea that fundamental assumptions of schools need to be challenged for effective changes to occur. Another fundamental assumption is that learning is the key variable being addressed. This definition of restructuring highlights the need to consider a variety of learning strategies and to examine all current assumptions, practices, and relationships with a view to achieving the single overarching goal of enhancing better student learning and outcomes. Educators seem to view restructuring as a way of creating the appearance of change without necessarily confronting the harsh realities that fundamental change suggests. These educators seem to say: “I’m all for change, as long as I don’t have to do anything differently” (Conley, 1999:13). This unwillingness to look at underlying assumptions, values and practices can make it very difficult for schools to come to grips with the idea of restructuring. This, in turn, makes true change in the school for the benefit of the learners and better relationships amongst staff hard to achieve.

#### **2.2.4 Power Change**

Power-coercive change strategies are the application of direct threats or use of power by legitimate authority, sanctions, or those with political clout. For example, changes can be made through legal means law, policy, or financial appropriation. Those in control enforce changes by restricting budgets or creating policies. This type of strategy is useful when a consensus is unlikely despite efforts to stimulate participation throughout the change process or when time is of the essence and change is critical for organisational survival (Sullivan & Decker, 2000) However harsh it may seem, change brought about in this way, especially in underperforming schools, could make a huge difference. The overall pass rate of learners should also be linked to the amount of money that the Department gives to the school. This will surely help the principal as the change agent speed up the process and make it more effective.

Manipulation or ‘co-optation’ is another option. Manipulation refers to covert attempts to influence the stakeholders. Facts are twisted or distorted to make them appear more attractive. This includes withholding undesirable information or creating false rumours to get employees to accept a change. Co-optation, on the other hand, is a form of both manipulation and participation. It seeks to “buy off” the leaders of a resistance group by giving them a key role in the change decision. The advice of those who have been co-

opted is sought only in order to get their endorsement, not to ensure a better decision (Robbins & Barnwell, 2002:364). At every institution or school there will always be a staff member that influences others, positively and negatively and in most cases it is the union representative, or one of the educators who has been at the particular school for a long time. A good starting point would be to incorporate the leaders or sell the change to them. They, in turn, would be able to persuade their fellow members and staff to accept the change which will benefit the whole school.

In the empirical-rational model of change strategies the power ingredient is knowledge. The assumption is that people are rational and will act in their own interests if that self-interest is made clear to them. It is also assumed that the change agent who has knowledge has expert power to persuade people to accept a rationally justified change that will benefit them. The flow of influence moves from those who know to those who do not know. In the process, new ideas are invented and communicated to all participants; it becomes a matter of educating and disseminating information. Once enlightened, rational people either accept or reject the change idea based on its merits and perceived consequences (Sullivan & Decker, 2000:442). The success of this system rests squarely on the extent to which the principal as the agent of change knows the new system he or she intends to implement in the school.

Fullan (2009) argues that in order to achieve the set goal of change and renewal, it is important to develop leaders that will have greater change knowledge as a result of their experience. In his view, knowing is insufficient: only knowing–by-doing, reflecting, and redoing will move the process forward and lead to transformation. He speaks of effective change agents who use what he calls **power principles**. This means they have to push as hard as the process will allow while increasing the chances for success. This also means that there has to be a strategic plan in place to build on, and strategy is viewed as an interactive process, not a two-step sequence, with continual feedback between thought and action (Fullan, 2009:17). Here the principal as change agent should have a firm plan in hand, know the direction of desired change, and not expect that everything will all go according to plan. The idea is to be persistent and press through, even if on some days it looks as if it is a matter of one step forward and two back. Ultimately, the goal of change would be realised.

### 2.2.5 Levels of Change

Stacey (1996, cited in McMillan, 2008) suggests that there are three major kinds of changes, namely closed, contained and open-ended. Closed changes are changes that are easily recognized and understood and contain a measure of predictability. This is the type of change that would be relevant to a school or institution that is dysfunctional schools or where academic results are not very promising. The staff members who will be affected by the changes may not be satisfied with them but they should come to realise these changes need to be made. They are able to anticipate that, even if they are not happy with them, the changes would benefit the school as a whole.

Contained changes also called first-order or first degree changes as well as single-loop learning. These changes are developments that have short-term developments and consequences. The reason is that they are more or less repetitions of previous events or activities. It may also be possible to discern some cause and effect linkages in these kinds of changes (McMillan, 2008:79). First-order change is a method which could be applied by the principal in cases where there is a disciplinary problem like late-coming. Learners may see late-coming as a trivial matter, but it could possibly be one of the factors that makes the school dysfunctional. What may look like a small and insignificant change could in the end contribute to major success for the school.

McMillan (2008) refers to a deep “level change” or transformation that describes the kind of change that radically transforms people and their organisations, also referred to as a second order change and double-loop learning, meaning that people have not only learnt to do things differently but also think and behave significantly different. It was also termed by some writers as a self-renewing change, which affects the structures of organisations as well”. This type of deep-change would be a valuable and precious tool for any principal that ought to be an agent of change but specifically for the new principal. It would be an opportunity for the “new” agent of change to bring about a deep rooted change from the structures in the school, but especially staff and learners could all undergo a complete “paradigm shift” for the future benefit of any institution or school. This change method could sound like “wishful thinking”, but for the dedicated agent of change can make it a reality.

Open-ended change is unique because it has never happened in that particular way before. Managers cannot tie past experiences to it directly nor discern any cause and

effect linkages. It is very different to predict closed or contained change in that it is difficult to know what the possible outcomes of this kind of change may be. This is the type of change that brings about transformation or renewal (McMillan, 2008: 79). The experience of change which the new principal as the agent of change will have will also be unique in the sense that this is his or her first post as principal or he is she is at a completely new school. The plans that have been put in place for the change process by the principal must aim at a huge improvement or change in the academic standard of that particular school. It is for this purpose and reason the principal was appointed and called upon to be the agent of change.

### **2.3 THE PRINCIPAL AS THE AGENT OF CHANGE**

Haynes (1990), as cited in Robbins & Barnwell (2002), defines change agents in organisations as “consultants seen as occupying a role similar to that of the psychoanalyst. They begin by identifying the symptoms of the client. They then express these symptoms in such a way that possible underlying causes become apparent and finally needs remedial action”. The principal, especially someone new at an institution, would similarly determine why the school is not fully functional, and then work out and implement a plan of action to bring about change.

Harada and Hughes-Hassel (2010) define change agents as being self-conscious about the nature of change and the change process. They support, assist, encourage, persuade and push people to change to adopt an innovation and to use it in their daily work. The goal of the change agent is “to fill the gaps of expertise and to assist in changing and implementing courses of action”. New principals at schools would and should be well prepared to face a huge challenge at the new institution. Besides having to press for the much needed change, they would have to meet staff expectations that they would have the required skills to successfully implement the whole change-process.

Principals at school levels have become increasingly more important, they are expected to be the “gatekeepers” of change, meaning that they should be in control of what needs to be changed and what changes will benefit the institution. They often determine the fate of innovations coming from the outside or from teacher initiatives on the inside (Fullan, 2007:74). This implies that principals are expected to lead change that was either forced

on the school externally, or initiate improvement. As a critical source the principal as agent of change will have to decide which of the intended changes can be implemented successfully because of the negative effect failed change will have on people.

Katler (cited in Fullan, 2007:79) argues “that it is an almost natural reaction that people change their attitudes when they experience new things, which in turn touch their emotions and can even lead to physical effects”. Before one can attempt to change behaviour, one must speak to the people concerned to find out how they feel when they are asked to do things differently, compared to how they have done things for decades without much success. In highly successful change efforts, people find ways of helping others see the problems and the possible solutions in ways that encourage ways.

Fullan (2007: 22) stresses the point that the meaning of change, in this case that of educational change, has both moral and intellectual dimensions. This means the informed principal as the change agent has not only to strike a balance between these two concepts, but also to get to the bottom of what will make the process successful. To be able to make a difference in the lives of the educators and learners requires care, commitment, and passion as well as the intellectual know-how. As a result of years of research on educational change, Fullan (2007:22) has discovered that moral purpose and knowledge are the two main change forces that drive success.

Educational change often calls on teachers to question and alter beliefs and practices that define not only what they do, but who they are in the classroom. Those promoting change do not recognise this. They focus simply on helping people within the school organisation perform their work better, smarter, or faster. This often means that the teachers experiencing the change perceive themselves as not as good, or as smart or as fast as they should be (Masci, Cuddapah & Pajak, 2008). Changes in any organisation or educational institution mean improvement, which implies at the same time that there was something wrong. It is no wonder that changes in any organisation are not accepted with much eagerness. For change to take place as painlessly as possible, it is wise to consider those whom it will eventually affect. The staff of the school will have more respect for the principal who tells them in advance about the intended change, as opposed to the principal who just forces the changes down their throats.

From looking at the different theorists' view of change, one can deduce that successful change comes about not only as a result of changing policies, practices and procedures,

but as a result of modifying one's own attitudes values and beliefs. There is therefore a kind of synergy that takes place when change happens. It is not a simple process of one force acting on another to alter it, but rather about a subtle process of dialogue, negotiation and accommodation, which affects all involved (Durrant & Holden, 2006:154). Although they are in charge of the school, principals should remember that the staff members are just as much a part of this institution as they are. Therefore it is their right as fellow citizens to have a say in decisions that will touch them in one way or another. Principals are expected to decide on the direction in which they want to steer the school; principals like all great leaders should have a vision of what the future could look like. They need to inspire their followers to buy into and make the vision theirs, so they can help to translate it into a reality. They thus allow everybody to move in the same direction with the common goal of making the change process an effective one.

As agents of change principals need to gain a commitment from their clients, in this case the educators and learners, that they will be part of the project. They have to provide a vision of the direction the project should take, because participants must understand why they would want to involve themselves in yet another project (Smith, 2008: 247).

It is vital for the principal who initiates the change process to make every detail of it clear: having good intentions is not enough. One must have a relatively well formulated conception of the obstacles ahead and have done a realistic assessment of the likelihood of finding possible solutions to address these obstacles as well as the time frame. Both Smith (2008) and James and Connolly (2000) echo this sentiment when they say "Change in schools is mostly difficult and complicated; it is more than rearranging furniture around. Leaders who successfully implement positive changes in schools show a clear understanding of organisational change".

It is for this reason that Fullan (2009: 11) suggests that understanding the change process is a powerful driver, because it cuts across all elements. Change is a difficult and frustrating process and leaders have to take into account all of the factors involved. The frustration would be even greater if half-way through or, worse still, at the end of the process, change proves to be unsuccessful. Fullan (2009: 11) is emphatic that this could not be called change. Careful planning based on what the principal really want to improve and change in the particular school and how he intends to do so is of utmost importance. Only when all the factors have been identified can the process plan be discussed with the stakeholders and then put into action.

Obviously, the principal as leader is responsible and will be held accountable for all changes made. However, Fullan (2009: 12) argues that making change work requires the energy, ideas, commitment and ownership of all those who are implementing improvements. The complexity of the many problems in the organisations or institutions does not allow for long-term “ownership development”, meaning that credit is not due to an individual in the process. Ownership is not something available at the beginning of a change process, but is created through a quality change process. Put differently, “shared vision and ownership are more the outcome of a quality change process than they are a precondition” (Fullan, 2009:12). This shows once again that the success of the change process is the product of a closely knit and dedicated team led by a leader with a clear vision of the direction in which he or she wants to go in order to make a particular institution sustainably workable.

For this reason, it is no surprise that Fullan (2009: 12) calls the change process one of the “Forces for Leaders of Change”. He argues that the change process is about establishing the conditions for continuous improvement in order to persist and overcome inevitable barriers to reform. In his view, change is about innovativeness, not just innovation (Fullan, 2009:14). Furthermore, the best plan on paper or even an idea in the leader’s mind is simply not good enough: a plan needs to be put into practice in order for the process to become a reality.

Masci *et al.* (2008) makes the point that “principals must be aware of the fact that a change in any organisation brings a lot of emotional unrest and movement in schools amongst staff, learners and the community. The principal as the initiator and agent of change should in this time of uncertainty also play the role of the agent of stability”. The staff will look to the principal to create and maintain balance and stability in the school in the midst of the uncertainty of change.

## **2.4 NEW PRINCIPALS AS CHANGE AGENTS**

In their study of principals, most of whom were fairly new in their posts, Earley and Weindling (2004), describe mediating change, and negotiating it effectively to fit the school’s values and ethos. Most principals in their study were clear that they responded to the changes they thought were important and necessary, integrating them into their own priorities for the school. They varied from those who went looking for new challenges and

new ways of extending the role of the school to those who were selective about chosen changes and made sure that the envisaged changes enhanced what the school was trying to do. One principal remarked, “If you do not make some changes, you do not move on”. At another school that made a great number of changes, the principal explained that the new initiatives at the school, “make the school feel good about itself, and give people a chance to raise their own game and learn” (Earley and Weindling, 2004:59).

It is important to realise that the whole change process means not only transforming a system, but also taking all the people linked to the system into consideration. At the end of the day, these people will make the system work. Havelock (1973, cited in Chance, 2009) refers to four “tactics of change” for the principals as change agents. As a **catalyst**, the change agent pressures for change, upsets the status quo and energizes the problem-solving process. This tactic should be a valuable tool for the new principal, who has observed the situation and so has a good idea of the amount of pressure to apply to get results. The second tactic is the **solution giver** role. This entails offering expertise on how to solve problems. At the same time it helps clients discover how to adapt to innovations in their particular organisations. It is the perfect role for any principal who is serious about change, but especially so for the new principal as the agent of change. This is the perfect time to show staff that their method is not that bad, but it is good to look at other options to get better results for the future.

Thirdly, Havelock (1973, cited in Chance, 2009) refers to the tactic of **process helper**; the change agent assists in helping the organization implement a problem-solving process. I think this is the best way for the new principal to persuade others to become involved in helping to solve the problem of getting rid of the “old system” and to be eager to help phase in a new system. The fourth tactic is that the change agent acts as a **resource linker** by bringing together various resources to meet the needs of the school. These resources would be those people that can help speed up the change process. This would mean opening up the process so people can buy into it. This creates a good opportunity to approach members of staff who were negative about the whole process. At this point the principal could be amazed to see how they have changed with the system.

The triggers of change in the study made by James and Connolly (2004) on effective change in schools vary a great deal. In some cases the impetus was external, including

unfavourable inspection reports from the education departments. But the most effective change came from within in the school, initiated specifically by the newly appointed principals across the spectrum of the study. Members of staff who had been at the school for some time were amazed at the significant changes and improvements and their effect on the morale of the school.

MacBeath (2008) focuses on effective school principals, seeing this as an almost global problem, as well as an urgent policy issue, especially in developing countries. He came to the conclusion that successful school principals do not learn how to “do” leadership and then stick to set patterns and ways of doing things along a prescribed set of known rules. Instead they are willing to change in response to new sets of circumstances, and the differing needs of learners and educators (MacBeath, 2008: 142). They become trendsetters in the whole change process for the effectiveness of the school by family rising themselves with the school climate to get the idea of what the required needs for change really are in a particular school culture.

Not unexpectedly, the new principals in the study referred to by MacBeath had to deal with a lot of baggage at the different schools. Because of the histories of the schools, their internal conditions and the way these trigger factors combined, many were in varying states of readiness to move forward (James & Connolly, 2004:90). Whatever the stimulus was, the most important factor was the initiator’s ability to use the internal conditions and the stimuli for change to their advantage to bring about change as well as provide a rationale for it. Existing staff on the school are likely to ask questions such as “But what was wrong with the way things were done previously?” These are the inevitable questions the new principal as an effective agent of change will have to deal with and have logical answers for.

The principal needs to find out the real reasons for poor results in an underperforming school, however many there are. In order for the principal as the agent of change to succeed in addressing these reasons, he or she has to develop an understanding of the specific culture of that particular school before he or she can start the change process and lead the school to success. In the early stages, the new principals in this study focused their efforts on gaining what they regarded as essential insights into the schools norms, values and beliefs system. They felt that they needed to understand the different cultures and sub-cultures within their schools, before they could initiate any major changes. Therefore they spoke to the staff, in its entirety, to small groups and individuals on the

staff, as well as to governing body members who represents the parent body. They found that the desire and need for change was so great that many of the new principals in the study confessed that they never had much time for reflection on the detail they obtained (James& Connolly, 2004:92).

Besides improving and changing the physical environment of schools, the newly appointed principals were very much aware that their real work lay in planning and initiating change in the learning culture of the school. They were aware that for changes and improvement to be effective, they would need to change the existing culture, and to align it with their vision for the school. In most schools cultural change and the "journey" metaphor were used in two senses. In the first place there was the desire to improve learner achievement; the end-point of the journey would be viewed in terms of outcomes. In the other sense it was described as moving the school from "one which was stagnant to one of continuous improvement. This perspective would see the end-point of the journey as a change in the process of changing the culture of the school.

My argument is that there is no need for learners to suffer at some schools when principals in the same situation "are able to perform "miracles". Why should under-performing principals use powerful unions to stand up for them, if most of them do not make a concerted effort to bring about change? They could raise the morale of most of our learners at schools. I agree the government should stop merely threatening to apply the work performance appraisal, and take the "bull by the horns" for the sake of our learners and to save some credibility. Again I ask, if a few can really work hard, even finding food for hungry children at the non-governmental organisations and setting up a feeding scheme at the school, why do those that have the same basic resources not act? I see effective principal as the ones that do not wait for things to happen (i.e. wait for the Department to take the initiative) but take the initiative themselves to make things happen for the success of the school in its entirety.

In his research article on reform in British education, Bernard Barker (2009) asks the question:"Why is progress so slow?" His case study explores why public-sector reform in education often fails to deliver expected performance gains. There was an intense focus on the performance of schools, and the capacities of principals were questioned, rather than holding teachers directly accountable. In pursuit of improved quality and performance the government of the day set up centres of excellence in leadership academies across

the public sector. The British government acted on the belief that by “tackling our management and leadership deficit we will unlock the doors to increased productivity”. This idea raises the question of whether this is the route that we need to follow in our country in order to have more effective and productive schools. It is not possible to put a new principal in every school. Should we not embark on putting the “old principals” through a “renewing process” for better results?

We have a huge number of dysfunctional or “ineffective schools in our country, and we need a national effort to improve them. By definition these schools cannot improve themselves; they are “stagnant” schools that need a high level of external support. Hopkins (2001:166) suggests that this type of school needs early interventions: changes need to be made which have a direct focus upon basic organisational issues. He suggests a change at leadership level, because he argues that principals of failing schools lack the capacity to be effective managers, and do not have the ability to resurrect that school. They are potentially a part of the problem. Research suggests that leadership is context-related to some extent, so failing schools need new principals.

In their research article entitled “Being a new principal in Scotland”, Cowie and Crawford (2008) report that these new principals felt professionally isolated and lonely. They found it difficult to deal with the legacy, practice and style of the previous principal when trying to cope with the multiplicity of their tasks. The existing staff openly revealed their disapproval of the new principal, in both their body language and what they had to say to explore (Cowie & Crawford, 2008). It is vital for new principals to understand that every new leader at a school will meet with some conflict or resistance. What is more important is for principals to learn how to deal effectively and professionally with conflict and still be able to do the work connected to their calling as principal.

It is usually the case that poor management and leadership are two sides of the same coin, within the ineffective school. This implies that the overall style of leadership needs to be changed in that context. New leadership opportunities will need to be created for different staff, using new models to achieve new and innovative goals for the benefit of the entire school or institution (Hopkins, 2006:166). The above idea of creating new leadership opportunities amongst staff is unrealistic, considering the way the system appoints school principals. It is not always the person with the best managerial skills that is appointed to the post, and the number of loopholes in the whole interview process makes it almost impossible to bring new life to failing schools.

Fullan (2005) argues that the moral purpose of educators may seem universal, but it has too often emerged as an individual phenomenon. The heroic teacher, in this case the principal, often has to prove that with courage and determination he or she can succeed against all odds (Fullan, 2005:69). It will become the main aim of the principal to be committed, and by raising the bar and closing the gap of learner achievement for all individuals at school, and proved to be a reality.

Research done by Heng and Marsh (2009) shows the effectiveness of change by the new principal was very successful simply because a shared culture and good relationships were established amongst the staff before “new things” were ventured. One of the senior staff members commented: “Under the old principal, school values were not clear. The new principal zooms in on the values of the school that anchor us to what we do and these values cut across teachers, students and non-teaching staff. The school values are not something that the principal came up with, but are the result of collaborative efforts from students, staff and middle-management, so these are values we can all identify with”.

#### **2.4.1 New Principals in South Africa**

Another example of an effective new principal, who made a huge change to a school, is the one appointed to a school in the Magatle Village near Lebowakgomo in rural Limpopo. In 2009 it celebrated its twelfth anniversary, proving that living up to their schools slogan of “Hard work pays dividends” really bore fruit. There was a huge improvement in their senior certificate pass rate, from a dismal 18% in 1998 to 91% in 2003, i.e. an increase of 73% in five years. Through creative fundraising the school has its own science and biology laboratory, a media centre and a home economics centre known as the Technology Centre and Perma Kitchen (Bloch, 2009:132). One may conclude that these developments contributed to the good senior certificate results. When there was no available resources, results were low, but after the much needed resources became available as a result of the initiative and hard work of the new principal, the results improved remarkably.

Other sources of pride are the vegetable gardens and sites for perm culture and agro forestry. These have also benefited the community because this rural school has trained the other schools in the surrounding area to do the same. Boreholes, rain-harvesting and a whole environmental policy have enthused and mobilised the village. It was said of this particular school at a prize-giving award that they never said “Manna will come from

heaven” but instead that they were the “Early bird that caught the fattest worm since 1994” (Bloch, 2009:133). The school has two slogans which are visible at the entrance. The one proclaims the school’s respect for its trees and gardens and that the school is building a culture of pride in a clean school. The other slogan emphasises that the school is a drug and weapon-free zone and that everyone must respect their school property and promote community involvement in their projects.

Very little research has been done thus far on the effectiveness of new principals and their experiences. Earley and Weindling (2008) are among the few researchers researched the career path and the performances of the principal in the late 1980s. Their study asks the question: “Do school leaders (principals) have a shelf life?” This implies that it is not healthy to have the same principal at a school for a lengthy. The study done by Earley and Weindling was done over a period of more than twenty years and included principals of both primary and secondary schools throughout England and Wales.

The results of the work by Early and Weindling (2008) and other authors have been used to map out stages of transition through there are six different stages which these authors agreed on. These stages start off with stage one as entry and encounter which lasts for the first few months and ends with stage six after eight years or more. The interesting fact of this last stage is that it is termed the “plateau”. This implies that when principals have reached their peak, it is time for them to start afresh again to remain as effective as they were when they were first appointed as principals. The next school would benefit from the experience they gained at the previous school.

Their findings included factors like the different pace at which principals act. For instance, when the school is in “special measures” following an inspection, the principal has an external mandate to change and will move forward more quickly. It was also discovered that the speed of progress in making effective changes was also determined by the way the principal was appointed. The internally appointed principals tended to make fewer changes and moved more slowly than externally appointed principals. The other interesting fact was that the proportion of internally appointed principals has changed considerably over the last decade; the reason is that governing bodies play a greater role in the selection of principals.

This is the way principals were appointed in South Africa in the past, namely that the internal or candidate known to the school governing body received preference. In most

cases this was also the reason that not much change occurred at those specific schools. It could possibly be that these principals use what (West, Jackson, Harris & Hopkins, 2000) call the “transactional approach” which means placing more value on protecting and maintaining the present system of the school. Seen from the outside, this is not always the right thing to do. In the last few years the method of appointing principals and for that matter all educators has gone through a transformational process. The Education Department has decided that they should have the final say in appointing successful candidates. The school governing body sends through the three names of the candidates that scored the highest in the interview, including the interview questions and score sheets, signed by the interview committee and the union representatives. The Education Department then appoints the successful person. This does not mean that it has to be an internal appointee. In the Western Cape the appointment of external candidates to principal’s posts has caused a great deal of controversy. In some cases, former Model C schools with the resources to do so have taken the Education Department to court.

Newly appointed principals in the research article by Early and Weindling (2008) commented on what they regarded as a reasonable period of time to be in a post in any one school. The most common response suggested an optimum period of between four to ten years, with many seeing seven years as about the right length of time. Principals that were about 50 years old remarked that they were ‘too old’. However, it was found that there was no necessary relationship between age and performance. Willingness and the ability to take on a fresh challenge were more important (Earley & Weindling, 2008). One can safely conclude that being a principal is not a job for those whose enthusiasm and energy has waned or decreased. There is a point when principals become stale, and it is only when they are moved to another school that they regain their energy. The system can still accommodate principals that can still do their job well, but there should be an escape clause for those who are not so ‘sharp’ anymore.

The question could be asked whether it really matters how long principals serve at a school or institution. The response or answer to this question largely depends on whether or not there is a negative relationship between the length of tenure and the levels of performance of principals. The study done by Earley and Weindling (2008) discovered that those principals in their mid-term (i.e. three to seven years) tended to have the most positive and effective impact on their schools. The opposite was true for long serving principals, i.e. those with eleven or more years in the same post at the same institution.

This was true for most of the schools in the study, both at primary and secondary (high) schools.

Over the years, educationists and some academics have called for short-term renewable contracts for principals. As early as 1988, Hargreaves suggested that principals be appointed for three years in the first instance and then perhaps for subsequent periods of five years. A year later the first limited period principal post was advertised, but the teacher unions advised their members to boycott the post. The successful candidate's salary was ten percent higher than the norm, and the post was for five years (Earley & Weindling, 2004:39). The national department of education in South Africa proposes to introduce a five-year performance based contract for principals and deputy principals, but the unions are not in favour of this. They argue that the principal and the deputy cannot be held responsible for learners that do not perform, and educators that are not effective.

A very interesting fact is that the few very effective new principals did not consult their union when they began making major changes in the low-performing school where they were involved. I am sure that if they had been asked to sign a performance contract, they would not have objected. They were passionate about their work as educators in the first place, and as a principal in the second place. Signing a contract would not have affected their behaviour.

It would be a good idea to rotate principals every five years, as is done in other state departments like the health department. Their unions do not object to this, because they see performance as important. Earley and Weindling (2008) suggest that principals should be appointed like their corporate counterparts and then rotated like bank managers and other directors of large firms.

Fink and Brayman (2004) give an account of the work of a new principal appointed at a school they described as a "cruising" school. The high quality of the student intake made it seem effective, but it did not have the capacity to cater for lower socio-economic students and minority groups. A "coffee circle" of experienced long serving teachers met every morning to socialise and share opinions on different issues in education. This group taught the core subjects in the curriculum like mathematics, science and English. The principal set out to shake the school, particularly the powerful groups in it, out of their complacency; they supported innovations in their own subjects, but complained that it would alter the culture and "grammar" of the school to make larger changes. The new principal

participated actively with staff in professional development activities and took every opportunity to challenge teachers to diversify their teaching to meet the changing nature and needs of all the schools learners. This is an example of a principal as change agent who not only initiated or drove the change process, but also led from the centre. She was physically and actively involved. One example is that she did not ever say “you” must change, but said instead “we” need to change to make this institution as a school accessible to all learners from all levels of society.

There will always be debates and discussions on what sort of leadership or management styles or skills a new principal should have to be able to use to control to be an effective agent of change. There is the question whether the person should be a “people’s person” or be a good administrator or academically be highly qualified for the job to be able to cope with relevant changes. Sarros and Sarros (2007) address these issues in their study called the “The first 100 Days: Leadership challenges of a new CEO” which included new principals in a section of the study called “Leadership: a multi-model approach”. This highlights a few interesting approaches: The transformational, transactional, laissez-faire and the instructional leadership approach. There was strong support for the instructional leader in the sense of promoting effective teaching and learning. However, this approach has too narrow a focus for a changing environment that demands leaders of change instead of system administrators. The transformational leader approach was the one that got the most support. This approach was seen as a positively affirming way of leading people and corporations. Other positive attributes are that a leader within this approach is able to motivate others to do more than they intended and often more than they thought possible. Missions and visions are articulated and this increases their followers and fellow workers sense of self esteem and beliefs about the value of their contributions to the job.

It would be very interesting to speak to principals who went through the change process to find out what the experience was like, including having to face and deal with resistance to the process. Finck and Brayman (2007) interviewed the new principals in their study after they implemented the changes they wanted to make. Most of them testified that the height of their effectiveness as change agents was between five and seven years, agreeing after that they were not as effective. They pointed out that it is always rejuvenating and exciting to go to the next school, because every school has its own history, way of doing things and ethos. They would find it much easier and more comfortable to change schools now than they did the first time. These principals agreed that their knowledge of what to do on

entering a school was sound, most of them were confident that they could “hit the ground running”. They felt able to judge quickly what to change and how to change it (Finck & Brayman, 2007: 441). If we could have more principals (than the few role models) that could sound and be as confident about this change process, we would be much further on the road to improving our education system. There seems consensus that the problem is not a lack of money or resources, the lack of determination and vision by some principals seems to be the main reason why the majority of our schools and learners are lagging behind.

## **2.5 RESISTANCE TO CHANGE**

### **2.5.1 Types and Forms of Resistance**

Resistance can be defined as those forces that oppose the process of change; it may be overt or covert and may originate with an individual or group. Resistance to change is natural, because any change, even one that is beneficial, requires psychological adjustment by the change target and may threaten the target’s work role, job security, economic welfare or social support (Saunders, 2000:457). Resistance is usually stronger when institutional cultures have been stable for a long time, and staff members are quite satisfied with the situation they have and have had for a number of years.

Sometimes resistance to change stems from a misunderstanding of the change process. Teachers are especially likely to oppose the planned changes when the school is situated in an area that at least some of them feel is not “conducive to teaching and learning” and they see as the norm to be part of a dysfunctional school. This type of resistance can be addressed and prevented by giving change targets detailed information about the cause, purpose, method, design and schedule for the process well in advance of any system alteration. Saunders (2000) emphasises that the psychological basis for resistance is the fact that change threatens a person’s security and esteem needs. As was said in 2.2.1, staff may feel that their efforts over the years are seen as inadequate by the change agent and they find that difficult to deal with (Saunders, 2000: 459).

Resistance to change is often cited as a reason for difficulties in implementing and the failure of change initiatives. Erwin and Garman (2009) found this to be the case in the research done by the international organisation, Deloitte and Touche. They used 400

different organisations to find out what the reaction of workers was, and discovered that resistance to change was the number one reason for failures of organisational change initiatives. There are four reactions people experience while passing through the stages of change. Firstly, there is denial when they refuse to accept and believe that change will be implemented. Secondly, they avoid participating in the change process. Thirdly, in the exploration stage they try to experiment with new behaviours. Fourthly, there is the commitment stage when they accept or embrace the changes made.

The approval or disapproval of changes also depends on the change agent's personality or behaviour; it can either provoke resistance or restrict it to the minimum. The principal that cannot inspire respect or trust meets with greater resistance than a more personable or inspiring leader. The change agent who ignores staff habits or social interests when designing the change process provokes resistance from the staff, who might otherwise welcome the intended change. Successful changes demands that the staff are on the side of the principal. That means he or she must treat staff members with the utmost respect.

Participation in the change process is another factor in combating resistance amongst staff at the different educational institutions. It is very difficult for individuals to resist a change decision in which they have participated, and even more so when they agreed to the changes. The principal as the one who initiates the changes will obviously not be able to make the changes in isolation and then impose them on the staff. Furthermore, agreement cannot be expected to be reached in a single encounter. Numerous meetings are necessary to get all the stakeholders on board. It is vital for the principal to be good at finding out the skills the various members of staff have and then delegating some part of the work to them. Staff members need to be fully drawn into the process for minimum resistance.

The agent should at all times expect resistance and listen carefully to who says what, when and in what circumstances. Verbal resisters are easier to deal with than "closet" resisters whose resistance is evidenced in nonverbal signs such as poor work habits and lack of interest in the change process (Sullivan & Decker, 2000: 442). It is usually better when certain individuals amongst the staff have the courage to say what they like or do not like about the change process, and, even more important, to speak out in front of the rest of the staff. However, this could also be one of the tactics used to try to undermine the change agent, in this case the principal. One should also be aware of both the closet and verbal resisters, who sometimes form groups and disseminate negative views about the

whole change process.

Resistance has both positive and negative aspects. On the one hand, resistance forces the change agent to be clear about the reason for change. The change agent must know the change plan inside out, because he or she must defend it against challengers. The positive part of resistance is the sharper focus and problem solving it encourages. It forces the change agent to clarify information, keep the interest level high, and answer the questions asked at all times.

The change agent needs to emphasise the positive consequences of the change and how the individual or group will benefit. This implies that the school as a whole is the beneficiary of the whole change idea being “sold” by the change agent. It is advisable not to spend too much energy on rational analysis of why the change is good and why the arguments against it do not hold true. People’s resistance frequently flows from feelings that are not rational (Robbins& Barnwell, 2002:248).

In a culture of change, emotions frequently run high and often represent fear or differences of opinion. People often express their doubts about new directions and sometimes express their outright opposition to them. Effective leaders, principals in this case, are able to appreciate the value of resistance in a culture of change. They see its possible merit and deal with it more effectively than anyone else (Fullan, 2004: 97). The absence of conflict and resistance is not a healthy sign. If all members of staff agree to have the new structures and the plans, it means they have decided to “go with the flow”. Experience has shown that the staff members that disagree or resist a new idea do not do so, just for the sake of wanting to be different. They often want to work with the leader. It could be that the instructions given or the way that the initial plan has been laid out may not have been clear enough.

Masci *et al.* (2008) has discovered in their research that many teachers have a certain degree of cynicism and resistance to change. They blame this on the extensiveness, rapid pace, and relentlessness of educational change, and often the perceived top-down approach of doing and applying changes. These methods or changes refer mostly to administrative decisions that are at times linked to certain curriculum changes that are sent to the different schools to be applied.

Wagner (2001) suggests that humans, and in this case teachers tend to resist change for

three reasons. The first one is called risk aversion. One of the reasons why many educators are attracted to the teaching profession is because of job security. They do not really embrace change, because changing the nature of their work could affect their job security. The second is called craft expertise. Teachers are proud of their knowledge and the teaching skills they have acquired and developed in their classrooms over the years. For this reason they will resist any attempts at change, especially when it means altering teaching strategies that they have applied for some time, which they feel have been working well. The third one is called autonomy or isolation. Teachers are largely isolated from other adults, because they tend to work alone in their classrooms. This is rightly so because part of their professional expertise is the ability to work on their own. They will resist change which threatens their autonomy.

It has been found that successful organizations or new principals appreciate resistance in cultures of change. In the process they seek diversity, ideas and experiences from employees, while simultaneously establishing mechanisms for sorting out, reconciling and acting on new patterns (Fullan, 2004: 98). The older staff at a particular school can provide the principal with valuable information about the culture and the environment at this particular school. This information can inform the change process at a particular school. It is not good to work and deal with like-minded people only, hence the idea of getting staff with different ideas on board to help make the change process a success.

Fullan (2004) argues that effective change leaders acknowledge the uncertainty, anxiety, and disagreement in the system, at the individual level, team level, and higher level (i.e. management or middle management level). They have to accept that not all groups within the system will view everything in the same way, (Fullan, 2004:100). This calls to mind the old saying: “You can please some people some time, but you can’t please all of the people all of the time” which agents of change could do well to remember. They should know and realise that not everybody will share the vision of the leader and see the envisaged change as in the future interests of the institution.

### **2.5.2 Management of Resistance**

Hughes (2006) cites research by Carnall (2003) and Burke (2002) that shows that resistance relates to uncertainty rather than change. They present the view that resistance is a consequence of how a change is **managed**, rather than the change itself. These researchers draw on the work of Brehm (1996) who wrote: “The degree of ease and

success with which change is introduced in an organisation is directly proportional to the amount of choice that people feel they have in determining and implementing the change” (in Hughes, 2008:219). This research implies that the success with which resistance is managed and controlled will depend largely on the planning of the change process, most importantly how it is presented to the staff members who will be affected by the changes.

These changes will also test the managerial skills of the change agent in the change process of the organisation. Conner (1998, cited in Hughes, 2008) suggests that managers can minimise the negative effects of resistance by encouraging the staff to express their resistance openly instead of secretly. From a managerial perspective overtly expressed resistance will always be more manageable than covert resistance. King and Anderson (2002, cited in Hughes, 2008:121) describe the management of resistance metaphorically as medicine for the bad patient: resistance is thus regarded as a “defence mechanism against the pathogens of change”.

Leaders in the change process should learn to be very good and discerning listeners, because resisters will usually tell them what is wrong with the new system, and never or seldom what benefits are linked to it. The effective leader will access the collective intelligence of the whole group by listening to diverse people and groups, including the questioners and resisters, who may not have a valid question or a reason to differ. They need to acknowledge their concerns, use their insights and invite them to participate in informed discussions and explorations (Fullan, 2004: 101). It is of the utmost importance to recognise that people affected by the change process need answers to their questions as well as clarity on what the future holds for them in the organisation or the institution. The fear and anxiety in individuals are there because of uncertainty about the future because new management normally appoint its own new staff.

The principal as the change agent has to realise that the first step in overcoming resistance to change in schools is the ability to determine who is resisting change and why. To begin this process, principals need to take a systems perspective that recognizes teachers attitudes and behaviours within the context of the social norms of their schools (Duke, 2004, cited in Zimmerman, 2006). Unless they understand and appreciate the need for change in their schools, teachers’ interest in maintaining the status quo will undoubtedly take precedence over their willingness to accept change. One of the many barriers to both individual and organizational change is the failure to recognize the need for change (Zimmerman, 2006: 3). It is a common human weakness for people to steer

away from challenges that will affect their “comfort zone”. They will do anything they can to avoid them.

Barriers to change come in many different forms and ways. **Habit** is one such barrier to teachers changing their practices. Rather than working to develop new skills and strategies, it is simply easier to continue teaching in the same way. Other forms of resistance displayed by teachers might be a result of their past experience. **Previously unsuccessful efforts** at change, for example, could leave teachers extremely wary about accepting further attempts. Many people derive a sense of security from doing things in familiar ways, so disrupting teachers’ well-established professional and instructional patterns could result in a **fear of the unknown**. Many teachers feel that change in the school environment is unsafe; they are not only unlikely to embrace new practices, but might also become defensive and resort to their old habits (Zimmerman, 2006:40).

It just as important for the staff to understand change as it is for the principal who initiates the change; in fact the process will be more beneficial for the school when the principal makes a good effort to understand his or her staff members. The research done by Zimmerman (2006) emphasises that principals who want to try to understand why some teachers do not perceive the need to change and / or resist change should be aware that there are different individual and organisational mental models. People do not all perceive the world or their workplaces in the same way. **Mental models** are the maps that individuals and organisations follow to help them not only make sense of their context or world, but also to interpret their reality. Mental models can promote efficiency and alleviate some anxiety especially during the change process. However, some established mental models can prevent educators from closing the gap between what they need to know to be successful in new contexts and their outmoded ways of dealing with change. This could result in non-productive behaviour (Zimmerman, 2006:3).

A number of different authors have described individual’s feelings and behaviour at the beginning of a change process as a type of **denial**. To understand why some teachers resist change, principals must realise that denial in some respects is similar to the first stage of grieving for what is lost. (Calabrese, 2002; Clawson, 1999, cited in Zimmerman, 2006) This negative reaction can take the form of denying the message, the messenger, the pertinence of the message and/or denying whether one has the capacity to deal with the message. (Zimmerman, 2006: 3). For this reason it is extremely important for principals to be adept at recognizing and dealing with teacher’s denial behaviours. These

are a possible indication of their feelings of loss because of what they are being asked to give up or to leave behind.

Robbins and Barnwell (2002) use Kurt Lewin's classic three-step process to manage this situation. Unfreezing, the first step, overcomes the pressure of both individual resistance and group conformity. The second step is movement in the sense that successful implementation of unfreezing allows the staff to accept that their previous ways of doing things were not advantageous to the organisation. The third step is called refreezing; this simply means stabilizing the change intervention by balancing the driving and restraining forces. The driving forces are seen as the forces that direct behaviour away from the status quo, since restraining forces hinder movement away from the status quo. Management normally implements positive incentives to encourage employees to accept the changes made (Robbins Barnwell, 2002:729).

Robbins and Barnwell (2002) provide change agents with some techniques or interventions to deal with changes made. These serve to reduce resistance amongst workers, and make the process of change more effective. The first is using what are termed sensitivity training groups. These groups seek to change behaviour through directed group interaction. They thus provide the subjects with increased awareness of their own behaviour and how others perceive them. The second technique is using survey feedback. Questionnaires are used to identify differences in members' perceptions. The data can then be used to identify problems. Discussions follow and remedies are suggested. The third is Process Consultation. The manager acts as a consultant and gives the client (worker) clear insights into what is going on around, within and between them and the other people. The idea is to have the client actively participate in both the diagnosis and the identification of alternatives. This leads to better understanding of the process and less resistance to the action plan.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The focus of this study, new principals as agents of change, was outlined in Chapter One. The term ‘agents of change’ is used for two reasons. In the first instance, it refers to principals who have been appointed for the first time to the post of principal, who were formerly members of the staff at that school. Secondly, it is used to mean a principal who has come from another school to serve as principal. The term “new” is used to describe someone who has been a principal at the particular school one to five years.

Chapter Two outlines what the different theorists and researchers, both locally in South-Africa and abroad, have written that is relevant to this particular study. Particular attention was given to how principals achieved change, what worked for them and why.

This chapter outlines the research design, the methodology used in the field, and the way the results of the study will be categorised and analysed.

#### **3.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY**

The main research question in this study is: How do new school principals as agents of change improve teaching and learning? This question lent itself to an interpretive method which is a branch of qualitative research. In what follows, I will discuss the view of a number of theorists on the links between interpretive and qualitative research.

According to Welman *et al.* (2010), qualitative research can theoretically be described as an approach rather than a particular design or set of techniques. They see it as an “umbrella” description covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning of naturally occurring phenomena in the social world. Mouton (2005) defines interpretive as advancing to a new interpretation or reading of an existing text or sets of texts, which are typical in hermeneutic, historical or text-based studies. Waghid (2003), however, sees interpretive paradigm education policy research as characterised by the use of archival knowledge, narrative knowledge or observational knowledge.

There are two of the main characteristics of qualitative research according to Meyer *et al.* (2008). The first is that it seeks to understand people's interpretations of their experience. In this study I intend to seek to understand why the respondent as the new principal found change important and why it was done in a particular way. Secondly, qualitative research aims to explore people's experiences and reflect these in words and concepts, with the idea of giving meaning to the whole. Qualitative designs are used when very little is known about the research topic. Since the aim of this study was to explore, understand and interpret a little researched topic (why some new principals in a set period of time (maximum of five years) are more successful as agents of change, as opposed to those that had a longer period as principals) a qualitative design seemed appropriate.

Key (1997, cited in) highlights some of the advantages of qualitative research: it uses subjective information and participant observation to describe the context or natural setting in an attempt to gain an understanding of the entire situation. It seemed ideal situation to get first-hand information from the respondents involved, the principals, as well as some of the staff at school, in the natural environment. The aim of any researcher should be to strive to the best of his/her ability to produce an in-depth research study and thus produce a good final product that many others could make use of in future. Applying Key's insights offered the opportunity to do just that by adding credibility to the research.

Johnson and Christensen (2004) refer to a major advantage in qualitative research called corroboration. This refers to comparing different sources of evidence to determine they reach the same conclusion. The main purpose of corroboration is to help researchers increase their understanding of the validity of a specific portion in their study. In my study, it was important to be able to weigh and compare the data given by the different principals of the different schools. It was a way of identifying the management styles they used to successfully achieve their aim as effective agents of change. This aspect will further be highlighted in the discussion of case studies which follows.

### **3.3 CASE STUDY**

Case studies are detailed investigations of individuals, groups, institutions or other social units. The researcher conducting a case study attempts to analyse the variables relevant to the subject under study. The principle difference between case studies and other research studies is that the focus of attention is the individual case and not the whole

population. Most studies search for what is common and pervasive. However, the focus in case studies is on understanding the particulars of that case in its complexity, rather than on generalization (Creswell: 13: 2009).

Another important feature of a case study is that it focuses on a bounded system usually under natural conditions, so that the system can be understood in its own habitat (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). My research was a case study in which the focus fell on the four principals (in their natural settings) at the different schools. They were interviewed to get a clear understanding from each one of them in their particular situation and how they gained success. These interviews will be discussed later.

Groenewald (1995) argues that the case study involves the thorough study of a single unit. The definition of this unit is determined by the researcher's cognitive structuring of reality. In terms of current sociological approaches the following could be considered as a single unit: roles, relationships, and groups such as organisations, communities or societies. These examples illustrate that the unit in a case study is not necessarily "natural", self-evident or finite, but that it is formed by a mental construction which is based upon an underlying sociological approach. For this reason Briggs and Coleman (2007) take the view that a case study is any aspect of reality which, for the purposes of research, we choose to view as unit.

Johnson & Christensen, (2008) suggest that researchers should view each case as having an internal and an external context. The example of a school is being used, where internally it refers to the organizational climate at a school like the leadership style used by the principal, and the condition of the physical and instructional facilities. The external context refers to where the school are situated like geographical area with specific social, economic and demographic characteristics. Case study researchers ought to fully examine the contexts of the case to better describe and explain the functioning of a case. The two factors namely the internal and external contexts are of utmost importance in this study, the new principal and the type of skills used as well as the area where these schools are situated will to large degree determine the outcome of this study.

(The other books which I have looked at all basically say the same thing about case studies as the authors and writers which I have quoted above, hence I'm asking should we still add anything further which will boil down to the same thing?)

### **3.4 SELECTION**

Generally the activity of selection in qualitative research is defined as the activity of selecting a site/research domain or individual. It is interpreted differently within the various traditions of inquiry. In the case of biographical study it means finding at least one individual to study who is accessible and willing to provide information on an issue being explored (Cresswell, 2009: 215). My study was biographical in the sense that I purposively selected new principals that were prepared to share valuable information on how they managed to be successful agents of change and turned their schools into ones where good teaching and learning occur. The process is totally different in the case of a phenomenological research study; the researcher tries to understand the response or reactions of people to specific aspects. The participants can be on a single site or at different sites, but it is of the utmost importance that they are all individuals who have experienced the phenomenon being explored (Creswell, 2009: 215).

In my case study, four schools were selected: two of them were primary schools and two were secondary schools. The first criterion used in the selection was that the schools had to be located in townships with a high crime rate and unemployment, for instance. However, the most important criterion was that the principals had to be in the first five years of their career as a principal or in the first five years of being a principal at a specific school. The idea was to determine whether the changes that were made at primary schools and secondary schools had the same effect in similar circumstances. The goal was to understand how the new principal succeeded in changing the school, i.e. was an effective agent of change, despite the environment and circumstances around them.

The four schools in the study two primary and two secondary schools each was given a code name. The primary schools were referred to as P1 and P2, and the secondary schools as S1 and S2 so I could differentiate between schools when referring to them in discussing both the data and findings.

### **3.5 INTERVIEWS**

The interview refers to a data collection process in which there is direct interaction between the interviewer (the researcher) and interviewee (respondent). The purpose of interviewing someone is to find out what is in his or her mind, not to put things there.

Unstructured interviews, which are informal and used to explore a general area of interest in depth, are also referred to as in-depth interviews. There is no pre-determined list of questions to work through in this situation, although the researcher needs a clear idea about the aspect or aspects that he or she wants to explore. (Welman *et al.*, 2010: 166).

Qualitative researchers typically pose questions to those participating in a study. While not denying the potential for subliminal or subconscious processes, their aim is to find out what people are thinking, feeling and doing. Words are of utmost importance for qualitative researchers, not only are the general ideas salient, but also the richness of word choices and metaphors – even “slang” is worth noting (Giovannoli: 1993: 278). It is of extremely importance for the researcher to pick up the smallest piece of information that can shed some light on the subject. In my case study; I was interested in what the interviews could reveal about what lay behind the success of the principal as an effective agent of change.

Each of the interviews with the four different principals was conducted at their particular school. Authors like Key (1997) and Meyer *et al.* (2008) suggest that the researcher should choose an interview environment and conditions in which the participants feel comfortable, secure and sufficiently at ease to speak openly about their point of view. It seems that the best results are obtained when people are interviewed in their natural setting.

Stories, also called “narratives” have become a popular source of data in qualitative research, especially first-person accounts of experiences. These narratives normally have a beginning, middle, and an end (Merriman, 2009:32). In this research project, the principals had a very interesting story to share with the researcher, namely how they succeeded in bringing about the changes that benefited both learners and staff despite the resistance. It should be mentioned here that there is always a certain amount of resistance to the change process. Narratives of the change process that were shared with the researcher during the interview served as vital information for the study.

While Smith (1981) uses a very concise definition of narratives as being “verbal acts consisting of someone telling someone else that something happened”. Polkinghorne (1988) acknowledges that the term narrative generally refers to any spoken or written presentation, confines his usage to the kind of organizational scheme that is expressed in story form. He refers to the “internal logic of the story” i.e. its plot and theme, and also the

product, meaning the story, tale, or poem as a unit, it is an achievement that brings together mundane facts and fantastic creations with time and place being incorporated. The narratives (stories) which were told during the interviews had a clear logic. The plot focused on as the “**new school**” and the theme was **changing** the school from a **low-performing or dysfunctional school** to a **good academic school**. This all came about in the setting of the school with the protagonist being the “**new principal as the agent of change**”.

Greene (1994, cited in Giovannoli, 1993: 7) argues:

Narrative research can be used to pilot a study and gather information that will help to design the most appropriate objective research tools; it can be used to gain greater depth into a small sample within the larger context of a population that has been surveyed with objective measures; or it can be used as the sole evaluation of a real-life problem.

This was a way for me as the researcher to get first-hand information from these principals in their natural environment at the problem schools. Thus principals were able to recount the “narrative” of how they brought about the “**Much-Needed Change**” in a fair and neutral setting. The **Real-Life Problem** of the large number of “**Dysfunctional and/or Low-Performing Schools**” in our country suggests that what this research project was able to reveal should be used as a starting point for further studies on the population of schools that need to be changed.

Giovannoli (1993: 128) makes the claim that in narrative settings:

[S]tories framed cultures and made life meaningful within cultures. It was the quality of meaningfulness, rather than factual truthfulness that gave the story credibility. The hearers of the story believed that it was true because it was meaningful, rather than it was meaningful because it was true.

The above statement made me eager to discover the factors that made it possible for the principals to turn around a school from a “culture of low performance” to a good performance. In other words, I wanted to find out what they did or were busy doing to make life for the learners and the school as an organisation **More Meaningful**.

**(Narratives are simply seen as a method of getting information i.e. in an orderly and logical way from the respondents, which in this sense was the principals, this I feel clearly stated in the text)**

Because the “text” of the story forms the data set for what is analyzed in this type of research, the philosophy of hermeneutics, which is the study of written texts, is often cited as informing narrative analysis. Hermeneutics provides a theoretical framework for interpretive understanding, or meaning, with special attention to context and original purpose, it offers a perspective for interpreting legends, stories and other texts. It extends the idea of text to include in-depth interview transcripts (Merriman, 2009: 34).

The qualitative interview involves a very specific process different from the therapeutic interview, or the ordinary conversation. Each step taken during the course of a qualitative research procedure brings new information and opens windows onto the experiences of the people the researcher meets. Entering the life worlds of interviewees helps the researcher to experience and reconstruct events in which he/she was not a participant. Through this process the researcher hears and learns and extend his/her intellectual and emotional reach across time, class, race, sex and geographical divisions (Rubins & Rubins, 1995: 2).

To conduct a qualitative interview and truly hear what people say requires skills beyond those of ordinary conversation, and takes considerable effort and practice. It is more than a set of skills in that it also encompasses a philosophy and an approach to learning that says that understanding is achieved by probing, namely by encouraging people to describe their life worlds in their own terms. It leads to a relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee that imposes obligations on both sides. This philosophy assist in defining what is ethical and helps to provide standards for judging the quality of the research, the humanity of the interviewing relationship and the completeness and accuracy of the write-up of the research report (Rubins & Rubins, 1995: 3).

### **3.6 DATA RECORDING PROCEDURES**

Researchers use an interview protocol for asking questions and recording answers during a qualitative interview. The protocol includes the following: a heading which includes the date, place, interviewer and the interviewee, and instructions for the interviewer to follow so that standard procedures are used in all of the interviews (Creswell, 2009: 181).

Researchers record information from interviews by making handwritten notes, by audio taping, or by videotaping. Even if an interview is taped, it is still advisable for researchers to take notes in the event that recording equipment fails. If audio taping is used researchers need to plan in advance for the transcription of the tape (Creswell, 2009: 183).

The recording of documents and visual materials can be based on the researcher's structure for taking notes. Typically, notes reflect information about the document or other material as well as key ideas in the documents. It is also helpful to note whether the information represents primary material (i.e. information directly from the people or situation under study) or secondary material (i.e. second-hand accounts of the people or situation written by others). It is also helpful to comment on the reliability and value of the data source (Briggs & Coleman 2007: 154).

### **3.7 DATA ANALYSIS**

The true test of a competent qualitative researcher comes in the analysis of the data. This process requires analytical craftsmanship and the ability to capture understanding of the data in writing. In "showing the workings of the data" researchers also show their understanding of design logic. They have to make sure there is a fit between the analysis procedures and the methodological position of the study, and consistently and coherently manage the analysis process according to the principles of the study design (Henning, 2004: 101).

There are various data analysis procedures for qualitative research; analysis differs for each of the five traditions of inquiry. Generally the process of analysis begins once the data collection process has been concluded, but these two processes can also take place simultaneously. Data analysis in qualitative research can be done by hand, or else it can be done with the aid of a computer program.

Analysis is used to clarify and refine the concepts statements or theories in the research, especially when there is an existing body of literature. The task of the analyst is to bring out the hidden meanings in the text, for example synthesis that combines isolated pieces of information that are yet theoretically unconnected. Information based on observation is used to construct a new concept, a new statement or a new theory (Lichtman, 2010: 48).

Induction entails a definite move in the data from the specific to the more general. The

data generated from this process is used in an endeavour to discover relationships or patterns through careful scrutiny. According to Briggs and Coleman (2007), sets of particulars are combined to form a larger whole. Induction implies that the researcher collects the data and then extrapolates from it to achieve insights into human behaviour.

A particular challenge posed by qualitative research is that it is done chiefly with words and not numbers as in quantitative research. According to Welman *et al.* (2010), words are “fatter” than numbers and usually have multiple meanings. This complicates analyses and research considerably. Although one can perhaps regard words as more unwieldy than numbers, these words render more meanings than a set of numbers and should be used throughout the entire analysis. In qualitative research the solution is therefore to convert words to numbers or symbols but to retain the words and use these together with the numbers/symbols throughout the analysis.

Narrative analysis and explanations are retrospective, they sort out the multitude of events and decisions that are connected to the launch and select those which are significant in the light of the final conclusion. They draw together the various episodes and actions into a story that leads through a sequence of events and their roles in the final outcome. The results draw on all the evidence that is relevant to the outcome, including the individuals’ interpretations of the information (Giovannoli, 1993: 41). The researcher has to be led by the data coming out the interview by the relevant principals, and through this make a logical conclusion of the event of how things moved into the direction of changing the school to a better performing one.

Lieblich (1998, cited in Giovannoli, 1993) suggests the following four criteria for the evaluation of narrative studies: 1) *Width: The comprehensiveness of Evidence*. This refers to the amount of evidence that is provided to allow the researcher to make an informed judgement on evidence and its interpretation; 2) *Coherence: The way different parts of the interpretation create a complete and meaningful picture*. Lieblich distinguishes between internal coherence (how the parts fit together) and external coherence (how the research compares to existing theories and previous research); 3) *Insightfulness: The sense of innovation or originality in the presentation of the story and its analysis*. Does this research move the reader to greater insight into his or her own life; 4) *Parsimony: The ability to provide an analysis based on a small number of concepts, and elegance or aesthetic appeal*. This refers to the literary merits of the oral or written presentation of the story.

;

In working with qualitative data a researcher has a few options for converting the “raw” data to final patterns of meaning. Depending on the methodological frame of the inquiry and the corresponding aim of the analysis procedures, a researcher may go the conventional, straightforward “qualitative coding and categorising” route. This means that the data are divided into small units of meaning, which are systematically “named” per unit (coded according to what a unit of meaning signifies for the researcher) and then grouped together in categories that contain related codes. Each category will therefore contain codes that are semantically related (Henning, 2004: 104).

The purpose of coding is furthermore to understand material that is unclear by putting names to events, incidents, behaviours and attitudes. Welman *et al.* (2010) argue that coding can be classified as follows: Descriptive codes need little interpretation and involve attributing a theme category to a segment of the text, for example the code attitude of the principal toward “change” in text. Interpretative codes relate to the reasons, explanations and motives behind the factual information and are identified when the researchers are more familiar with the text. Pattern codes connect different sections of the text and help the researcher create a more meaningful whole. Revising codes, involves changing the codes as the data analysis continues. The researcher will become aware that some codes may not work or that others decay or become inappropriate.

Codes can also be created by using the conceptual framework of the research question, which in this case would be “New principals as agents of change” prior to the unstructured interviews. The list of codes can then be revised upon closer examination of the field notes. Secondly, the researcher can first collect the data and then divide the field notes into different segments afterwards. This is especially useful in the case of focus groups, where they could have different opinions of a topic. In this particular study, the principal and staff involved might have given their view of the whole change process. Thirdly the researcher can create codes for conditions in the field notes (markers would be words like ‘because’ or ‘since’) or consequences (markers would be words like ‘as a result of’ or ‘therefore’). There could also be codes for interactions amongst the participants, strategies and tactics used during the interview as well as phrases that are used repeatedly (Welman *et al.*, 2010: 214).

Because of the inductive nature of most qualitative research, qualitative researchers traditionally generate their codes or category names directly from their data. Inductive

codes are defined as codes that are generated by the researchers by directly examining the data during the coding process. They are base codes on emic terms (terms that are used by the participants themselves) used mainly by students active in sports, and social science that researchers are familiar with. Most qualitative researchers are in favour of inductive coding because it gives good, clear and descriptive words that characterise data into different segments (Johnson & Christensen, 2004: 508).

When categories are properly entered, the themes that will be constructed from the data begin to emerge, and will be used in the discussion of the inquiry. This part of the road from “raw” data to findings is as important as the coding and perhaps even more so because it invokes the broader context. Henning (2004) argues that researchers do more than journalists; journalists have only to present the information, hopeful to serve the interest of the public. Researchers strive to systemise knowledge in their discipline, and for that they need extensive disciplinary knowledge. The results of their research could contribute to their particular field of study and also benefit many individuals and institutions.

In the recontextualisation of the data text, meaning when the final data are integrated as evidence in an argument, the original data text and the context (the “text” with the “text”) are merged. This merging is also evidence of the intellectual labour of the researcher. To merge the text of the data with other texts in the literature and to forge your own argument and take your position cannot happen without a broad and thorough knowledge of the texts, the empirical and the theoretical. Holiday (2001, cited in Henning, 2004) suggests that researchers look again at content analysis as an important tool, and the template from which it operates, that is chunking the data and synthesising the chunks again to create a new whole. This also serves as a valuable tool for other forms of analysis.

### **3.8 DISPLAYING THE DATA**

In broad outline, a data display is a systematic, visual representation of information which enables the user to draw conclusions about qualitative material collected through unstructured interviews and to take the necessary action. More specifically, a data display offers a descriptive explanatory framework of the investigation and enables the researcher to obtain a complete view of the systematically arranged, full data set obtained (in the case of this research, during the interview). Data display formats are always driven by

explorative research questions, or the development of concepts which are often in the form of codes (Welman *et al.*, 2010).

There are several types of data display formats, but these generally fall into two major categories, matrices with defined rows and columns and networks with a series of nodes with links between them. The display selected depends on the object of the investigation which can include a general situation, detailed chronologies, the attitudes, decisions or behaviour of people, different roles of people, or the interplay between conceptual variables (Welman *et al.*, 2010: 220).

Matrix displays enable the researcher to understand the flow of events and the connection between these events. Time-ordered matrix displays are usually used to describe the flow of events by listing them chronologically. The series of concrete events are arranged into several categories according to chronological time periods, so that it is easy to see when particular phenomena occurred.

Network displays show the most important independent and dependent variables as well as the relationship between these by means of arrows. The relationship between the independent variables and dependent variables should be regarded as causal not correlational. Consequently, one can assume that the independent variables exert a direct influence on the dependent variables (Creswell, 2009: 221).

I made use of the matrix to display my data because it allowed me to show events and happenings chronologically. The developments that followed obviously followed in a set sequence that led to the ultimate goal of a successful agent of change. This Matrix also made provision for the negative happenings like the resistance the principal had to deal with, and also the time taken to get staff on their side to fulfil the mission of creating a good environment for teaching and learning.

### **3.9 EPISTEMOLOGICAL DIMENSION**

The epistemological dimension refers to the relationship between the researcher and what is being researched. When the qualitative paradigm is followed, the implication is that the researcher interacts with those he/she studies, whether this interaction assumes the form of living with the respondents or the observation of the respondents over a period of time, or both. The researcher therefore minimises the distance between himself/herself and

those being researched (Creswell: 214: 2009). The epistemological dimension of my study is the same field as my profession i.e. education, which means there is a direct link between my daily work and research topic. The goal of this study was to find out what makes certain principals better “agents of change” or more effective than others in the same field.

### **3.10 RESEARCH ETHICS**

Ethics in science are the principles and guidelines that help us to uphold the things we value. Because scientific research is a form of human conduct, it follows that such conduct has to conform to generally accepted norms and values. In the course of time, the scientific community has developed codes of conduct, to regulate the behaviour of members of the scientific community. In this case, I was part of the scientific community. Such codes of conduct are usually enforced through professional societies and associations, like universities. In my case the ethics committee of Stellenbosch University checked my research proposal to ensure that it adhered to this university’s code of conduct (Mouton, 2005: 239).

Mouton (2005) argues that the ultimate goal of all science is the search for truth. This is known as the epistemic imperative of science, which is the moral commitment that scientists are required to make to search for truth and knowledge. The term imperative implies that a kind of moral contract has been entered into that is neither optional nor negotiable, but intrinsic to all scientific inquiry. The epistemic imperative is not merely a nice idea or convenient rhetoric, but acts as a regulative principle to guide the conduct of scientists.

There are some important ethical considerations. One is that researchers must obtain informed consent. This means that the researcher must obtain the necessary permission from the respondents after they have been thoroughly and truthfully informed about the purpose of the research and any benefits or risks involved (Welman *et al.*, 2010:201). In my research, the information I obtained during the interviews with the different principals was entirely positive because I was enquiring about the successful strategies they used in their different schools. They proved to be completely willing to share their success so others could benefit.

Since my research was in a school context, additional consent was needed from the

Education Department concerned (Johnson & Christensen, 2004: 109). Accordingly, I applied to the Western Cape Education Department through the University of Stellenbosch.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE FINDINGS

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter interprets the findings of the investigation into new principals as agents of change. The interviews confirmed that all the respondents were first-time principals at these particular schools. All the schools were in areas affected by socio-economic factors that had an impact on the pass rate and the low morale of teachers, with the result that these schools had been termed dysfunctional. The other important finding was that principals created a healthy working environment. This included boosting the morale of teachers and upgrading old policies or creating new ones which ranged from curriculum to discipline of learners to more effective ways of communicating with parents. Another significant finding is that the management and leadership skills of principals played an important role in peaceful conflict resolution both within and outside the school and helped to establish the new vision” of the school. They were thus important gatekeepers in the sense that they kept to policies agreed on by the resisters, worked on an open door policy by listening to everybody and did not deviate from decisions made in the interests of the new vision of the school.

A critical finding was resistance to change was stronger among educators that had been at the school for a number of years. They were the ones that formed cliques because they saw nothing wrong with the present situation of the school. It is significant that up to five years later all the principals were able to agree that there was visible change at all schools involved. The staff was more cohesive and teachers were better able to express themselves in meetings. There was also distinct improvement in the discipline of learners which led to an improvement in the pass rate. The community and parents noticed the change that took place at the school after the new principal took the helm. As a result, more parents and community members wanted to become involved in helping to strengthen the image of a better and more productive school which they could be proud of.

The findings of this study support the view in the literature outlined in Chapter One and reviewed in Chapter Two those principals who are at a school for less than five years are in a strong position to make the school more productive.

## 4.2 IMPORTANT FINDINGS

The most important findings of the analysis were:

- The respondents in the study, namely the principals interviewed for the purpose of the research, had been in their current post at these particular schools for three to five years.
- Fifty per cent of these (P1 and P2) principals had become a principal for the first time. Of these one had been a deputy principal (P2) before that, and the other one (P2) had been a head of department.
- The other 50% of principals (S1 and S2) had previously served as principals, but at other schools. The interesting factor is that prior to this appointment, they (both S1 and S2) had been used on more than one occasion by the education department to help to raise the standards at dysfunctional schools. They (S1 and S2) had also been used to start new schools and help to establish an acceptable educational level. The previous two findings show that the Education Department had already identified these principals, whom they used to upgrade dysfunctional schools, as successful agents of change. The respondents (S1 and S2) that had become principals for the first time were doing well in the process of bringing change to their particular schools.
- An interesting aspect of these schools is that they are situated in areas which are strongly affected by socio-economic factors like gangsterism, unemployment, drugs and teenage pregnancy. The majority of these schools are poorly resourced, but the principals resisted the temptation to use this fact to excuse non-execution of the curriculum. Two of the schools in the study were still in pre-fabricated buildings, which are difficult to work in during extreme weather conditions.

## 4.3 THE SITUATION WHEN THE NEW PRINCIPAL ARRIVED

The information provided by the new principals in most cases depicted a situation very close to that of a dysfunctional school. At one particular primary school (P1) the average pass rate for mathematics was 10%, while the other primary school (P2) had an even lower average. One of the possible explanations for this low performance may be that most learners were not being taught in their mother tongue. The majority of learners originated either from the Eastern Cape or other countries outside of South Africa, which resulted in an ever bigger problem when it came to the external tests for the grade threes and sixes.

There was a culture of late coming at the primary schools that did not appear to have been addressed by the previous leaders. During the day of reporting, the late comers continued to arrive up till the line-up after breaks. This delayed the start of the next period. In addition, the teachers showed no interest in reprimanding the late comers.

The situation at the high schools was even worse in that the average pass rates for the school learners at S1, including the matriculants, was only 45%. There were major disciplinary problems such as late coming and absenteeism which greatly affected the academic work. There was also a problem of substance abuse, both drugs and liquor. In addition, there were learners at S1 that were involved with gangsters, which made both teachers and learners feel unsafe. These gangsters used the school grounds as a turf to gather as well as a “thoroughfare”, because the school fence had been broken down by these very gangsters and some of the school learners. The situation at S1 was so bad that the department was seriously considering closing the school. They argued that they had spent a great deal of money, but there had been no real improvement in safety and security.

The problem of either low or no teacher involvement in the day-to-day running of the school was of great concern to the principals. Many teachers at S2 did the bare minimum: their share of teaching and nothing more. The morale amongst staff was generally very low at these schools because they felt that there was very little they could do to change the situation.

The findings also revealed that there was role confusion at most of the schools. This was because some of the teachers had not been given a clear job description. Many teachers were working on an ad hoc basis because of the uncertainty that existed at the school. Teaching the curriculum, which is supposed to be what the teachers were there for and what they are paid to do, was done at a very basic level at S1 and at S2. This could be one of the reasons why the pass rate was so low at these schools.

When the principal arrived and was introduced, he was made to feel distinctly unwelcome. The older staff members formed factions and, in some cases, openly showed their disapproval of and opposition to the new leader. They sat in a particular corner of the staffroom or moved about in groups outside it. At one of these high schools, the older teachers who had been at the school for an average of twenty-five years gave the principal

most resistance during the change process. At S1, it appeared that the younger staff welcomed the appointment from outside, anticipating that new ideas would be introduced.

The parents were very sceptical when meeting these new principals for the first time in either a general meeting or on a one-on-one basis, raising questions like: "What new can you bring to the party?" Some parents at P1 were not happy with the appointment of a new principal from "outside". It was as if they wanted to ask: "Now what's wrong with the people that we know?" Some of the parents at P2 who knew what the situation was like at the school before welcomed the principal, obviously hoping that there would be changes in the school and community.

There were some learners who were happy with the new principal, and showed the desire to cooperate, while others were out to take "chances" with the new principal as at S2.

#### **4.4 TOWARDS CREATING A HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENT**

The first and most important thing principals had to do was to create a good and healthy work environment in which to bring about the necessary changes for the good of these schools. As established in 2.2, (Everard *et al.*: 2004: 224) define change as a phenomenon that engages with people's intellect and emotions. It impinges on people's value systems, and not only affects individuals but also the structure, norms and environment of organisations. The success of the principals was based on how well they facilitated or steered the change process taking all crucial factors into account. Before new developments can take place, it is imperative to level the playing fields and for the parties concerned to start with a clean slate. Success at this crucial stage rests squarely on the shoulders of the change agent. In the case of a school, the\* change agent is the principal as( Everard *et al.* 2004: 235) rightly emphasise.

The solution that respondents at S1 and S2 came up with was either to develop new policies where there was nothing in place or to upgrade the policies that had never been upgraded or revised. These policies ranged from a code of conduct for both teachers and learners to curriculum assessment to language, admission and HIV and Aids policies. Teenage pregnancy policies were compiled at both the high schools to offer teachers guidance on how to deal with the learners concerned in a sensitive way. The other very interesting move at both P1 and P2 was a wellness policy for teachers. This showed that the principal took a personal interest in the welfare of the staff and even their immediate

family. He also announced highlights and milestones to the rest of the staff. This created a sense of pride and belonging, which encouraged staff to give more quality time to the school and to help the principal make the change process more effective. These policy developments confirm what (Conley, 2000:10) was referring to when he argued that the change process in schools should also be linked to 'reform-driven' activities. Once existing procedures, rules and new policies have been put in place, the school has to adapt to function well in its new circumstances. Providing role players with the impetus to make this happen and introducing the necessary reform is the responsibility of the change agent, the principal (see 2.2.3).

These policies have become an effective means of guiding and monitoring teachers and especially the learners with regard to discipline inside and outside the classroom. In cases where learners did something seriously wrong, their parents were called in so the learners could be made aware of the seriousness of the matter and the likely consequences in the presence of their parents. This worked well in both the primary and high schools since it meant that working parents had to arrive late for work and so lost money. Parents were faced with a choice: either they put extra pressure on their children to comply with the rules of the school or they risked losing pay if they allowed their children to continue to behave inappropriately.

The possibility of change was strengthened by having policy workshops where both the advantages and possible disadvantages of some of the policies were discussed. Every single educator was encouraged to make an input in the meeting in order to make the workshop successful. The procedure and the implementation of these policies were discussed on a regular basis. The Senior Management Team (SMT) was the first point of contact with the principal. They met to discuss what needed to be done before putting it to the whole staff for approval (S1 and S2).

In the case of one of the principals (S1), creating a healthy working environment also meant repairing almost the entire school, which had been vandalised by gangsters over the years. Most of the classrooms had no ceilings and the electric wiring and the fittings were missing and so had to be replaced. All of the classrooms badly needed to be painted, and, in some cases, the floors were in such a bad state that they had to be retiled.

This high school (S1) had a computer room for the very first time when a company donated about 30 computers. This was one of the factors that contributed to the

improvement of the academic results of the school.

The principal as change agent at P2 also had to find really innovative ways to improve the safety of the building. After he had successfully negotiated with it, the Education Department finally agreed to appoint security guards to guard the building for twenty-four hours of every day, including week-ends and school holidays. Closed circuit cameras were also installed to help prevent a recurrence of vandalism at the school. In an area of this nature the school building (a pre-fabricated building) could not only be vandalised, but be completely demolished. This has happened to a few buildings of this kind in the area.

One of the major changes that stood out at one of the high schools (S2) is the effective communication system called the SMS Web System. As part of the system, parents are fed valuable information, such as reminders of meetings, homework or projects, or even requests to see a teacher regarding the behaviour of their children via SMS.

#### **4.5 MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP SKILLS**

Being asked to be an agent of change obviously makes high demands on management and leadership skills. These new principals in most cases found themselves at either a poorly performing or a dysfunctional school where they were expected to produce better results. Being able to produce better results, however, is linked to the amount of experience and skills the new candidate has at his or her disposal. (Hopkins, 2006: 166) argues that poor management and poor leadership are two sides of the same coin at an ineffective school. This implies that the overall leadership style of the principal needs to change in order to transform this kind of school.

The findings show that a combination of different management and leadership skills and how they were applied played a major role in the success of the principals of these schools. The process of change is rarely, if ever, smooth or unopposed. These principals definitely had their fair share of differences with the staff, and this led to conflict and the staff's refusal to share in the new vision the principal had for the school. In all cases, however, the school as a whole benefited from the principal's management skills and knowledge of how to resolve conflict successfully.

The principal at the school is likely to face many challenges in future and differences would

continue to come to the surface. How this is managed and resolved would depend on the type of leader the principal is. This would also mean that the principal's change management abilities would be tested. (Sarros and Sarros, 2007:58) report on research done on multi-model approaches to leadership, i.e. an attempt to find the kind of leader that handled the environment of change most effectively. The Transformational Leader obtained most support. This kind of leader was seen as taking a positively affirming approach to leading people and institutions. They were thus able to motivate people to do more than they originally intended or they thought possible (see 2.2.4).

The new principals in this study brought out the seemingly impossible in their staff by delegating responsibilities to them, which had never been done by the previous leaders. Staff members were trained, or rather re-trained by the principal, to develop a sense of accountability for their given task, especially by having to report back in meetings. This also developed a sense of pride in them. One of the outstanding features of a transformational leader as change agent is helping people search for self-fulfilment, i.e. to focus beyond minor things. In this case, the minor things were differences amongst staff regarding the change process. Staff members were encouraged to focus on the "big picture" – their responsibility to serve the needs of the learners: the reason for which they were employed and being paid for.

The interviews revealed that the principals had also acquired skills in their involvement in their extra-mural activities in the community, where they played a pivotal role in bringing many much needed projects into being. In these projects, the principals needed skills like being able to negotiate with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in order to achieve success. Principals also needed to negotiate with staff to get them in sharing in their vision for the improvement of the school. For the sake of the school, one of the principals had to gather his courage and get the two rival gangs together (S1) so he could "negotiate a deal for peace".

The principals found they needed problem-solving skills almost every day to address the issues that arose, but finding the best way to solve the problems was even more challenging. The principals had to be very careful about the course they took to solve things to avoid being accused of being biased by certain parties that wanted to swing things their way.

#### **4.6 RESISTANCE PRINCIPALS FACED**

Those directly or indirectly affected used various forms of resistance to oppose requests made the leader. Individuals or groups found legitimate reasons not to comply at all or to do a poor job. They also made excuses for not carrying out the task, procrastinated or refused flatly to do the task.

The findings show that the respondents saw resistance to their intended changes as a major factor in holding up or prolonging the process of transformation. In some cases it even brought out the worst in the professional people concerned. As part of “selling” the intended changes in policy, principals had to deal with educator cliques in the majority of these schools (S1 and S2). In some cases these included even senior staff. According to (Saunders, 2000:457), resistance to change is a natural reaction. Any change, even one that is beneficial, requires psychological adjustment, because it threatens the target’s role, job security, economic welfare or social support (see 2.5.1).

Resistance was strongest in cases where many of the staff had been at a school for a good number of years. At this one high school nearly 70% of the staff had been there for an average of twenty years. Some of them had even been learners there, and they wanted the principal to know that they “owned” the school. It was this very school that the education department threatened to close: they had termed it a dysfunctional school because of its low pass rate for a number of years (S1).

Staff members at S1 felt that the new principal saw the efforts they had made in previous years as inadequate. According to (Saunders, 2000:459), that would be difficult to deal with (see 2.5.1). It was very difficult for the principal to convince them that the present situation was not conducive to teaching and learning. The staff were unable to believe, or perhaps did not want to believe, that the Department termed the school dysfunctional. One of the chief reasons that had caused this was, of course, the environment. The principal was addressing that very issue when he successfully got the gangs together.

According to the findings, the majority of the respondents all felt that a very small percentage of the staff were in favour of the change process. These were the younger members of staff. Principals at S1 and S2 were very aware that the older staff felt that “you cannot teach an old dog new tricks”. Although they never explicitly stated this, it was evident that they were aware of the reality of the situation they were faced with. This is a reality that goes hand in hand with the change process. As (Fullan, 2004:100) points out,

change leaders need to recognise the uncertainty, anxiety provoked by change and the inevitable disagreement on all levels (2.5.1). This was the greatest concern and challenge that the respondents grappled with when they invited the whole school community to see and share in the new vision they had for their particular school.

One of the biggest issues that most of these principals had to deal with was that the cliques made up of older staff and those that had been there for a number of years. They offered the greatest resistance and would openly oppose the principal in a meeting, and “shut down” discussion of any new idea that were put on the table to better the institution. It was not that these cliques had their own proposals or a “Plan B” or alternative way of improving the school. Their resistance was merely a means of taking every opportunity to “undermine” or “show up” the principal during staff meetings (P1 and P2).

“Cliques and resistance” was a very powerful factor. According to the principal at P1, when the cliques did not succeed in getting their way, they used the help of a union representative to organise an illegal strike. It should be noted that the principal had tried every avenue, including negotiation, to reach agreement. The new principal, who had learnt that staff members at this particular school were notorious for using illegal strikes to give vent to their anger, notified the Education Department. The disciplinary steps taken by the Department backfired on the principal. But for the sake of the institution and most of all the vulnerable learners, the principal had to stand his ground and find a way of resolving issues and differences.

The resistance at one particular school was intensified when individuals and groups felt that the previous meetings had not favoured their interests. When the principal at P2 refused to compromise because he was determined to act in the interest of the learners and the school as a whole, the confrontation nearly became physical and the Education Department officials were called in. As a result, the guilty parties had to face disciplinary hearings. Thereafter, the Department kept regular contact with the principal to monitor the situation.

The finding also revealed that some of the most resistant teachers at one primary school (P1) were opposed to the abolition of corporal punishment. Right at the beginning the principal re-affirmed the decision by the Education Department to abolish corporal punishment for learners, and made the suggestion: “Let all of us cut up or throw our canes away”. This led to fierce resistance. It should be understood that teachers lacked the

training to explore alternative means of discipline, and this caused even greater frustration. The argument from the teachers was that the learners, who had been made aware of this regulation, would take advantage of the situation. The principal found the teachers would send learners guilty of the most trivial or minor transgression to the principal's office, implying: "You made the rule so you handle the miscreants" (P1).

Part of the resistance faced by the principal at P2 was that in this particular community people would always come in groups and shout, instead of coming in an orderly manner and sitting down and discussing their differences to reach a peaceful settlement. The area was used by different political parties as a "political playground" to persuade people to vote for them. Unfortunately, some of the teachers allowed themselves to be influenced by political power play. An aggravating factor was that this particular place was used as a type of "dumping ground" to accommodate the influx of people into the Western Cape from other provinces in the country, particularly from the Northern and Eastern Cape. This was one of the main reasons why 70% of the schools in this area were declared dysfunctional.

The parents at these different schools applied pressure on different occasions. They constantly argued at length about what they could afford and what they felt the school fees should be, without considering what the needs of the school were. Even when the school fees were decided democratically at a meeting and were kept to the minimum, the majority of the parents still did not pay the fees. In addition, at one school (P2) parents questioned the appointment and authority of the principal arguing that the Department should have appointed an older person with more experience.

#### **4.7 MANAGEMENT OF RESISTANCE**

Successful management and control of resistance and the resisters, who in this case were largely teachers, are vital. It is of the utmost importance for the principal as the agent of change to do so for the whole change process to succeed. (Fullan, 2007: 74) refers to principals as the "gatekeepers" of change, meaning that they should be in control of the situation at the school (see 2.3). The findings showed that all the respondents were successful "gatekeepers", despite the fact that they had to contend with many nasty incidents at the different schools where they were situated.

The one single major factor that all the respondents used to control resistance was to listen to everybody, whether in a staff meeting or to delegations from cliques or even

individuals. This does not mean that they were always left with positive feelings, because in most cases it was very difficult to please the resisters. This confirms the point made in 2.5.2 that managers can best deal with negative attitudes by allowing resistance to be openly expressed (Conner 1998: 121 cited in Hughes 2008) Overt resistance is more manageable than covert resistance. The principals all took this view even when most of the responses from teachers and parents were negative. They retained their vision that change was necessary for the benefit of the school in general.

The findings also show that open expression by the resisters, even if it was negative most of the time, created a sense of transparency. The seeds of this transparency were sown in workshops where all the policies needed for the smooth running of the school were negotiated, approved, and finally accepted by all individuals (S1 and S2). The workshops became a strong tool against resisters, because all differences were expected to be raised in the workshops. Encouraging openness was thus a great step in the right direction. This resonates with an idea expressed by (Robbins and Barnwell, 2002: 362) that “sensitivity training groups” could be used to deal with changes made and reduce resistance. The aim is to change behaviour through instructed group interaction. If the principal becomes the facilitator of such training, he is able to gain clear insight into what is going on around, within and between the groups (see 2.5.2).

The effective implementation of the different policies allowed everybody, including the principal, to keep to the procedures that everybody had decided on. This made it possible to have better control of the different aspects at school. No individual exceptions were allowed when it came to applying policies, since this would lead to further confusion. There was also a risk that it would leave room for individuals to question both the change process and the agent, the principal in this case. As the principal at P1 said, effective implementation of policies “closed all the loopholes” resisters might have used.

Another finding is that these principals made sure that there were no doubts about their relationship with teachers, parents or learners. They did not deviate from what was decided in any circumstances. They were fair and consistent in their dealings with everyone, keeping a record of what anyone had been asked to do and the deadline. They even kept a record of short meetings as a point of reference and a means of keeping those who intended to resist the change process in check (P1 and S2).

The principals all believed in an open-door policy: everybody had access to the principal's office and any school documents which concerned them. The principals all believed in empowering the staff by delegating certain task to them, although some teachers were not very willing to be given extra responsibility.( Robbins and Barnwell,2002:356) (2.2.4) refer to "power co-optation" which is a form of both manipulation and participation. Basically, it gives leaders of a resistance group a key role in the change process so they the resisters become part of the change process. Power co-optation is a very handy way of dealing with resisters, because they would come to appreciate the fact that they could share in the change process at school.

#### **4.8 THE CHANGE PROCESS FIVE YEARS LATER**

The respondents all agreed that the changes at their school in the three to five years that they had been in their post were clearly visible. One was that there was a better sense of cohesiveness amongst the staff. The majority of the staff members were less concerned to promote their own interests, although there were still some that were not fully on board as far as change was concerned. However, because change is a process and not an event, even these staff members may eventually be part of the process.

Principals ascribed their success to a number of reasons. The most important was the time they spent in work-shopping policies. They concluded that it was time well spent. The fact that these principals had stood firm and never deviated from the policies they wanted to adopt left the staff with clear sense of the road ahead. The staff felt freer now to express themselves openly in meetings, not only to make negative comments but also to make positive comments. All of these comments were made in a very professional way.

One principal (S1) said that he had begun using the opportunity in the school assembly to praise and to thank the teachers for the good work done as part of the change process. Expressions of appreciation for teachers involved in new projects at school, such as the launching of a school newspaper, made the teachers concerned feel good and other projects developed as a result. The principal's good work was also acknowledged. For instance, the Education Department gave special recognition to the principal who tackled the problem of gangs in a way that helped to build a positive culture of change, making better teaching and learning possible (S1).

The learners responded well to the changes. This is evident in the fact that there are fewer

disciplinary problems at these schools. There also is a better relationship between the learners and the teachers; learners now understand that what they are asked to do at school is in their own future interests. The number of learners who used to be regular late-comers has declined and so has the rate of absenteeism at all these schools. This has obviously contributed to the most important indicator of school success: the average pass rate at all these schools has increased.

The community around the school also speak positively about the change in these schools. Their comments include proud references to the school gardens and the repaired security fence that at one stage was almost completely down (S1 and S2). The learners' parents are more involved in the activities of schools than ever before. At one high school (S1) a fair number of parents, including the governing body chairperson, helped out at the school every day. At one primary school (P2), the principal succeeded in getting large numbers of parents to attend a meeting every month to evaluate and monitor the learners' progress.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at there commendations and conclusions arising from this research into new principals as agents of change in the education system. New principals, the respondents in this study, had been in their current post for a minimum of three years and a maximum of five years. In this particular study two of the respondents were first-time principals and two of them had previously been in posts as principals at other schools. The one factor which all these schools had in common, is that the schools are all in low-socio economic areas which are known to be affected by crime, unemployment, substance abuse and teenage pregnancies, all of which affect the learners' academic performance in one or another. The results of the research clearly showed, that it is possible to succeed as a school, when the right person is at the helm, and he or she is driven by the passion to make the school successful.

All of these schools had a pass rate of between ten and forty-five percent when these principals were appointed. The personal involvement of all these principals and their success in involving the rest of the staff as well as some parents to help, especially on primary school level to assist some teachers in the larger classes was a key factor in the turnaround. These principals had regular workshops and meetings with their staff to explore methods and strategies that would improve the academic results. They also had workshops and meetings with learners tow in their cooperation through convincing them that the envisaged change would be to their future advantage.

The results show that the efforts and hard work of all these principals bore fruit in the sense that the academic results of all these schools improved significantly. Here one school should be singled out: S1, which was most affected by socio-economic factors, especially gang activity at the school, made the greatest academic improvement. The senior certificate pass rate increased from 45% to 91% in the first year the new principal was at the helm of the school. Significant though these results are, a more impressive feature is that the situation is sustainable because of the sound curriculum policies that were decided on in the workshops by the whole staff will have long-term benefits.

## 5.2 CONCLUSIONS

### 5.2.1 Changing the Schools

The findings of the research project reveal how new principals as agents of change involved staff and the local community in the process of transforming their schools so that they could produce better academic results. The principals made use of methods like having workshops and staff development programmes, for two very important reasons. These were firstly to empower staff, and secondly to get them actively involved in the change process. The principals all either had to introduce new policies where they did not exist or upgrade the old policies. (Conley, 2000:10) calls this “Reform Driven Change” (see 2.2.3). According to him, research studies reveal that most change schools fall into this category because it is capable of yielding positive results. This proved to be true in the case of the principals in this study, who successfully implemented change.

The principals as change agents always had an appropriate strategy available to drive their vision for the institution, and to motivate the staff to move in the desired direction. They used their previous experience and management skills to solve conflict and address issues both within and outside the school. Building on their previous work, they were confident that they would be successful, despite the resistance they encountered (Fullan, 2009:17) calls the methods used by the principals “Power Principles” (see 2.2.4). These imply moving as fast as the process will allow and thus increasing the chances of success. However, success requires having a strategic plan for the process.

All the principals in the research project agreed that it was not easy to start this kind of process of change. They had to meet the challenge of upgrading schools whose academic performance was poor. In the case of S1, the principal had to turn around a dysfunctional school that was on the brink of being closed down by the Education Department. It was a major task for principals to continue the process of taking the school to a level it had never been on before once it had been started, since they had to face resistance from members of staff, however good intentions their intentions were for the school. This kind of challenge they faced is reflected in (Smith, 2008:245) “[C]hange is a journey or process of moving people to a new place and state of mind and often they don’t want to get there, and they

will use any excuses not to get there, they will use things like is it worth all the effort, we have previously tried this before” (see 2.2).

The collated the data on the principals’ experience of the whole change process was consistent with the literature on change. Therefore it seems that the principals’ conclusions were right. All these principals were very serious about their role and had a passionate conviction about what they were planning to do. They were determined to bring about the intended change and to make it academically sustainable.

### **5.3 RESISTANCE TO THE CHANGE PROCESS**

The results in the study show that there was resistance to change led by the new principals at all of the schools. However, at one school, P2, resistance was not so much from the staff, but rather from the community. This resistance stemmed from the hidden political agenda of a certain political party. At two of the other schools in the study, namely at P1 and S1, resistance was severe because the majority of the staff had been at these schools for an average of twenty years. (Saunders, 2000:457) explains that “resistance is normally the strongest where staff are coming on for years at the same institution”(see 2.5.1).The educators at these two schools questioned the need for change, arguing that doing things like this had worked for years so what was the sudden need to do things differently.

The study revealed that staff did not see the reason for change because they had not realised that the school had been declared dysfunctional. This was the case at S1 where the Education Department intended closing the school, because there had been no improvement in the academic results for some time. The staff at most of these schools in the study had become used to the “abnormal situation”. Three years after the new principal had been appointed, one of the educators asked, “What crisis are you talking about?” when the Education officials referred to the crisis at the school.(Saunders, 2000:459) refers to the situation where educators oppose change to a dysfunctional school in an area affected by socio- economic issues (see 2.5.1).They do not see the situation as inimical to teaching and learning because they accept being part of a dysfunctional school as the norm. These educators see change as a threat to the security and comfort they have experienced over a number of years.

The findings also show that there were two types of resisters at all the schools involved in the study. There were those who openly opposed the change process and others who resisted the change process by forming “cliques” to undermine the principal as the change agent. Many individuals were not assertive enough to speak with conviction during meetings, so they found being part of a clique empowering. (Sullivan & Decker, 2000:442) contend that at all times the change agent should listen to who says what and in what circumstances (see 2.5.1). Verbal resisters, meaning individuals and those that form part of a clique\*, are easier to deal with than “closet” resisters whose resistance takes the form of nonverbal signs such as poor work habits and a lack of interest in change process.

#### **5.4 PRINCIPALS’ MANAGEMENT OF RESISTANCE**

It seems that all the principals in the study all used a transparent way of managing resistance in the change process. In other words, everyone was given the opportunity to discuss the intended changes which were for the benefit of the school. It was not a matter of finish product’s coming from the principal’s office which the staff simply had to implement. This illustrates what Carnall (2003, cited in Hughes, 2006:121) implies: “[a lack of] resistance is a consequence of how a change is managed rather than the change itself” (2.5.2).

The findings make it clear that all principals were able to deal with and manage resistance very effectively. For instance, they listened to resisters in groups or individually, and in this way were able to resolve the natural conflict that arises during any change process. In all cases these principals were able to reach agreement, albeit not always very easily, through persuading resisters that change was in the interests of the institution and would ultimately benefit the learners. This idea of handling conflict effectively is supported by Conner (1998 cited in Hughes, 2008:121), who argues that managers – in this case, principals – can minimise the negative effect of resistance by encouraging open rather than covert resistance (see 2.5.2).

The findings show that the principals all work-shopped the new ideas, policies and changes with the staff, and invite their views. Resistance was expected, but negotiation made it possible for consensus on the envisaged change to be reached. This made it

easier for policies to be implemented. When staff member had a problem with the same change later on, they could be reminded that they agreed to the change. This was an effective way of managing resisters; it is difficult for a person to resist something that he or she had publicly agreed to earlier.

## 5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

I would suggest and recommend that further research needs to be done on the management style of effective school principals. Studies done on the new principals at particular schools could allow us to look through more complex academic “lenses” at the pace at which changes can be done and ways of enduring and overcoming the resistance to change. This could contribute to making the school as an institution a more effective place of teaching and learning for all the learners and educators. Learners who graduate from these particular schools may not be aware of the in-fighting that took place behind the scenes, but they will leave from a better school than the one they started at. The change will largely be thanks to the efforts of one person, the change agent, who was prepared to transform the school.

The findings show that these principals dealt with their staff in a humane and professional way and were very successful leaders. Despite all the differences and difficulties they had to endure, they never lost their professional touch, they still kept their composure and this was one of the greatest factors in their success. The staff could not accuse them of losing control of the situation or themselves in the heat of the difficult process of change.

\*

Finally, the findings show that these principals had a workable method at all times through their inclusive workshops. They did not always take the chair, but as a result of their guidance and empowering strategies, staff members who previously were not able to do so could now run these workshops effectively. The findings show that they always had an appropriate strategy to deal with the issues that arose, which makes them true “transformational leaders”. They had the know-how, and could lead their followers to look beyond their self-interest and act for the good of the institution. This type of leader is most certainly the sort of principal all schools need to make our education system the effective one it needs to be.

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## Appendix



# WESTERN CAPE Education Department

Provincial Government of the Western Cape

## RESEARCH

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**REFERENCE:** 20110523-0043

**ENQUIRIES:** Dr A T Wynngaard

Mr Sydney Williams  
Lower Parliament Street  
Cape Town  
8001

**Dear Mr Sydney Williams**

### **RESEARCH PROPOSAL: NEW SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AS EFFECTIVE AGENTS OF CHANGE**

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The Study is to be conducted from **14 June 2011 till 14 June 2012**
6. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
7. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr A.T Wynngaard at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number.
8. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
9. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
10. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
11. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:  
**The Director: Research Services  
Western Cape Education Department  
Private Bag X9114  
CAPE TOWN  
8000**

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards.

Signed: Audrey T Wynngaard

for: **HEAD: EDUCATION**

**DATE: 24 May 2011**



UNIVERSITEIT-SELLENBOSCH-UNIVERSITY  
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12 October 2011

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Reference No. 604/2011

Mr SF Williams  
Department of Education Policy Studies  
University of Stellenbosch  
SELLENBOSCH  
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Mr SF Williams

**LETTER OF ETHICS CLEARANCE**

With regard to your application, I would like to inform you that the project, *New School Principals as Effective Agents of Change*, has been approved on condition that:

1. The researcher will remain within the procedures and protocols indicated in the proposal, particularly in terms of any undertakings made in terms of the confidentiality of the information gathered.
2. The research will again be submitted for ethical clearance if there is any substantial departure from the existing proposal.
3. The researcher will remain within the parameters of any applicable national legislation, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of research.
4. The researcher will consider and implement the foregoing suggestions to lower the ethical risk associated with the research.
5. This ethics clearance is valid for one year from 12 October 2011 to 11 October 2012.

We wish you success with your research activities.

Best regards



*Sidney Engelbrecht*  
MR SF ENGELBRECHT

REC Coordinator: Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humaniora)  
Registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council (NHREC): REC-050411-032



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## Interview Schedule

- 1 How long are you in the post as principal at this school?
- 2 Were you also a principal at any other school before?
- 3 What was the situation like at the school, when you came here for example the:
  - Average pass rate?
  - Discipline amongst learners?
  - Staff involvement in every day run of the school?
  - Effective implementation of the school curriculum?
  - How was the spirit amongst the staff at that particular time?

4 How did the staff accept you as new principal, could you perhaps describe what he feeling was like in the initial stages?

- 5 How did the learners, parents and the community respond to your appointment as principal?
- 6 What did you do to win the staff over on your side to create a good working environment?
- Could you share with me some of the methods you applied?
- 7 Can you share with me what according to you and the staff was the major changes you made in this period?
- Were there new policies that was made
  - Or existing policies upgraded
  - Social functions arranged to create cohesion amongst staff and community
- 8 Were there any specific management and leadership skills that you can ascribe to as your success in this change process?
- How did you apply it?
  - Were workshops conducted?
  - Did you do the workshops yourself, or did you get a neutral person to do it?
- 9 What type of resistance did you encounter in the process of change amongst the staff, learners and parents?
- Could you perhaps furnish me with a few examples
  - How did they respond in meetings was their negative comments made?
  - Was their “clicks” amongst staff that tried to undermine you?
  - Who do you think gave the most resistance, the younger or the older staff?
  - What about their unstable emotions like distrust in your plan, or fear for the unknown?
  - What was the reaction of parents in the school governing body?
- 10 How did you address and solved the resistance you encountered on your mission of change?
- What strategies or methods did you use in the process?
  - Did you use more group activities, or did you make more use of addressing individuals?
  - How did you address the “denial stage” of the change process?
  - To what extend did you involve staff in your new plans?
- 11 Why would you say that these strategies were effective?  
Was there a change in the behaviour of those that resist initially?  
Was there a better working environment amongst the staff?  
Was there a better spirit amongst the staff then before?

12 What is the climate and atmosphere like now amongst the staff, learners and the community a few years later?

- Do they now expect you as a successful agent of change? (explain please)
- Do they see a different and better performing school under your leadership? (explain)
- What are their feelings and views like now on the above matter?

### Onderhoud Skedule

1. Hoe lank is U in die betrekking as hoof by hierdie skool?
2. Was u alreeds hoof by enige ander skool ?
3. Hoe was die situasie by die skool aanvanklik toe u as hoof aangestel was byvoorbeeld
  - Die gemiddelde slaagsyfer
  - Disipliene onder leerders
  - Personeel se betrokkenheid in die daaglikse take
  - Die effektiewe implementering van die skool kurrikulum
  - Hoe was die gees onder die personeel op daardie tyd
4. Hoe het die personeel U as nuwe hoof aanvaar, kan U dalk beskryf wat die gevoel was in die begin?
5. Hoe het die leerders, ouers en die gemeenskap gereageer tot U aanstelling as hoof.
6. Wat het U gedoen om die personeel aan U kant te kry om 'n positiewe werksomgewing te skep?
  - Kan U moontlik van die metodes wat U toegepas het met my deel.
7. Kan U dalk met my deel wat volgenss U en die personeel was die grootste verandering wat U aangebring het?
  - Was daar nuwe beleide wat gemaak was
  - Of ou beleide wat dalk opgegradeer was
  - Enige sosiale funksies wat gereel was om 'n samesyn onder die personeel en Gemeenskap te koester

8. Is daar enige spesifieke bestuurs en leierskap waardighede wat U kan toeskryf as sukses in die veranderde proses?
- Hoe het U dit toegepas?
  - Was daar werkswinkels gehou?
  - Het U self die werkswinkels gedoen of was daar 'n neutrale persoon wat dit gedoen het?
9. Watter tipe weerstand het U ondervind in die proses van verandering onder die personeel, leerders en ouers?
- Kan U 'n paar voorbeelde aanhaal
  - Hoe het hulle in vergaderings opgetree. Was daar dalk enige negatiewe kommentaar gemaak?
  - Was daar dalk enige "Clicks" onder die personeel wat U gesag probeer Ondermyn het?
  - Wie dink U het die meeste weerstand veroorsaak; die ouer of die jonger personeel?
  - Kan U dalk iets oor die onstabiel emosies se, soos byvoorbeeld wantroue in U plan, of die vrees vir die onbekende?
  - Wat was die reaksie van ouers in die skoolbeheerliggaam?
10. Hoe het U die weerstand teen die proses van verandering wat U ondervind het Aangespreek en opgelos?
- Watter strategie of metodes het u in die proses gebruik?
  - Het u meer groep aktiwiteite gebruik of meer gebruik gemaak om mense Individiel aan te spreek?
  - Hoe het U die "ontkenning stadium" van die verandering proses aangespreek?
  - Tot watter mate het U die personeel by die nuwe planne betrek?
11. Waarom sal U se dat die strategies effektief was?
- Was daar 'n verandering in die gedrag van die wat in die begin weerstandig was?
  - Was daar 'n beter werk atmosfeer onder die personeel?
  - Was daar 'n beter gees onder die personeel as voor die verandering?
12. Hoe is die atmosfeer en nou onder die personeel, leerders en die Gemeenskap paar jaar later?
- Aanvaar hulle U nou as n suksesvol agent van verandering? (verduidelik)
  - Sien die personeel en gemeenskap n beter skool onder U leiding? (Verduidelik)
  - Hoe is die gevoelens en nou aangaande die hele situasie?