

## **Female school leadership as a relational narrative**

Inaugural Address 20 February 2013

Prof Brigitte Smit

BA(ED); BEd; MEd *Cum Laude*; PhD

Department of Educational Leadership and Management

College of Education

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA



## Contents

GREETINGS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	3
INTRODUCTION.....	6
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	7
DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY .....	11
FINDINGS .....	13
DISCUSSION.....	16
CONCLUSION.....	18
REFERENCES .....	20

## GREETINGS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Prof MC Mare ~ Vice Principal Academic Teaching and Learning –thank you for the welcome

Prof KP Dzvimbo ~ Executive Dean of the College of Education – thank you - introduction

Prof V Mncube ~ Head of Department Educational Leadership and Management and respondent to this address and thank you for your willingness to do this

Prof SJ Berkhout ~ my supervisor from the University of Stellenbosch – special word of welcome

Colleagues from my department

Colleagues from the College of Education and other colleagues from UNISA

Colleagues from the University of Pretoria, University of Johannesburg, and North West Uni

My postgraduate students

My Friends, who see me for the first time working,

My family, and in particular

My husband Theo, our daughters Christine, and Louise and our son-in-law Jonathan.

I am delighted that you have joined me here today and to listen to my address about female leadership, in rural educational settings. I am humbled that you considered my invitation and for your kind attendance. Before I begin I want to acknowledge scholars who have invested in scholarly journey. Firstly my PhD supervisor, Prof Sarie Berkhout who constantly

challenged my theoretical thinking: Brigitte where is your theory? Prof Jonathan Jansen, now VC at UFS, who challenged me by asking, Brigitte what are you professing? You cannot be a professor without professing; Prof Jean Clandinin from the University of Alberta in Canada, who would ask, Brigitte what is the compelling narrative in your research and how are such narratives presented in a captivating manner? There are many scholars who have crossed my paths, who have brought their wisdom to my doctoral education and beyond. From the US, Prof Sharlene Hesse Biber qualitative and feminist theorist, Boston College, Prof Patti Lather, post structuralist and feminist theorist from Ohio State University, Prof Anthony Onwuegbuzie quan, qual and mixed methods methodologist from Sam Houston State University...Prof Sandra Hollingsworth feminist theorist, University of California at Berkeley and Prof Norman Denzin father of Qualitative research from the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. From Europe there is Prof Frans Schuurman social scientist from Radboud University in Nijmegen, Tjeerd Plomp evaluation and assessment expert, from Twente University, Enschede, Prof Lorraine Nencel Prof Harry Wels, anthropologists from the Vrije University in Amsterdam, Dr Susanne Friese and Dr Thomas Muhr developers of the Atlas.ti, a computer assisted software for qualitative data analysis from the Atlas.ti Institute in Berlin.

I also want to acknowledge and thank my critical readers Ms Charmaine Williamsons, Santrust Academic Programme Manager, Prof David Levey UNISA, Prof Eleanor Lemmer UNISA, Prof Jean Clandinin University of Alberta and Prof Valerie Janesick from the University of South Florida in the United States. I big thank you also for the beautiful flower – Baie Dankie liewe vriendin - thank you also for all the good wishes and text messages.

I started my academic journey in the position of senior lecturer shortly after completing my doctorate in 2001 at University of Pretoria, where I stayed for 5 years. During this time I had

the opportunity to visit Harvard and Stanford University. These scholarly visits heightened my awareness of what constitutes research, scholarship and academia. I was also invited to the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada, where I worked with Dr Jean Clandinin who sensitised me to qualitative research and narrative inquiry. In 2005 I joined the University of Johannesburg as Associate Professor for 6 years and thereafter was offered a professorship in 2011 at UNISA. – This is indeed a short academic journey and a privileged one. Today, I teach Masters and Doctoral students, supervise postgraduate research and facilitate qualitative research seminars both for students and staff of universities.

Through the course of my own research, I have been inspired by the many women leaders, who have been central to my research for the past 4 years. Their stories are the substances of this inaugural address. From the outset, therefore, I wish to thank and honour my research participants for allowing me into their lives, sharing unconditionally and giving of their precious time. so authentically ....Without you, I would have not learned what I have learned. In the true inductive spirit I learned from the empirical data about female leadership and the clarity of the analysis directed me to the theories, which I am about to share with you.

I have structured this address in three parts, first the theoretical underpinning of this ongoing research, second the methodological and empirical decisions and lastly I allude to some implications and pose more questions about this inquiry. Sadly, I do not have many answers; instead I offer more questions, which, in my view, is perhaps more important in the academic quest and journey, than finding answers.

## INTRODUCTION

This inaugural address illustrates female leadership in a disadvantaged school in South Africa. It is an interpretive inquiry that seeks to understand the experiences of a female school principal from a critical feminist perspective, specifically an ethics of care and relational leadership in order to reveal the complexities of school leadership in disadvantaged schools. In the inquiry I worked ethnographically as an observer in the school over a period of four years. The inquiry was designed narratively, sourcing data from guided conversations (Hollingsworth, 1992) and observations.

As preamble of this inquiry, I take my cue from Grogan & Shakeshaft (2011, 6) who claim that “much of the research about leadership has been critiqued for the absence of women in educational leadership studies. Studies, conducted only with men, have been generalised to all leaders without identifying them as single gender studies. This implies the research on educational leadership presents a biased interpretation, which leans strongly towards the views of men”. That said, most empirical research in educational leadership is also constrained by positivist research frameworks, which fail to provide a robust, dynamic and multi-dimensional description of female leadership (Young & Lopez 2005, 340). Prevailing conceptions of leadership have been defined largely from Eurocentric and patriarchal perspectives. The empirical approach employed in this inquiry offers an interpretive and qualitative approach for in-depth understandings of the multiple realities of female leadership in a particular educational landscape. The inquiry also proposes a broader alternative theoretical perspective of a feminist relational theory and the ethics of care, which offers the potential to strengthen the knowledge base around female educational leadership.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

What can feminist theories of leadership offer to better understand the experiences of female leadership in disadvantaged communities, in the South African context? Given the dearth of research of women as leaders, in general, and female school principals in particular (Oplatka 2006, 619), this inquiry intends to advance knowledge of female school leadership, theoretically and empirically. Substantive research on feminist theories relates to inquiries of power, autonomy, allocation, reproduction and ethics. These aspects may have relevance for female leadership but are not equated to female leadership. Leadership, given its public forum, has been mostly investigated from a male-dominated perspective (Kramarae & Spender 2000; Vetter 2010; O'Connor 2010). Female leadership has been relegated to the private sphere where attention was focused on family and social relations (Vetter 2010, 3). Male domination has been opposed by feminist researchers who insist on a leadership that advances the goals and aspirations of women. It is beyond the scope of this address to trace the history of feminism and its lack of contribution to feminist theories of leadership. What can be said though, is that “the history of political thought has provided a broad and often contradictory basis on which to build feminist theories of leadership” (Vetter 2012, 6). One such an example is the work by Michel Foucault whose theories of power and discourse have influenced feminist political theorists in diverse ways. Foucault “calls attention to the marginalized and silenced perspectives to gain greater understanding of the multiple ways in which power operates in society” (Vetter 2012, 6). Vetter also offers four major strands of contemporary feminist theory that apply to current trends in feminist leadership theory: liberalism and feminist theory, Marxist feminism, ethics of care and feminist leadership, and Foucauldian and discursive feminism and leadership. This inquiry draws on the ethics of care and feminist leadership. Virtues such as compassion and care, should not be interpreted in a narrow way and limited to private life, but should instead be appropriated too in public and political life, including educational life. Tronto, cited by Vetter (2010, 8)

redefines care as both disposition and action to reach out to other people in society at large. Care is connected to democratic processes and a concern for social justice. “An ethics of care requires several components such as attentiveness to the needs of others, responsibility, understanding of contexts, competence and responsiveness on the part of those who receive care. Such ethics of care is applied in feminist theories of leadership and is often recognised by compassion, empathy, collaboration, and social justice” (Vetter 2010, 8). School leaders who regard care as a political, moral and ethical imperative, are committed to ‘making a difference’ in the lives of their learners. Research studies by women leaders, conducted for example by Blackmore (1989); Strachan (1999); Wyn, Acker & Richards (2000); and Williamson & Hudson (2001) were motivated by doing what was best for their learners and staff.

An emerging trend in female leadership theories is the relational perspective and approach. Uhl-Bien (2006, 2007, 2011a, 2011b), who wrote extensively on this topic, explains that the term relational leadership is quite new, although the concept of relation-oriented behaviour is not so new in leadership studies (p. 654). It was Carol Gilligan, in 1982, in her well known text, *In a different voice*, who proposed, somewhat provocatively that females value relationships more than males, which resulted in further research on female approaches to leadership with documented relational aspects, evidenced in communication styles, teamwork, collaboration and community connection (Shakeshaft 2006, 506). Earlier writings on relational leadership (Regan & Brooks 1995) offer insights into how women transformed their understanding of school leadership. These women were insiders and resisted the traditional administrative behaviour as modelled by their male counterparts. In their research, Regan and Brooks (1995) developed relational leadership as a theory based on empirical data sourced from 11 women, who resisted socialisation into the prevailing male dominant culture ( *ibid*: xi). These accounts of their practice were described as relational as opposed to controlling. Leadership as relational influence can be performed by anyone; it is not a person or a place or a thing, instead it is a verb: “leadership is the action of influence; it is relation,

and it does not exist by itself (Schmuck & Schmuck 1992 cited by Regan & Brooks 1995: xi). A new language that is relational is offered, including concepts such as care, vision, collaboration, courage and intuition, which are seen to be feminist attributes of leadership. While these concepts are not new in the vocabulary, they are given new conceptualizations for the practice of relational leadership.

The first feminist attribute is care, which is defined “as the development of an affinity for the world and the people in it, translating moral commitment to action on behalf of others” (Regan & Brooks 1995, 27). Caring is the essence of education (ibid), and educational leaders remain in caring relationships over a period of time, nurturing growth of learners and staff. Put differently, relational leadership displays care and concern for colleagues and learners. Beck (1992) cited by Regan and Brooks suggests that ethics play an important role in educational leadership. These ethics are informed and guided by care (Regan & Brooks 1995, 29). A feminist perspective of care allows for the interaction with particular individuals, as individuals, with whom leaders are in professional relationships. Caring encourages understanding of experiences of individuals who are living for example in poverty, or with a disability (Grogan 2000, 133). The second feminist attribute is vision, an ability to formulate and articulate original ideas through a facilitated process of encouragement. A visionary leader creates a trusting work environment and colleagues are invited to collaborate and participate. Visionary leaders contribute to feminist thinking and to a new vision for schools. The third feminist attribute is collaboration, the ability to work in a group, supporting group members and creating a synergetic environment for all. Collaboration entails inclusiveness, shared ownership, connectedness and cooperativeness. The fourth feminist attribute is courage, “the capacity to move ahead into the unknown, teasing new ideas in the world of practice” (Regan & Brooks, 1995:29). It involves a degree of risk-taking for the good of the group or the individual, and a quality of leaving oneself vulnerable in a difficult situation. This kind of leadership does not call attention to the leader, instead it calls attention to everybody else (ibid 30). The final feminist attribute is intuition as “the ability to give equal weight to

experience and abstraction, mind and heart. Often intuition is given little credibility. However, “intuition as the initiator is the capacity of mind and heart that is integral to a relational approach to leadership” (Regan & Brooks 1995:34). These attributes of leadership differ greatly from the traditional administrative language of control, hierarchy, authority and division of labour. Whilst relational and traditional language is at opposite ends, it does not mean that relational language is only meant for female school principals. Instead it is meant for all genders. What is enlightening is that the “increased presence of women administrators, as well as [the] emerging feminist scholarship in this field, is corollary to the widening acceptance of the idea of leadership as relational” (ibid: xi).

A more recent text, based on women and educational leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft 2011) explores the concept of relational leadership based on research conducted with female leaders in educational contexts. Grogan and Shakeshaft (Ibid) suggest that relational leadership is about being in relationships with others in a horizontal rather than a hierarchical sense (ibid: 6). Stated differently, relations produce power in a flattened organisational structure. “Leaders who develop coherence around shared values are likely to deepen the sense of community with an organization – a sense of being in relationship with others who are striving for the same goals” (ibid: 47). Accomplishing goals usually takes place with and through others; power is conceptualised differently emphasising that power of everyone should be expanded. Given the male dominance of power, women often would express their discomfort with power and deny their own power. What has changed is the language in use about power, from power *with* rather than power *over* (ibid: 7). This signals a relational approach of power in the work of female leaders. Power is conceptualised by women as something that is shared and therefore they seek to expand everyone’s power (Grogan and Shakeshaft 2011). This supports a view of how power and relationships are perceived as closely aligned, and how power facilitates the strengthening of relationships, as opposed to controlling them.

## DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

– “the softer a research technique, the harder it is to do” – (Yin 1994, 6)

By way of introducing the qualitative research design and methodology for a leadership study, it is noted that leadership scholarship has largely been quantitative in orientation, grounded in the objectivist and positivist paradigm (Klenke 2008). However, narrative inquiry as a qualitative design type is slowly edging its way into leadership studies. Such qualitative inquiries offer “opportunities to explore leadership phenomena in significant depth, do so longitudinally, and answer ‘why’ questions about leadership as opposed to ‘how’ and ‘what’ type of questions as might be answered by quantitative research” (Klenke 2008, 5).

For the purpose of this study, feminist qualitative research frames the design and methodology and considers how race, class, gender, age and material circumstances, in multiple contexts which render the taken for granted problematic in ways that move towards social justice (Olesen 2007, 421). As such, Feminist theory is at its best when it reflects the lived experiences of women, when it bridges the gap between mind and body, reason and emotion, thinking and feeling (Jagger 1983, cited by Regan and Brooks 1995, 39). Furthermore, feminist research does not depict women as powerless, abnormal or without agency. On the contrary, research participants have the power to withhold information. In this regard, Given (2008, 334) suggests opening the dialogical space for researcher participants to be heard, to share and not to withhold information. This is facilitated by avoiding ‘othering’ in the research process, by requesting participants to share much information about themselves, while the researcher shares little or no information about herself. Feminist research acknowledges that knowledge and ‘truth’ are partial, situated, subjective, and relational. Closely linked to feminist ethics of care, feminist qualitative

research stresses the ethical dimension and the inter-relatedness of researcher and participant, and multiple ways of knowing (Olesen 2007, 422). This implies that feminist researchers are both implicated and participatory in the generation of data. Importantly to ask, whose interest will be served by the research? The intent of this inquiry was to serve female school principals and to show that educational leadership is best served by those who work with attentiveness to feminist theories.

This research employed a narrative inquiry from a feminist perspective, which implies that we need more than ‘imported voices’, but critically to “transform and disrupt ideological and/or institutional arrangements ... in a disciplined and caring way” (Carspecken 1996, x). The processes of leadership, intended and unintended consequences of observed interaction patterns, relationships and socio-cultural contexts within educational landscapes were investigated. To these ends, I focused on the experiences of a female school principal. The field texts were analysed using constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006), narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly 2000; Clandinin, 2007; Clandinin, Pushor Murray Orr 2007; Slater 2010) and feminist narrative interpretations (Hilfinger Messias & DeJoseph 2004; Landman 2006). I recognise narrative inquiry as a productive methodology for feminist research, respecting that research participants not only recount their stories but also become “engaged in living, telling, retelling and reliving stories” (Connelly & Clandinin 1990:4). Appropriately for narrative inquiry, as a relational way of knowing, is that, as we tell our stories, in whatever forum, we concomitantly bridge the gaps, we reach out to our participants in order to develop relationships by sharing personal experiences related to the topic, we create trust and we avoid ‘othering’. Put differently, narrative research is focused on how individuals assign meanings to their experiences through the stories they tell. Also, “stories that are told depend on the individual’s past and present experiences, values, the people the stories are being told to and when and where they are being told” (Klenke 2008, 243). Narrative inquiry has an intuitive appeal for the study of female school leadership, although such studies are found infrequently. This is not surprising given the required skills

for collecting narrative data in an “unaltered, unfiltered form with diligence to record and analyze them” (Klenke 2008, 255).

## FINDINGS

I met the school principal, Naledi<sup>1</sup> about ten years ago as a master’s student. Today she is a successful school principal of a primary school in a rural school approximately 80km away from Pretoria. She has been a teacher for 7 years, a head of department for 4, a deputy principal for 8 years and a school principal since 2006. She has also completed her PhD in Education Management. Her school has over 1300 learners. Her staff consists of 2 deputy principals, 4 heads of department, 23 teachers, 5 practitioners, 2 administrative staff and 5 ground staff. The narrative findings are constructed from the voice of Naledi:

“My school was named after a former executive mayor from the area who had great political influence. The school is located in a rural area in the north eastern part of South Africa. Many farm schools in the area have closed down and therefore teachers and children have moved closer to my school. Approximately 85% of all parents of my school are unemployed and rely on government grants to support their children. Most children live in squatter camps. Refugees from Zimbabwe and Mozambique come to my school to enrol their children. Sadly, these parents do not have identification documents and children have no birth certificates or immunisation cards. The Department of Education forces me to admit these children conditionally for 90 days in order for parents to organise relevant documentation. Not only do I do not know where to place these children, given that they have no school report cards, but they also do not speak English or a local African language. I am unable to request school fees and the daily running of my school is seriously compromised. I rely on donations of food and money. Most learners in my school have very little if anything to eat at home. Therefore I have started a non-profit organisation (NPO) on my premises where I have volunteer

workers cooking for approximately 200 children. This project complements the feeding scheme, which is run by the government. Schools in rural areas get one meal a day, which is sponsored by government. I realised though that the governmental intervention is insufficient and therefore I sourced funding from businesses in the nearby town. These businesses help us immensely to feed the hungry learners. The NPO also attends to the physical needs such as washing children and afternoon homework activities. Without this support I would struggle even more. Most children are now able to participate fully in classroom activities and learning. It happens still though that children come to school sick, but actually they are only hungry. Winter time is the worst. Children do wear uniforms but there is very little that is *uniform* about the uniforms as most parents cannot afford the school uniform. Recently, I received an amount of money for a teacher award prize from the Department of Education. Although the money was intended for me personally, I decided to donate this money to buy uniforms for 63 learners. I found this to be far more rewarding. The home situation of most learners is unbearable. Orphans live with their grandparents who rely on old age pension. Many parents have died because of AIDS and the local hospice attests to this.

As the school leader I am in charge of all the affairs of my school: curriculum, development of people, financial management, learners, infrastructure, as well as parents. I am the link between school and the community. I 'represent' the image of this school and I want it to be good one. I encourage my staff to deliver on all counts of the requirements of the Department. I inspire and motivate my staff and account to the district and the department. My view on what it means to be leader in this school has developed over the years. I realise that often I am in conflict with the bureaucratic system, where I need to make decisions regarding learners and staff. I often respond as a buffer between the two. For instance, my decision to establish a NPO was a decision I took on my own – I simply responded to the needs of my school, realising that the Department would not assist.

Most teachers who have postgraduate qualifications choose to leave the school and join the district or the Department as administrative officials. I have however chosen to stay – there is work to be done! I am utterly serious about my school and my leadership style shows it. I fight for my staff, encourage them in their work, and motivate them to continue studying. I know my staff is hardworking. Many of them come from farm schools where they have taught in classes combined of 3 to 4 grades, which is called multigrade teaching. I still teach some classes in my school and particularly enjoy the little ones. I offer accelerated reading programmes, realising how important reading is. As a teaching team I encourage my teachers to devote all their energy in teaching and in their learners. Under my leadership I have developed sports fields (which are unknown in poor rural communities) and I am in the process of building a strong room. I am currently also a building site manager as the assembly area which will soon be getting a roof. I have requested tenders for these building projects, received some funding from the department and have sourced additional funding. “I need a complete change of the academic face of my school – and the physical structures most match”. I want my school to look beautiful and to be a safe place!

I am deeply concerned about what happens outside the boundaries of my school. Thankfully learners trust me and share with me. Recently, I received a pornographic CD which has been doing its rounds in my school – a primary school. I investigated the matter and called in the South African Police Service to assist. They found that foreigners from outside South Africa were distributing these materials. I am shocked at what my learners are exposed to. I often feel helpless, knowing that I am unable to fix the social ills in the community. Parents and learners are so exposed to evil things and I therefore want to create a safe haven for my learners at school. I keep learners at school until late afternoon as a way to protect them. I am concerned about the level of unemployment and the measures that women in particular go to in order to make ends meet. There are hardly commendable examples in the homes of learners about what constitutes good work.

Leadership is not always as straightforward and people do not always respond with kindness. I have challenges with my immediate management team. This adds such pressure to the leadership of the school as I am unable to rely on all my members. I have taken the matter to the authorities, but with no success. What concerns me is the contradicting message of leadership we present in my school and yet I hope that a leadership of care and collaboration will be experienced first-hand”.

## DISCUSSION

Evidence of relational leadership speaks clearly to the potential of leading schools in a caring manner. A relational leader sees the world differently, with vision, with care and with collaboration. Naledi conducts her work with a moral code of conduct, she empowers others to achieve and leads by example in and out of school. Responsibilities reach far beyond of what is traditionally known as school. She is indeed everything to everybody: a narrative of all things to all people. Such narratives help us to understand by making the abstract concrete and accessible (Witherell & Noddings 1991 cited in Reagan & Brooks 1995). I agree with the authors that such narratives ‘from the ground’ redefine leadership, bring about a new language about leadership, and one that disrupts the male dominated discourse of leadership. Discerning the feminist attributes evident from the narrative data speaks to the explanatory power of these attributes in relational leadership. Naledi’s leadership experiences reflect feminist attributes of care, collaboration, vision, intuition and courage. This inquiry redefines the roles of leaders and specifically female leaders working with feminist principles or feminist relational ways of knowing, attributes which are seldom if ever taught to graduate students. Given the findings of this inquiry, leadership in a disadvantaged context requires a redefining not so in terms of tasks, instead as a way of being. Odora Hoppers (2012) offers a helpful explanation in this context: “leadership is a matter of how to be, not how to do. How to do, is the task of a manager. The most effective leaders are a

living demonstration of how values and character when combined in action carry the day.”

As we hear Naledi’s voice in her short narrative, I envisage that these will empower other teachers and school principals, both male and female to initiate such journeys in their schools appropriating the practice of feminist attributes of leadership to their work as school leaders. Such leadership can enrich school life and create a multiplier effect for the entire school community. No doubt this takes extraordinary courage and resilience to work beyond the boundaries of what commonly considered to be ‘school’.

The inquiry draws purposively on a relational epistemology meaning, “all the systems of knowledge are built on relationships” (Wilson 2008 cited by Chilisa 2012). Also, a relational axiology is built on the concept of relational accountability, respectful representation, reciprocal appropriation and rights and regulations during the research process (Chilisa 2012, 22). Theoretically, conceptually, epistemologically and methodologically this inquiry coheres with a feminist, relational and narrative inquiry. The topic of relational female leadership fits comfortably in a relational epistemology as I narratively sought the experiences of a female leader in a disadvantaged school setting. Entering this educational setting in a different manner would direct the investigation on another path. Pagano (1990, 135) (cited by Reagan & Brooks 1995, 64) reminds us appropriately that “we make ourselves known to ourselves by making ourselves known to each other”. Therefore this inquiry invites other female leaders in education to learn from this experience and to build new knowledge, adding to this experience in order to expand the understandings of relational leadership. Given that educational training is dominated by male thinking, managerial positions are mostly understood from that perspective. Relational knowing (Hollingsworth 1992, 386) that draws on feminist attributes may shed light on a different way of leading in schools, particularly in disadvantaged schools. Not many texts speak to relational leadership in disadvantaged schools, specifically on the African continent. Therefore inquiries into the experiences of female leaders from a relational perspective are critical to advance new contextual understandings of leadership. The challenge is to find the language, the words to

articulate experiences on the one hand, and on the other to make these contextual understandings accessible and acceptable for the academic community and a male dominated leadership discourse.

## CONCLUSION

Narrative inquiry, which is interested in lived and told stories (Clandinin 2006, 44) is a form of feminist research to facilitate meaning and knowing. This is a compelling reason why knowledge constructed from female leaders' experiences must be disseminated. Perhaps one could ask other female leaders what they would like to have passed on to the young principals following them. I venture that the feminist attributes could be mentioned. The question remains though, will this relational way of knowing in educational settings be positively received by those in power?

The experiences of female educational leaders in South Africa remain largely un-researched. Narrative inquiry can play a pivotal role into understanding how female leaders negotiate their roles in disadvantaged school communities. Methodical in-depth narrative accounts from a feminist perspective shed light on what happens on the ground in disadvantaged schools led by female principals. We learn from these narratives how nuanced, diverse and complex the various educational landscapes are and that there is no single answer as to how to lead schools in such contexts. We learn about educational leadership specifically relational female leadership in disadvantaged communities. Narrative accounts together with detailed observations are imperative for our student teachers who are studying teacher education and educational management. This inquiry contributes to developing important research in female leadership studies that seeks to draw attention to the limitations of dominant male perspectives. The intent of this inquiry was to “continue to make sense of leadership from a position that recognises the value in attending to its social

and cultural roots, that views [female school] leadership as a relational process and that moves away from leader-centric perspectives” (Stead & and Elliott 2009, 171). Therefore, I contend that what is needed is future research that makes visible female school leadership experiences that occur in various educational landscapes.

In closing,

*What is necessary is the critical understanding of the feminist attributes embedded in relational leadership...To understand relational leadership...one must be open to learning from women’s experiences. To learn from women’s experiences, one needs a congenial group, about half of whom should be women, at least initially, with whom one can engage in relational knowing. To engage in relational knowing, one must be committed to serious reflection about one’s practice, willing to engage in respectful dialogue with both men and women, open to seeing the many levels of its meaning, and ready to act on that new meaning, as one returns to the world of practice.*

(Regan & Brooks 1995, 104)

Naledi’s narrative was shared in the world of practice. She reminds us to restore a caring purpose and relational leadership to our efforts and to help us create the kind of schools our children deserve.

**-THANK YOU - KE A LEBOGA - VIELEN DANK - BAIE DANKIE-**

## REFERENCES

Blackmore J 1989. Changing from within: Feminist educators and administrative leadership. *Peabody Journal of Education* 66(3): 19-40.

Carspecken PF 1996. *Critical ethnography in educational research. A theoretical and practical guide*. New York: Routledge.

Charmaz K 2006. *Constructing grounded theory. A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: Sage Publications.

Chilisa B 2012. *Indigenous research methodologies*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Clandinin DJ & Connelly FM 2000. *Narrative inquiry. Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Clandinin DJ 2006. Narrative Inquiry: A methodology for studying lived experience. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 27(1): 44-54.

Clandinin DJ 2007. *Handbook of narrative inquiry. Mapping a methodology*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Clandinin DJ, Pusher D, Murray Orr A 2007. Navigating sites for narrative inquiry. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 58(1): 21-35.

Connelly FM, Clandinin DJ 1990. Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5): 2-14.

Gilligan C 1982. *In a different voice*. Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Given LM (Editor) 2007. *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative research methods*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Grogan M 2000. Laying the groundwork for a reconception of the superintendency from feminist postmodern perspectives. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 36(1): 117-142.

Grogan M, Shakeshaft C 2011. *Women and educational leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hilfingier Messias DK, DeJoseph JF 2004. Feminist narrative interpretations: Challenges, tensions and opportunities for nurse researchers. *Revista Aquichan*, 4(4): 44-49.

Hollingsworth S 1992. Learning to teach through collaborative conversation: a feminist approach, *American Educational Research Journal*, 29(2): 373-404.

Klenke K. 2008. *Qualitative Research in the study of leadership*. Bingley UK: Emerald.

Kramarae C, Spender D 2000. *Routledge international encyclopaedia of women. Global women's issues and knowledge*. New York: Routledge.

Landman M 2006. Getting quality in qualitative research: A short introduction to feminist methodology and methods. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*, 65(4): 429-433.

O'Connor K (Ed) 2010. *Gender and women's leadership: a reference handbook*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Odora Hopper CA 2012. *Ethical African Leadership: We know theories, but what is the task*. Unpublished address to the UNISA Pre-SENEX meeting.

Olesen VL 2007. Feminist qualitative research and grounded theory: Complexities, criticisms and opportunities. In A Bryant & K Charmaz: *The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, pp. 417-435.

Oplatka I 2006. Women in educational administration within developing countries. Towards a new international research agenda. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 44(6): 604-624.

Regan HB, Brooks G H 1995. *Out of women's experience. Creating relational leadership*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.

Shakeshaft M 2006. Gender and educational management. In C Skelton, B Francis, I Smulyan. *The Sage Handbook of Gender and Education*. London: Sage Publications, pp.497-512.

Slater CL 2011. Understanding principal leadership: An international perspective and a narrative approach. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 39(2): 219-227.

Stead V, Elliott E 2009. *Women's Leadership*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Strachan J 1999. Feminist educational leadership: locating the concepts in practice. *Gender and Education*, 11(3): 309–322.

Uhl-Bien M 2006. Relational leadership theory: Exploring the social processes of leadership and organizing. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 17(6): 654-676.

Uhl-Bien M 2007. Relational leadership approaches. In GR Goethals, GJ Sorenson, JM Burns (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of leadership*. London: Sage Publications, pp. 1305-1308.

Uhl-Bien M. 2011a. Relational Leadership and Gender: From Hierarchy to Relationality. In PH Werhane & M Painter-Morland (Eds), *Leadership, Gender, and Organization*. Dordrecht: Springer, pp. 65-74.

Uhl-Bien M. 2011b. Relational leadership theory: Exploring the social processes of leadership and organizing. In PH Werhane & M Painter-Morland (Eds.), *Leadership, Gender, and Organization*. Dordrecht: Springer, pp. 75-108.

Vetter LP 2010. Overview: feminist theories of leadership. In K. O'Connor: *Gender and women's leadership: a reference handbook*. London: Sage Publications, pp. 3-10.

Williamson RD, Hudson M B 2001. New rules for the game: *How women leaders resist socialization to old norms*. Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Seattle, WA) April 10-14, 2001.

Wyn J, Acker S, Richards E 2000. Making a difference: Women in management in Australian and Canadian faculties of education. *Gender and Education*, 12(4): 435-447.

Yin R 1994. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Beverly Hill, CA: Sage Publications.

Young MD & López GR 2005. The nature of inquiry in educational leadership. In FW English *The Sage Handbook of Educational Leadership: Advances in Theory and Research, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition*. London: Sage Publication, pp.337-362.