SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: NARRATIVES OF WOMEN SECONDARY PRINCIPALS IN RURAL SCHOOLS

by

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SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: NARRATIVES OF WOMEN SECONDARY PRINCIPALS IN RURAL SCHOOLS

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KEY WORDS:
Successful school leadership, Narrative inquiry, Capability approach, Agency, Functionings, Women principals, Rural schools, Secondary schools, Leadership and Management

ABBREVIATION LIST
DoE – Department of Education
HoD – Head of Department
SGB – School Governing Body
SMT – School Management Team
LDoE – Limpopo Department of Education
SADTU – South African Democratic Teachers’ Union
DSM – District Senior Manager
CA – Capabilities Approach
UNISA – University of South Africa
This study explores the narrated experiences of two women principals in their roles as leaders and managers of rural secondary schools in South Africa. Several studies have shown how women principals experience both leadership and management challenges in their roles. This study was conducted in rural public schools in Limpopo Province, South Africa. Despite such challenges, this study finds it important to mention that there are some women principals who successfully lead and manage their schools. Although a number of studies have examined women principals’ experiences at primary schools, not much has been done on women principals leading secondary schools. Moreover, too little is known about how they develop as school principals and what capabilities they need in order to perform their roles. This study seeks to do this by understanding how women principals develop capabilities in a changing social context in order to function as successful leaders, of secondary schools.

The study used qualitative narrative inquiry research as a basis for the study. The aim of this study was to focus on women secondary school principals who are and continue to lead their schools successfully in order to bring a positive narrative of women secondary schools principals’ successful school leadership. The Capability Approach (CA) was employed as an analytical framework based on Sen, Nussbaum and some educational scholars who expanded Sen’ Capability Approach. To generate data, the study conducted narrative interviews with two women secondary school principals from South African public schools, as well as journaling and letter writing.

The study focused on elicit accounts of two women secondary school principals’ experiences from childhood to adulthood in order to understand how they developed their capabilities and how they came to take up leadership and management roles successfully. Findings link family relationships and educational experiences to the development of capabilities that prepared and influence them for leadership and management position. Based on key findings, this study concludes that the attributes and behaviours of successful women principals align with the development of foundational leadership and management capabilities which is termed, the Successful School Leadership Capabilities Theory.

Key words: successful school, leadership, narrative, women principals, secondary school
DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my late father, Makodu Bernard Mpyana, who passed on on 02 August 2019

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‘You are never too old to set another goal or dream a new dream.’

C.S. Lewis

To my gracious Lord: I thank You that throughout my study I was of good health and managed to perform other responsibilities. Jeremiah 29:11(NIV) reads, “For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and future.” I owe this achievement to my Creator, who gave me strength, health and life itself.

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CHAPTER 1

1.1. Introduction and background

School leadership in South Africa has been described as lurid, in which post-apartheid policies were introduced to reform schooling system, its leadership, management and governance. Christie (2010) maintains that the first step in understanding the complexity of leadership in schools in current times is to integrate the practices of running schools, to bring in a coherence that links substances to process and deeper value to daily tasks. Furthermore, school leadership is rooted “in broader social relationship and cultural understandings; it embodies race and gender in different ways; it inevitably involves normative judgements of right and wrong, good and bad; in involves emotional engagement and unconscious dynamics as well as rational and cognitive activities; and it is not experienced in the same way by different actors it brings together” (Christie 2010:6). She argues that most research focuses more on training and development for school managers and policy rather than what principals actually do.

In agreement, Oplakta (2012) states that it is clear that school principals have many roles to play; that of being manager as well as leaders. School principals are expected to define the vision and mission of schools by framing the goals and communicating them. Secondly, school principals should manage instructional programme by coordinating, supervising and evaluating instructional curriculum as well as monitoring leaners’ academic progress and social welfare. Lastly, school principals should ensure a positive learning climate for both learners and teachers, promoting staff members’ professional development and maintaining high visibility. School principals should establish positive relationships with school staff which involves partnership, empowering others and other forms of cooperation in the school (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). According to Christie (2010:1), the complexity of leadership in South Africa is aggravated by the introduction of new policies that are supported by a “tangled network of regulations in governance, labour relations and performance management”.

School leadership, in most cases, is explained from a male point of view, in a sense that leadership theories are androcentric and derived from masculine perspective of leadership. This has been so because much literature on leadership has been written by men, so women find themselves in compromised situation where access to leadership positions and opportunities are slim.
In this 21st century, the paramount challenge in South Africa and anywhere else in the world is the struggle for gender equality. With all gender equity laws and regulations that have been put in place, it is still difficult to strike a gender balance. Statistics in South Africa and around the world continue to reveal that women are underrepresented in school leadership positions, especially in rural secondary schools. However, some women teachers have managed to reach the positions of principalship. One can state that working as a principal in large rural school today can be both dangerous and difficult. Even so, more and more women teachers aspire to lead institutions that offer such challenge. Women principals in rural secondary schools encounter serious leadership challenges ranging from personal, administrative, cultural to societal.

This study is rooted in the voices of women principals from different parts of South Africa. During my Master’s degree research, I investigated leadership experiences of female secondary school principals in the province of Limpopo, South Africa. By exploring the experiences of these women, I discovered that they have more to tell, and I felt encouraged, motivated. I was intrigued by the fact that despite all challenges women principals face day in and out, they still emerged stronger and courageous leaders. I then decided to expand more on the positive experiences of the women secondary school principals by employing a narrative enquiry approach. Even though they are few in number, but they managed to transform the schools they lead into better ones. As a post level one educator who aspired to lead one day, I was truly inspired by their stories even though limited in the research. The study is informed by various works of all women in the world but more so by South African women who wrote more about black women in particular. The main objective of this study was to allow successful women secondary principals speak about their leadership experiences, so that other women principals could learn from their successful experiences. Findings revealed that the extent of the challenges women principals faced in their schools had adverse impact on the whole school management and personal lives; in a sense that the schools they lead were declared dysfunctional at some point during their leadership. The research also revealed that women with serious challenges at their schools do not show any more interest in leadership roles; some opted to resign while others took early retirement.

From the above-mentioned assertions, I realized that for more women teachers and middle managers in schools to get motivated, and advance to senior leadership roles, more success stories of women principals must be displayed often. Makgoka (2016) maintains that while women are
being discouraged from taking up senior leadership in schools by their husbands and their male colleagues; hindered by factors such as organizational, societal, cultural as well as personal factors; women teachers were also seen as stumbling block for other women due to the lack of confidence in women as leaders. One of the questions posed to participants in my study was, *what reaction did you get from other, when you showed interest in leadership?* Participants mentioned that women teachers in their schools asked questions such as “will you manage? “The shows doubt in women leaders. I believe that the more success stories of women principals are researched, parallel their challenges; the more women teachers will be motivated to take up the challenges in school leadership roles.

For the purpose of this study, narrative inquiry was used to get stories of two successful school principals in South Africa. The participants intended were drawn from secondary schools. They are successful school principals because they are award recipient of excellent school leadership in secondary schools. The researcher believes that by documenting the leadership traits of these successful women principals that will be contributing to professional and personal growth of thousands of women in the teaching field. These successful women principals could be seen as symbols of hope and faith for those who aspire to lead, as well as those struggling women principals unable to achieve their desired leadership goals.

Phendla (2008) maintains that life experiences affect individuals in their professional lives and in their political commitment to social justice. She used a powerful metaphor that says “*musazdi u fara lufhanga nga hu fhiraho*”. She explains the metaphor in this way, that on one hand, women are portrayed as a symbol of struggle, resistance, obduracy and strength, while on the other, they represent hope, faith courage and words of wisdom. This explains why women principals in leadership positions, in spite of the challenges they face, emerge successful.

According to Collins (2015), black women’s lives can only be understood by interlocking issues such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, culture, language and traditional norms. By highlighting the knowledge and experiences of black women secondary school principals, the study served as a tribute to those in my community whose mission for love, courage and wisdom enabled them to become school principals. Above all, these women served, and continue to serve, as positive influences, mentors, role models and mothers to all children in South Africa. They deserve to be honoured while still alive. Despite being marginalized, these women helped to bring out the gifts
and challenges that were hidden in black children. Therefore, successful women leadership strategies are worth to be researched further for the benefit of other women who are caught up in their leadership roles.

1.2. Rationale for the study

The underrepresentation of women principal in school leadership positions in South Africa had led me to this study. As a secondary school teacher, a member of the School Management Team and acting Head of Department, I became interested in the complexity of school leadership, and wanted to know more, especially from women principals. Few as they are, successful or not, with the kinds of challenges they face daily at their workplaces their experiences are worth to be documented. In addition, to find out the reasons why some are succeeding and others failing or rather not achieving as expected. Lumby and Azaola (2011: 73) indicate that “gender in workplace is a socially constructed phenomenon and remains a potent influence on the career and experience of women, because it influenced other factors such as language, poverty, race and size of the school”. Numerous policies were introduced in South Africa such as Gender Equity Act 39 of 1996, and Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998, and 24 years later, gender balance is still not yet achieved.

This study hoped to provide effective practices that can be implemented in other schools as well as broadening the fields of education, including perspectives, current theories and practices of South African women principals. The study also adds to the surfacing body of knowledge and literature of women principals’ experiences in South Africa. In addition, the finding will complement studies that explain women underrepresentation in school leadership. Lastly, the researcher believes that changing the gender imbalance in school leadership has implications not only for women but also for all stakeholders in the education field.

1.3. Statement of the problem

In view of the above–mentioned assertions, the study is intended to understand from the point of women secondary school principals, what makes them successful school leaders. The research questions are as follows:
1.3.1. Research questions

How do women secondary school principals become successful in their leadership role?

The following are the sub-questions:

(a) What are contributing factors to women principals’ successful leadership?
(b) What is women principals’ perception of successful school leadership?
(c) What are the challenges of women principals?
(d) How do women principals overcome the challenges they encounter?
(e) How do women principals know that they are successful?
(f) What can be done to assist women to succeed?

1.3.2. Aims and objectives

- To identify factors contributing to women principals’ success as school principals.
- To understand from women principals what successful school leadership is.
- To explore the challenges women principals face in their leadership.
- To explore strategies women principals employ to overcome their challenges.
- To propose some recommendations to other researchers in the educational leadership fraternity.

1.4. Preliminary literature review

1.4.1. Introduction

It is true that some schools perform better than others, and it is common sense that schools are not successful simply because they possess good quality of infrastructure, availability of both human and capital resources or the location in which the school is situated. This study is aimed at identifying leadership styles and practices employed by women principals in successful schools. By identifying these leadership styles and practices, the study enables readers to learn from them and therefore implement these strategies in their lives as well as in the schools they lead.

1.4.2. Historical background of South African gender equity
When the South African government came into power in 1994, initiatives were put in place to remove discriminatory practices and policies in employment. Measures were also developed as an interim arrangement to facilitate and promote accessibility to the public service for all (White Paper, 1998). The White Paper on Affirmative Action was a testimony of the government’s commitment to the transformation of the Public Service into an institution whose employment practices are underpinned by equity. The government, through the White Paper, aimed at developing their own affirmative action programme, structures, mechanism and guidance. It also aimed at closing the gaps and remove ambiguities in policies which were created by previous measures introduced in 1995.

The White paper was primarily focused on the field of human resource management. The three targeted groups were black people, women, and people with disabilities, who were identified in the Employment Equity Bill as having suffered most from unfair past discrimination. However, its ability to do so has been limited by its legacy of ineffectiveness, and unfair division on the basis of race and gender. In 1995, women comprised just over 51% of the entire South African population, made up 76% African women, 12% White women, 9% Coloured women and 3% Indian women. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa stipulates that the government will strive to reflect these proportions in its staffing in order to be more representative. In 1997, the percentage of women new recruits to management level was at 13%, and in 1999 at 30% and the gap to be filled was at 17%. These do represent the ultimate goal of the White Paper that all groups and levels within the Public Service should have been representative of society as a whole. Gender stereotyping has resulted in the majority of women in education and health sectors to perform relatively low level of work, with very few in decision-making positions. These occupations are not only low level positioned, but they also the lower paid (White paper, 1998).

Furthermore, even where and when women are well qualified and experienced, the predominance of their male counterparts at management level has resulted in a culture in which male behaviour patterns are perceived to be the norm, and in which women often find it difficult to be accepted as equals by their male colleagues. These problems are worsened by the working environmental factors such as maternity leave and domestic responsibilities, which are primarily of female concern. The situation is worse in the education sector, witnessed by the Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga (2014), who indicated that “there are only 8210 female principals as
compared to 14,337 males. The disparity has doubled, and this is worse in secondary school leadership where the majority are female educators but still few of them have managed to advance to senior leadership positions.”

1.4.3. Successful School Leadership

School effectiveness research has been an area of interest internationally and locally in the last two decades. According to Reynolds (2015), effective principals are portrayed as offering stable and appropriate leadership, using formal and informal structures, sharing their power, and being willing to respond to the external change of school (Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993). Rutter et al., in Reynolds (2015), indicate that pupil outcomes in secondary schools were better when the headmaster understood the sharing of power. They shared control and consulted widely especially on matters such as spending plans and curriculum planning. Mortimer, in Reynolds (2015), maintains that other studies in the field of school curriculum have identified eight (8) areas which they regard as important for determining the quality of leadership and they include: a sense of mission, involving others, concern with teachers, hands-on-monitoring and staffing which include method of selection and replacement of teachers, type of support for individual teacher development and overall instructional leadership provided by administration, academic orientation, high expectations and monitoring and evaluation.

Gray et al. (1999), in Reynolds (2015) indicate that leadership in a socially difficult schools may need to be more initiating (making things happen) and already effective schools more managing (helping things to occur more naturally). Gray et al. (1999) suggested that effective leadership may need to beat different stages of school development, with more top-down efforts supplemented with greater ownership or laterality as competence level increases during the improvement cycle. Most importantly, is that effective school leadership involves maximizing the indirect influence of others in the drive to achieve.

1.4.4. Leadership theories

Leadership is typically defined by traits, qualities and behaviour of a leader. Horner (ND) asserts that leadership in the 20th Century was divided into different categories. Bernard (1926), cited by Horner, maintains that leadership was explained by internal qualities with which a person is born, traits such as personality, physical and mental characteristics were examined in order to identify a
successful leader. This idea was based on the notion that leaders are born, and not made. However, Horner mentions that this notion was difficult to consistently identify traits associated with great leadership in a sense that factors such as environmental as well as situational were in most cases not considered to be contributing to effective leadership. Moreover, leaders’ behaviour is examined and how they look to others in an attempt to determine what successful leaders do (Horner, nd). This simply imply that leadership was not necessarily an inborn trait, but instead effective leadership methods could be taught to employees (Lappas, 1996). Furthermore, contingency leadership theory assumes that the effects of one variable on leadership, which simply means that leadership variables could be different in every situation. Certain leadership is more effective in certain situations. Although not much research exists on why leaders fail, it appears that leadership success depends on a combination of both exhibiting positive behaviours and also not exhibiting negative behaviours. Negative behaviours are those such as arrogance, untrustworthiness, compulsiveness, moodiness, insensitivity and abrasiveness.

Based on the above assertions, (Lappas, 1996) it appears that, so far, the objective of redefining successful leadership has not been satisfactorily accomplished. Lappas (1996) emphasizes that because of changes in the workforce, the nature of work and structure of organisations, it is important to reevaluate the concept of leadership. Lappas (ibid) found that managerial competence was found to be the most important, followed by collaborative and analytical competence and communication and interpersonal competence were found to be the next important. The authors indicate a stronger emphasis or influence and support as opposing to directing and commanding behaviours of leaders.

Shonubi (2012) found that schools which were doing exceptionally good in terms of leadership and management practices have their strength in the availability of school policy on teaching, decision-making, delegating, control, motivating, communicating, management of interpersonal relationships, school climate, culture, change, management of conflict and school community relationship.

According to Mestry (2017), both leadership preparation and training are central to school effectiveness and improvement. In her study, she interviewed fifteen (15) principals who anonymously revealed that they were appointed as principals without having any professional training or formal preparations for their positions. In South Africa, there are no rigorous criteria
for educators to be appointed as school principals (Moorosi & Bush, 2011). They explained that in developed countries, such as the United Kingdom (UK) and United States of America (USA), educators can only apply for principalship if they hold a Master’s degree in educational administration. This is different in South Africa, because the Employment for Educators’ Act of 1998 stipulates that any educator with a Relative Education Qualification Value (REQV) 13 qualification, that is, holding at least a three year teachers’ diploma and having served the department of education for seven years, is eligible to be appointed as a school principal. This implies that level one educators could be recommended to a principal position by a School Governing Body, without having any leadership and management qualifications or experience of being a head of department or deputy principal.

Mestry (2017) mentions that for school principals to cope with the demands of the 21st century innovative leadership development, serious consideration should be given to the professionalization of principals by redefining criteria. Secondly, for principals and aspiring school principals in South Africa to become effective managers, they should enroll for Advanced Diploma in Education (ADE) because, unlike Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE), ADE is practice-based and offers a programme qualification on daily issues of school leadership. In addition, upon the completion of this course principals will know what is expected of them, such as Norms and Standards of educators, competencies and expectations of the department of education (DoE). Schools should therefore be encouraged to strengthen professional development of principals and teaching staff, otherwise principals will continue experiencing difficulty in coping with changes, partly because they are inadequately prepared (Mestry, 2017).

1.4.5. Perceptions of female leadership effectiveness

The effect of gender stereotyping on women leadership effectiveness is often cited in the literature as the “double bind” dilemma, in a sense that women are doomed if they are able to advance into senior positions and again doomed if they do not when they are confronted with gender stereotypes (Crosby-Hiller, 2012). Furthermore, the effect of gender stereotyping on women leadership effectiveness is also indicated in literature as the “think-leaders, think-male”; in this case, qualities associated with successful leaders are often described as male attributes which include assertiveness, taking charge and confident. This perception assumes that when it comes to leadership styles, men’s behaviour is seen as essential to effective leadership (Oplatka & Tako,
They (ibid) further maintain that “when an environment assumes men’s values and practices as the norm from leadership”, it is surprising that women are excluded from senior leadership positions in schools (P.426).

According to Bass (1990) in Costellow (2011), leadership is often regarded as a single most important factor in the success or failure of institutions such as schools. A school leader must be viewed as competent, visionary and empowering to his or her teachers. Bass (1990) maintains that while the principal must acknowledge the expectations of other stakeholders in the educational process, it is the teacher who looks daily to their school principal as their leader, and a primary influence on their actions and attitudes. Unless they have some training or experience in the area, most teachers base their ideas of effective leadership on perception. Oplakta and Tako (2009), assert that teachers may derive these perceptions based on a variety of things such as leaders’ actions, the performance of organisations, external conditions, stereotypes and past experiences of other school principals. Moreover, findings in Oplatka and Tako (2009) indicate that many teachers’ perceptions of principals began with their own grade school experiences; in a sense that as children many of these teachers were affected in either positive or negative ways by their own principals.

Women principals are sometimes forced to adopt their own strategies to deal with challenges they face daily in their work places and to make their voices heard as women leaders. Studies by (Arar, 2012; Dryer ,2011; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Lindo ,2012; Marumo, 2013; Makhaye, 2012; Perumal & Edward ,2014), indicate that women participants’ identities are influenced by their environment as they also influence the environment. As women principals, they have to extract cues to be able to make sense of the situations they find themselves in. The leadership styles commonly adopted by women principals include the following: transformational, authoritarian, curriculum/instructional, spiritual and servanthood.

1.4.6. Theoretical framework

A capability is defined as the freedoms or genuine opportunities available to an individual, such as being literate or knowledgeable (Nussbaum, 2011). The realisation of capability is defined as a functioning, which is defined as an active ‘doing’, such as using the capability of one’s voice to speak confidently in a meeting (Nussbaum, 2011:25). A functioning could also be a state of ‘being’
where a capability has been realised, such as being a critically educated citizen, or academically literate student.

According to Fertig (2012), the concern to understand human development within the context of increased economic penetrations across national boundaries seen over recent decades has been greatly aided by the emergence of the concept of “capability”, which was developed by Amartya Sen in the late 1970s. This was developed as a way of looking beyond a narrowly-utilitarian approach which had come to dominate the economic and political thinking following the establishment of the Bretton Woods system in 1944. This system had placed emphasis on supremacy of the dollar within the global economy and gave prominence to policies which centred upon economic growth as a talisman of effective government and as a marker for the quality of life for citizens. As a counter to this approach, Sen insisted on “the importance of capabilities, what people are actually able to do and to be” (Nussbaum, 2003:33). Deneulin and McGregor (2009) uphold this notion identifies the potential that individuals have to act in ways which are of value to them, and it has been further developed into what has been called “capability approach” (CA), which has become a framework within which social, political and economic factors are analysed so as to investigate and analyse the nature of an individual’s well-being.

This study employed the CA as a lens to investigate successful women principals in secondary schools. The CA is concerned with evaluating a person’s advantage in terms of his or her actual ability to achieve various valuable functioning’s as part of living (Nussbaum, 2011, & Sen, 2004). CA is a holistic approach which focuses more on the importance of people, what they do, and aspire to be rather than in the process of simply motivating them. According to Nussbaum (2011) and Sen (2003), functionings’ represent parts of the state of a person in a way that he or she manages to do or be leading in life. This approach is based on a view of living as a combination of various ‘doings and beings’ with the quality of life to be assessed in terms of capability to achieve valuable things. There are elementary and complex functionings; elementary functionings include being adequately nourished, being in good health, and complex functionings are such as achieving self-respect or socially integrated which are widely valued. The CA explains that individuals may differ from each other in the weights they attach to different functionings; it does not matter how different functionings are, but at the end they must be alive to these variations. In addition, drawing on Sen’s notion of development as the practice of freedom, which in this case
theorises equal participation in education leadership as a bundle of choices, freedoms and opportunities to which every individual should have equitable access. Various research on women principals, internationally and locally, continues to reveal leadership and management challenges they face daily in their workplaces, which in turn impacts negatively on the whole school management. These challenges include, amongst others, gender stereotypes and devaluation of women. The CA will help in understanding how women principals develop their own sense of agency and converting their leadership capabilities into leadership functionings.

Furthermore, “The options that a person has depend greatly on relations with others, and on what the state and other institutions do” (Dreze & Sen, 2002:6). Furthermore, the concept of liberty and freedom are retained by identifying capabilities, rather than functionings, as appropriate goals for collective political action and policy which set the contexts in which individuals can make choices (Nussbaum: 2011). This leaves space for individuals to exercise, or not to exercise those choices. Moreover, (ibid: 34) “The freedom to lead different types of life in the personal capability set which depends on a variety of personal characteristics and social arrangements. Individual freedom must pay more focus on the person ‘s other objective such as social goals which are not directly related to one’s own life”. “If we do not have the courage to choose to live in a particular way, even though we could live that way if we so chose, can it be said that we have freedom to live in that way” (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 2003). They (ibid: 34) further maintain that “freedom must be valued independently of values and preferences of the person whose freedom is being assessed, since it concerns the ranges of choices a person has, not how she values the elements in that range or what she chooses from it”. Based on the above-mentioned assertions, the study saw fit to use CA as a lens through which to investigate women principals in secondary schools will provide an opportunity to identify ways in which they bring about school improvement can also bring forth the conversion of the school leader’s capabilities or potentialities into school leader functionings or actualities. This study will also bring forth the challenge that exist between the notion of individuals being free to make choices about what they have reason to valued, whilst, on the other hand, the implications that these choices have for the freedoms of other individuals with whom they are connected to make such choices (Nussbaum, 2011).

Sen (1999) has noted education as an enabling process, which provides human beings with opportunities to have experiences which can help them develop functionings in a sense that
education can value in terms of providing individuals with developed capabilities which, in turn, allow them to exert greater freedom in terms of how they use these capabilities. Nussbaum (2007:15) asserts that the end result of including education as central capability in its own right would be the emergence of “a nation of free choosers, so it matters greatly that people have the opportunity to learn and develop in ways that open a meaningful world of choice for them’.

1.5. Research methodology and design
1.5.1. Research paradigm

The study used qualitative narrative inquiry research as a basis for the study. This is a study of experience understood narratively. It is a way of thinking about, and studying, experience. According to Clandinin and Huber (2010), a narrative inquirer thinks narratively about experience throughout inquiry. This qualitative methodology follows a recursive, reflexive process of moving from field-to-field texts to interim and final research texts. A narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into experiences through “collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). The term ‘narrative’ is defined differently in different disciplines. Furthermore, Liamputtong (2013) explains ‘narrative’ as a spoken or written text that gives an account of events or actions that are chronologically connected. However, Liamputtong (2013:120) asserts that narrative enquiry research embodies narrative as both the phenomenon and the method of study. Liamputtong (2013) further highlights that narrative enquiry as a method, examines experiences” as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals.

I chose narrative inquiry, firstly, as an umbrella term that captures personal and human dimensions of experience over time, and takes account of the relationship between individual experience and cultural context. Secondly, it is a means by which researchers systematically gather, analyse, and represent people’s stories as told by them, which challenges traditional and modernists’ view of truth, reality, knowledge and personhood. Thirdly, people gain “memorable, interesting knowledge that brings together layers of understandings about a person, their culture and they have created change” Etherington (2007:600). Struggles to make sense of the past are told and participants create meanings as they relate what happened to them. The shape of the story helps organise information about how people have interpreted events, values, beliefs and experiences that guide those interpretations, their hopes, intentions and plans for the future. Complex patterns,
descriptions of identity construction and reconstruction, and evidence of social discourses that impact on a person’s knowledge creation from a specific cultural standpoint are found. Fourthly, narrative inquiry produces reflexive knowledge; information on what is known as well as how it is known. Moreover, Etherington (2007) emphasizes that knowledge gained in this way is situated, transient, partial and provisional; characterised by multiple voices, perspectives, truths and meanings.

There are different forms of narrative analysis as described by Etherington (2007). Some focus on content of stories, others on meaning (maybe both), depending on philosophical position. Stories can be viewed as socially-situated knowledge constructions in their own right that value messiness, differences, depth and texture of experienced life. Analysis occurs throughout the research rather than being a separate activity carried out after data collection. The emphasis is on co-construction of meaning between the researcher and participants, while being involved in listening or reading the conversations, researchers take in what is being said and compare it with their personal understandings, without filling in any gaps in understanding with “grand narratives”, but rather inquiring about how pieces of the stories make sense together. The process of data collection and analysis therefore becomes single harmonious and organic process.

Etherington (2007: 610) maintains that narrative analysis shapes stories as knowledge per se which constitutes ‘the social reality of the narrator’ and conveys a sense of that person’s experience in its depth messiness, richness and texture, by using the actual words spoken. This includes some of the researcher’s part in that conversation in order to be transparent about the relational nature of the research, and ways in which these stories are shaped through dialogue and co-construction, as well providing a reflexive layer with regard to researchers positioning. Moreover, life history helps us to know and understand a subject’s identity, it distinguishes what people are trying to do and provides a framework to comprehend a person’s actions so that an individual is a dynamic, rather than reflexive participant in her own life. According to Chase (2005), life history as a qualitative approach to research is considered as a natural line of enquiry, where women often use life history to study women’s lives. The interest lies in women being social actors in their own right and in making sense of subjective meanings which are assigned to events and conditions in their lives. The researcher chose life history as a research tool because this enables her as a researcher to
Creswell (2012: 73-75) highlights steps to follow when conducting narrative research, which are as follows:

- Choosing one or several participants who have stories or lived experiences to tell.
- Spent time with these individuals in order to build rapport and trust; and collect stories through various types of information.
- The researcher must seek collaboration with individuals they hope will agree to help create a historical account from the questions. The researcher does not only collect stories but also negotiates relationships and reciprocate any useful information to the narrator.
- In-depth interview, and open-ended questions are followed by probing questions to encourage the narrator to speak at great length and in great depth.
- Good listening is needed in narrative research (listen carefully and actively)
- The story as well as the interviews will be tape-recorded.
- Recorded stories are then transcribed for data analysis.
- Narrative analysis will be utilised, and therefore it is more important for researchers to stick to what is actually said and how it is said, including pauses, emphases, interruptions, and even finger snaps and laughs.

1.5.2 Research approach

Phenomenology is a theoretical perspective that attempts to generate knowledge about how individuals experience things. A phenomenological study aims to examine the lived experience of a person or several people in relation to a concept or phenomenon of interest. The aim of phenomenological research is to understand and describe the participants’ experiences of their everyday world as they see it. In order to examine how a specific aspect of lived reality is constructed, the researcher must bracket that reality. This means that researchers need to suspend any judgements about reality so that they may see it as the participant would see it. Thus, phenomenological studies often employ in-depth interviews as a means to generate a detailed description. Phenomenologists use a number of qualitative methods, including observation,
depth interviews, life history and narrative. Others may examine written records of experiences such as diaries, journals, art, poetry and music (Liamputtong, 2013; Creswell, 2012)

1.5.3. Instruments and data collection strategies

1.5.3.1. Interviews

An in-depth interviewing method allows the researcher and participants to know each other, learn about their feelings, experiences and the world in which they live. This research employed semi-structured interviews as a way of collecting empirical data about social world of individuals by inviting them to talk in depth about their lives. This also helps “reconstruct events [the] researchers have never experienced” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012:3). As guided by Rubin and Rubin (2012), this study used interviews because of the following reasons:

- Interviews elicit rich information from the participants or a particular individual and on a selected topic under investigation.
- They explore the “insider perspective”.
- They capture the participants’ own word, thought, perceptions, feelings and experiences.
- They involve the processes of asking questions and active listening.
- They use the type of questions that are direct, indirect, specific, probing and follow-ups.

Interview processes were conducted in a quiet location to avoid disturbances and also to ensure good quality of recording is maintained. A quiet setting ensured that participants’ confidentiality is achieved. During the interviews, the researcher asked interview questions from the designed schedule, and also used verbal cues and body language to encourage participants to talk more. A tape recorder was utilised to capture words and their tone, and pauses. This helped the researcher to listen to the interviews more often during the analysis process. The researcher also took notes and listened attentively to what the participants said. Main points were summarised at the end of the interview. Lastly, the researcher debriefed with the participants in case they had other information they would have liked to add.

1.5.3.2. Documents review

Personal information can offer a great deal of information such as life histories, diaries, curriculum vitae and letter writing. Written documents can “influence how we see the world and people in it,
and we act” (Liamputtong:2013). They document what the participants are actually doing in the world without being dependent on being asked by researchers. Written documents can be accessible, and do not always depend of ethical considerations.

1.5.3.3. Narrative interviews

One of the characteristics of narrative inquiry is that it consists of a story as a tool to make invisible visible or opaque to transparent (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narratives are frequently collected through interviews from individuals or small groups (Butina, 2015). Every whole story has a beginning, middle, and end, and in order for people to tell their story, they must reflect on their experiences (Seidman, 2006:7). Creswell (2013: 190 - 191) highlights some of the benefits of using the narrative approach in qualitative studies which are that “humans are natural storytellers and as such it is easy to elicit stories, gathering in-depth data is easily accomplished as narratives usually provide thick descriptions, and it is possible to gather in-depth meaning as participants usually reveal themselves in their stories”.

1.6. Credibility and trustworthiness

Rigour refers to the quality of qualitative enquiry and is also used as a way of evaluating qualitative research. This is also being referred to as trustworthiness by qualitative researchers, interpretivists who developed crietoiriology. In order to ensure in this study, the researcher employed credibility and authenticity, transferability, confirmability as well as dependability as guided by Carpenter and Suto (2008: 26 – 30).

1.6.1. Credibility and authenticity

In qualitative research, credibility is comparable to internal validity, which scrutinizes the matter of “fit” between what the participants assay and the representation of these viewpoints by the researchers. This tests if the research is genuine, reliable or authoritative. Credibility is based on the constructivist assumption that there is no single reality but rather multiple realities that are constructed by people in their own context and require authentic representation of experience that can be seen as plausible by the participants. This study ensured that multiple realities held by all the participants are represented as accurately and adequately as possible. This also implied that the participants were able to recognise the description and interpretation made by researchers.
1.6.2 Transferability

Transferability is comparable to external validity which refers to generalizability and it asks the question: To what degree can the study be generalized or applied to other individuals or groups, contexts or setting? This actually emphasises the analytical or theoretical generalizability of research findings. Chilisa (2012) maintains that transferability can only be achieved sampling strategies and thick description of the research setting.

1.6.3 Dependability

Unlike transferability, dependability asks questions such as whether the research findings match the data from which they were deduced. In other words, the researcher must ensure that the research process is “logical, traceable and clearly documented.” This can only be achieved when the researcher uses a thick description method, triangulation participants and peer review. Chilisa (2012:26) confirms that an audit trail allows the researcher to examine the adequacy of the research process even though they may not provide some conclusions, but they must make logic that gives sense to others.

1.6.4 Confirmability

The idea here is to make the researcher adopt the above-mentioned strategies to ensure rigour in qualitative research is achieved. The main aim of confirmability is to reveal that research findings and interpretation of those findings do not derive from the imagination of the researcher but are well connected to the data.

In conclusion, Liamputtong (2013) mentions that the above-mentioned issues of reliability and validity in qualitative research are best achieved through thick description whereby the researcher writes full details about the research settings, participants, methods and processes of conducting the research. He further maintains that interpretation and evidence are needed in which verbatim quotations of participants are cited to support the researcher’s interpretation. Furthermore, Liamputtong (2013:29) asserts that reflexivity and critical abilities of the researcher must be evidenced in the process to assure that interpretation is valid and grounded within the data. What is emphasised here is the researcher reflexivity, which is the integral part of their studies. In fact, reflexivity of the researchers makes their research findings more credible in a sense that researchers
contribute their experiences, beliefs and personal history which might influence their research; and this must be acknowledged.

1.6.5. Triangulation

Liamputtong (2013) explains triangulation as a powerful research strategy that converges information from a variety of sources to validate data and emerging themes. This brings richness, depth, complexity and rigour into research. The study employed methodological triangulation by using interviews and document analysis such as letter writing, diaries or journal and data triangulation using various quotations from data provided by different interviewees to confirm and illustrate emerging themes. In addition, field notes were used to complement other sources. In cases where findings were incompatible, the researcher established the core cause by checking if incompatible findings arose from methodological or other possible data.

1.7. Research ethics

Ethical consideration of narrative inquiry, as explained by Etherington (2007), requires the following: trust and openness in research relationship, high levels of ethical and critical engagement, mutual and sincere collaboration, over, storyteller having full voice, both voices heard, reflexive engagement, tolerance of ambiguity, valuing of signs, symbols metaphors and using multiple data sources. Furthermore, reflexivity is defined as a “process of interaction within and between ourselves and our participants, and data that inform decisions, actions and interpretations at all stages (Etherington, 2007: 612)”.

Etherington (2007) maintain that in the conduct of narrative inquiry there is open recognition that the researcher is collaboratively constructing the narrator ‘s reality, not just passively recording and reporting. Connelly and Clandinin (1990:7) assert that, “researchers need to be prepared to follow their nose and, after the fact, reconstruct their narrative of inquiry”.

Liamputtong (2007) explains research ethics as a set of moral principles that aim to prevent participants from being harmed and exploited by the researcher and the research process. To protect participants from such a study will employ that informed consent, confidentiality and the principle of non-maleficence are maintained at all costs.
1.7.1. Informed consent

This is defined as the “the provision of information to participants, about the purpose of research, its procedures, potential risks, benefits and alternatives, so that the individual can understand this information and can make voluntary decision to enroll and continue to participate” (Liamputtong, 2013:39). This is one of the key means of protecting participants from being harmed. It further ensures that throughout the process, the participants’ dignity and worth are fully respected. As a result, a written consent form that stipulates, among others, the right to refuse to participate and the right to withdraw from the project at any time must be designed by the researcher, and then signed by the participants. In circumstances that are challenging, Liamputtong (2008) emphasises that verbal consent can be obtained through tape-recording.

1.7.2. Confidentiality

This means that the researcher must ensure privacy and anonymity of all participants by maintaining the certain procedures. Firstly, securing participants’ identities and names of sites by using pseudonyms instead of real names, in field notes, transcripts and writing. This also implies that the researcher must ensure their real names would not be connected with information from the interviews, and all data must be locked in a safe place or well-secured password computer. This is crucial especially when the researcher is working with a small group of participants from particular geographical areas.

1.7.3. The principle of non-maleficence

According to Padgett (2008), researchers have the responsibility to ensure the physical, emotional and social well-being of their research participants. Qualitative researchers are advised to take safety issues seriously due to the extent and involvement of participants who are vulnerable to harm and risk. The participants in the research may reveal some personal painful memories, intimate stories of their lives, and in some cases they may include information that is illegal or deviant which could affect their lives and reputations if they are publicly identified.
1.8. Chapter outline

This study consists of seven chapters, each discussing a different topic. The outline is arranged as follows:

Chapter 1: This chapter clarifies the purpose statement, problem statement, research questions, significance of the study, as well as research methodology which are employed in the study.

Chapter 2: A literature review on women educational management and the theoretical framework that underpins the investigation are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 3: The Capability Approach is discussed as the lens for this study.

Chapter 4: The following were discussed in this chapter: research design and methods, sampling strategies and population, instruments, data collection techniques and data analysis process. Descriptions of participants, settings and stories of women principals are also presented in this chapter.

Chapter 5: Narratives of women secondary principals are presented according to topics that emerged.

Chapter 6: Narratives are interpreted using the Capability Approach of Sen, Nussbaum and other educational scholars.

Chapter 7: Conclusion, summary of chapters, key findings, recommendations and limitations of the study are discussed in this chapter.

1.9. Summary

In this chapter, I presented a prelude to the study, explained the background and importance of the problem and what should be done to find answers to the research questions. I then presented the scope of the study, a description of the method to be used, and the theoretical framework of the study, data-collection instruments, credibility and trustworthiness issues and ethical considerations. Finally, the chapter provided an elaboration of the chapter divisions of the study.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

Despite the Employment Equity Act of 1998 that has facilitated equity in access to equal job opportunities, women are still underrepresented in secondary school management positions. Previous studies have examined women principals’ leadership employing quantitative approach, while other studies investigated women in leadership positions exploring women principals’ challenges, factors accounting for underrepresentation, women’s encumbered choices and women studies in suburban high and primary schools (Arar 2012; Bosch, 2015; Chiramba, 2016; Malveaux, 2017; Mochizuki, 2014; Njuguna, 2013; Ntaka, 2013). There are, however, a few studies that investigated women’s success in their leadership roles especially in rural secondary schools. For the purpose of this study, literature reviewed is from previous studies pertaining to women principals leading rural secondary schools, from local and international studies. For better understanding of how women principals in rural secondary schools succeed in leadership and management roles, this study will focus on the following areas: leadership and management, rural school leadership, successful school leadership, challenges encountered by women principals and factors accounting for women principals’ successful leadership.

2.2. Rural school leadership

2.2.1. Defining rural schools

Du Plessis (2014) contends that the definition of the term “rural” still eludes us because it is ambiguous, and the distinction with urban tend to be arbitrary. Thus, no concrete definition has been agreed upon. Du Plessis (2014) adopted some of the features from UNESCO (2005) as examples of rural profile which are: distance to towns, topography (conditions of roads, bridges to school, etc.), access to information technology, transport infrastructure (roads, buses, taxis), services and facilities (electricity, water, sanitation) lifelong learning services, the health, educational and economic status of the communities, and activities of political and civil society organisations.
South Africa has diverse rural areas and, therefore, certain factors such as social, economic, educational and cultural factors need to be considered in enhancing the definition of rural education. Thus, the inequality in the country is reported to have contributed to unequal educational opportunities among learners from different socio-economic backgrounds (Spaull, 2015; Bush, 2011). In an attempt to address the issue of socio-economic status and disparity in access to education, the South African government has categorised the country’s public schools into five quintiles for the purpose of allocating financial resources (Dass & Rinquest, 2017; Graven, 2014). The categorisation is based on the school’s socio-economic status which is determined by measures of average income, unemployment rates, and general literacy level in the school’s geographical area. Quintiles 1 to 3 are the most economically disadvantaged and non-fee-paying schools, and thus receive more funding per learner than those in quintiles 4 and 5 are the most economically advantaged and fee-paying schools based on the assumptions that parents can afford to pay fee and therefore require less support from the government. However, Mpofu (2015: 20) contends that although quintile ranking in South Africa is a useful tool, but it is not a perfect means of categorisation to help improve learner achievement.

Empirical research (Chikoko, Naiker, & Mthiyane, 2015; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015) has consistently shown that schools in rural communities are generally characterised by underperformance in terms of learner achievement. This concurs with findings in Ogbannaya and Awuah (2019) which reveal that learners in quintile 4 had significantly higher achievement scores than learners in the lower quintiles at all levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy, except for synthesis. Intuitively, quintile 1 learners had higher achievement scores at all cognitive levels. Some rural schools in the outskirts of the country use the concept synonymously with the concept of farm school or small school. Lumby (2015) explains that poverty in itself is not necessarily an indicator of deprivation, and that poverty may in fact lead to deprivation if it results in an inability to live in ways deemed appropriate by societal norms (Barnes & Shirley, 2007). Barnes and Shirley (2007), maintain that major indications of deprivation include both economic and personal attributes such as the lack of dignity, health or opportunities to develop oneself or society and therefore change one’s circumstance. The deprivation so conceived is a denial of rights, and in this case, children’s rights.
Furthermore, when the adjective “multiple” is attached to deprivation, the concept expresses a belief that, in geographic areas where numerous rights are denied, there is an effect that is greater than aggregation of a single deprivation: that neighborhoods can become particularly toxic for children and for educational outcomes. Lumby (2015) further explains that principals of schools located in areas of multiple deprivations therefore face challenges in realising societal expectations that education will meet children’s needs to secure their current and future rights, while functioning in a context where rights are denied.

Moreover, rural school principals face unique challenges, and issues that often display their roles as less effective and attractive than those in well advantaged schools. Miller (2015) argues that “much of a principal’s work is hidden from view (P40)”; and in agreement Smit (2017) asserts that school leaders operate from different contexts and have different needs, thus the expectations for school leaders continue to become much more complex and demanding. A principal operating in rural school context also wants to be noticed, to have a say, for they too want to be in the best possible position to make a contribution to the lives of all students and those in their school communities.

2.2.2. Challenges in rural schools

It is evident that rural schools locally and internationally continue to experience unique challenges that need unique strategies. (Dass & Rinquest, 2017; Du Plessis, 2014; Maringe, Masinire & Nkambule, 2015; Miller, 2015; Smit, 2017; Spaull, 2015). The findings reveal common and distinctive characteristics of rural schools as follow: a shared content of community poverty, a culture of underperformance, reality of inadequate resources for learning, dysfunctional specialist learning space, the negative impact of redeployment on schools, low parental commitment, living and health deprivation, and under-trained and demotivated educators. All these are characterised by various factors that negatively influence the delivery of the quality of education. Typically, rural areas are remote and relatively underdeveloped. The above-mentioned challenges and problems hampering school principals and schools in the development of rural schools were found not attractive for teachers; principals are marginalised, constrain, curriculum challenges of role multiplicity and problem of access to technology. According to Du Plessis (2014), all these emanate from the fact that rural schools are located in poor communities.
Furthermore, poor funding was also cited as one of the greatest challenges faced by rural education. “The low proportion of funds that are allocated to rural schooling is worrisome as it has been suffering from bigger financial shortfall over the past few years. Shrinking spending on rural schooling has caused widespread problems in both students’ enrolment and teacher commitment to teaching. Poverty is an issue that more and more of our children come face-to-face with. The price that children of poverty must pay is unbelievably high. Increasing numbers of children enter rural schools with needs from circumstances, such as poverty, that schools are not prepared to meet” (Du Plessis, 2014: 1111). He (ibid) indicates that a good education is often the only means of breaking the cycle of poverty for rural learners. Lastly, this research revealed that many financially strapped rural schools must often deal with aging facilities and limited funding for new equipment and technology. Additionally, principals in the study maintain that they do not feel supported by the education system at national and district levels, saying that as rural principals they wear many hats, having to be generalists and straddling a line between the demands of teaching, leadership and administration. Moreover, with rural schools being deficient on every indicator of material provision, it appears as if curriculum issues are almost completely overshadowed by the more immediate and pressing need for resources to enable effective teaching and learning to take place.

This concurs with Miller (2015:11) who says, “there is little in the way of administrative support, with ancillary personnel such as receptionist, bursars, and grounds staff being part time employees”. In other words, the realities of life in small rural and remote communities create unconventional circumstances for principals.

Miller (2015:42) contends that whether privately or publicly run, the location of the school can be a key factor in its success or failure. The location helps with the supply of clients and staff, although the reverse is also true. Being able to learn with little distraction due to both location and school size is cited as a positive issue. Some principals described other factors such as fresh air and the beauty of nature as important incentives associated with schooling in a rural community, alleging benefits associated with health and well-being. In contrast, small and dwindling student numbers, social class issues, teacher recruitment and retention and the school’s and parents’ inability to provide students with a more enriched school experience, due mainly to funding were identified as particular challenges. Some principals also cited poor road conditions, with very few staff
owning a car or driving to work compounded by the physical distance from town centres and emergency services as problematic.

The rural setting will more often remain as they are, perhaps with slight improvements. However, for the immediate future, these rural schools will remain as much part of the South African democratic processes. Since the abolishment of apartheid, rural schools have seen little, if any improvement, both in terms of physical environment and pedagogical context that should be conducive for teaching and learning. The narrative perspective of women principals in South Africa is largely under-researched. Therefore, this narrative study is vital not only to add to the few existing literature on rural schools, but that it will also uncover how women principals in rural secondary schools negotiate their roles in rural school communities. The rural context is simply too complex to address social ills as they manifest in rural school leadership as well as in rural classroom and beyond the context of school. This, therefore, makes rural school leadership even more difficult.

2.3. Successful school leadership

Existing research on what makes a school successful is ongoing, because some researchers claim that high academic achievement indicates a school’s success, while others define successful schools as those that foster personal growth, creativity and positive self-concept (Gurr, 2015; Hallinger, 2015; Stenger, 2013). Stenger (2013) asserts that a fairly clear picture of how well a school is doing its job can be obtained by looking at the results, such as test scores, student performances, retention and graduation rates. In South Africa, a school is defined as successful by looking at the high level of a matriculation pass rate. However, successful schools should display five common characteristics, namely, quality leadership, high expectations of students and teachers, ongoing screening of student performance and development, goals and direction, and safety and security for students (Stenger, 2013).

According to Fullan (2002:17), there are five components that characterise successful leadership which are: moral purpose, understanding change, improving relationships, knowledge creation and sharing, and coherence making. Fullan (2002:33) avers, the “first law of leadership” as credibility whereby “if you don’t believe the messenger, you won’t believe the message”. This suggests that the leader must be influential and inspirational so that her or his followers could follow her or him. In addition, Kouzes and Posner (2002:23) propose other five practices of exemplary leadership
guide by ten commandments. Firstly, they believe that the leaders must model the way whereby she or he finds her voice and leads by example. Secondly, they recommend that the leader must inspire a shared vision. When leaders take up leadership, and find that processes are not fruitful, they must challenge the process, search for more opportunities and take risks to be successful. Fourthly, leaders must be able to foster collaboration in order to strengthen others. Lastly, leaders must be able to recognise and celebrate other people’s values and contributions in the school.

Leithwood and Riehl (2003: 9) formulate six defensive claims about Successful School Leadership (SSL). They firstly claim that successful school leadership must contribute to the improvement of student learning. In their claims, however, they acknowledge principals and teachers as primary sources of SSL. Thirdly, Leithwood and Riehl (ibid) maintain that SSL is about distributed leadership to others in the school as well as the school community. In agreement, Spillane & Healey (2010:130) emphasises that distributed leadership comprises “leader plus” and “practice aspect”. They further explain that the leader plus recognises what school leadership is and that management revolves around several individuals additional to the principal. As a result, different leadership roles and responsibilities are assigned to different teachers according to their expertise. Moreover, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins (2006) have identified the core basic leadership practices important in nearly all successful schools which are as follows (112):

a. Setting direction, whereby the leader identifies and articulates the vision, fosters the acceptance of the group goals as well as setting high-performance expectations.
b. Developing people, the leader is expected to provide intellectual stimulation and individualized support.
c. Redesigning the organisations, the leader can do this by strengthening the school culture, modifying organisational structures and building collaborative processes.

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) claim that successful school leaders must act in ways that acknowledge the accountability- oriented policy context in which almost all stakeholders work. They mention four types of accountability that the SSL embarks on which are: Market accountability through which a competitive school is created and sustained. Decentralised accountability would ensure that other stakeholders are empowered to make significant decisions. Successful leaders must also act in a way that promote professional accountability by providing instructional leadership. Successful leaders also employ management accountability through the
development of an execution of strategic plans. The sixth claims by Leithwood and Riehl (2003) suggest that many successful school leaders serving high diverse student populations decree that school practices promote school quality, equity and social justice to ensure the following: powerful forms of teaching and learning, teacher and learner expectations, student grouping, teacher recruitment and retention curriculum, instruction, parent educational programme and nurturing the development of family’s educational cultures (Riehl, 2003, 24-36).

Furthermore, previous studies on SSL indicate that leaders depend more on what they think and feel. In other words, to be successful means that a leader requires to be in possession of a variety of cognitive and affective qualities, strategies and skills (Davidoff & Lazurus, 1997; Leithwood, Mascall, Strauss, Sacks, Memon, & Yaskima, 2006). Similarly, Grant (2010) discovered that invariable personality traits contribute to leadership success. Essential leadership is about power relations, and influence (Davidoff & Lazarus, 1997). Influence is a form of power and this suggests that there are several sources of influence in the school such as the deputy principal, heads of department as well as the School Governing Body members.

Gurr (2015) asserts that the influence of content and culture on the practice of leadership is viewed through the lens of the research on successful school leadership as part of the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) and the International Leadership Development Network. Gurr (2015:75) argues that, “the context and culture do influence the practice of leadership but that there is now a substantial body of research across diverse contexts and cultures that indicate that core characteristics and practices of successful leaders that transcend context and culture; even though successful leaders are culturally sensitive, they are not constrained by context”.

Research on successful principals’ context-based practices has gained momentum in the last decade. Grint (2005:1467), while acknowledging the role of context in the success of the school, claims that “successful school leaders are those who respond most appropriately to the demands of specific situations”. Contexts are unique to schools and are thus highly variable between schools, even within the same geographic location. Bush and Middlewood (2013:8) claims, “It is also unwise to assume that educational problems are the same within countries let alone between them”. There are a variety of contextual factors which affect schools within a country and across countries, such as location, historical background, stage development, leadership structure,
instructional programme, staff competence and professional disposition, diversity of student population, available resources and school culture (Johnson et al., 2008). Norman, Hashim and Abdullah (2016) conducted an in-depth case study in a successful school in Northern Malaysia and findings indicate that strong interpersonal skills, people-centred leadership, clear communication of vision and goal, focus on academic achievement, co-curricular activities, developing people and creating a positive work environment are crucial elements of successful leadership.

There are internal and external factors contributing to successful school leadership as reported by the ISSPP, even though they were not examined in order to establish how they influence leadership (Leithwood, 2005). Internal factors giving rise to successful school leadership were identified, such as enthusiasm or passion, high degree of emotional intelligence and sensitivity to the needs and aspirations of other stakeholders, and optimism in pursue to achieve high goals. Furthermore, successful school leaders demonstrate cognitive flexibility which showed their willingness to listen carefully to the ideas of others in their open-mindedness, skilled communicators, and problem – solvers (Leithwood, 2005). The ISSPP has also shown that successful leader’s age, years of experience, education and gender were key internal antecedents, and may in some cases influence the behaviour of these leaders.

External factors indicate that successful school leaders worked in state or national policy contexts that are more preoccupied with holding the school publicly accountable. Findings indicate, “the preoccupation was in its relatively early stages in three northern European countries as compared to Australia, England, and the US which were in a mature stage (Leithwood, 2005:4)”. Additionally, in the more mature accountability contexts, most successful principals even used external demands for greater accountability as a tool for overcoming longstanding resistance to change on the part of young teachers. Some external factors reported were school level, size, location, and status (Leithwood, 2005).

The ISSPP conducted a research project in about 20 countries with 20 scholars who develop cases of successful leadership (Leithwood and Day, 2007). ISSPP scholars have generated more than 100 studies defining school success, and the impact principals have in different contexts, especially in low-performing schools. The project relied only on principals as data source, and opinions of others in schools were gathered to complement and enhance knowledge of the contribution to
school success. Most literature was derived from more than 20 developed countries North America and United Kingdom (Gurr, 2015). The schools presented student academic achievement above the mean for municipality expectations, and supervisor and teachers perceived the principal as successful based on actions and results. Successful schools in the project are identified when: students demonstrate above-satisfactory academic achievement; teachers perceive the principals as performing above expectations in leading the school; and parents and other stakeholders know the principal from actions and results.

Gurr (2015) developed a model of successful school leadership from the ISSPP based on previous studies (Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2010) in which he described “the work of school leaders as engaging within the school context to influence student and school outcomes through interventions in teaching and learning, school capacity building, and wider context” (p. 136). Gurr (ibid) argued that the ISSPP is too complex to comprehend, mainly due to its size. Thus, he synthesized 15 stories of principal leadership success collected from 13 countries (Gurr & Drysdale & Mulford, 2010); from which eleven themes emerged as follow; high expectations, pragmatic approaches, core practices, heroic leadership, trust, respect and capacity development through continuous learning and personal resources, context sensitivity resulting in school success, and sustaining success (138-140).

The ISSPP model is explained in terms of level 1 to 3, in which level 1 explains the “what”, “how” and “why” elements of successful school leadership (p. 142). The “what” elements comprise student and school outcomes such as academic attainment, participation and progress as well as the success of school and the quality of teaching and learning. Level 1 impacts on teaching and learning, level 2 on leadership and level 3 on context. Gurr (2015:144) contends, “Although ISSPP is focused on principal leadership, there is sufficient evidence from the project to broaden the model to apply to all school leaders such as senior leaders, middle level leaders and teacher leaders.” Depending on their role in terms of teaching and learning, middle level leaders were found to operate across levels 1 and 2.

According to this model, the principal’s work is much located at all levels, but also more at level 2 where she or he helps to develop teachers in the school and at level 3, “actively responding to and influencing the wider context”, and finally, at level 1, “depending to a large extent on the school context”. The ISSPP has consistently indicated that principals need to draw on a repertoire
of leadership ideas and employ both instructional and transformational leadership styles (Gurr, 2015:144).

On the other hand, Buckhauser, Gates, Hamilton, Li and Pierson (2014) conducted a study entitled, “Laying the foundation for successful school leadership?”, using a survey of 33 districts in Chicago, New York, Memphis and Oakland, guided by two research questions presented as follows: How are principals’ education and professional experience related to student outcomes and principals’ retention? Secondly, how can certification and district hiring policies better incorporate information about a principal’s education and professional experience to improve principal effectiveness? In order to improve chances for positive student outcomes, school administrators and policy makers should consider four factors, namely, implement effective hiring practices, build evaluation systems that foster strong leadership which, give principals the autonomy to lead schools and, lastly, provide them with the resources and support they need.

Furthermore, what makes schools to succeed have been ongoing for many years, with regard to what exactly defines or characterises successful schools. The common elements discussed are interrelated, however, Reynold’s (2015) success factors are eight, while Lynch (2015) spoke of five common elements which were developed from what she calls “Five-factor theory”, which includes high expectations, ongoing screening of student performance and development, quality of leadership, existence of goals and direction, and the extent to which the school is secure and safe (Gurr, 2015; Leithwood, 2012; Lynch, 2015; Reynolds, 2015).

The above-mentioned reviewed literature contributed to knowledge on successful school leadership. However, the existing research has been based on “input-output model which applied to a large survey of 50 or more American and British schools. Thus, the literature is limited in that it fails to pinpoint the in-school processes or transactions which makes schools successful or unsuccessful. Secondly, it fails to offer in-depth descriptions of a few schools. Lastly, it fails to explain school success in developing countries. This study will contribute to literature on successful school leadership from a South African women secondary school principal’s perspective. This study will therefore provide detailed case studies of two successful schools in South Africa with a focus on school leadership, in a sense that it will qualitatively explore women principals’ understanding of successful school leadership, and what makes them successful leaders using the Capability Approach as a lens.
2.4. Challenges of women principals

This section presents challenges experienced by women principals of secondary schools in rural schools, though not limited to rural as such. Challenges are classified as follows: personal, administrative, and cultural other factors. According to Ntaka (2013), most of the challenges women principals experienced emanated from the fact that they are women and that they are managing secondary schools from rural communities which are characterized by poor educational and economic status of the community, inadequate physical and infrastructure conditions, school buildings especially toilets facilities, no adequate transport available, sickness and disease affecting the communities, high attrition and dropout rates at secondary level.

2.4.1. Cultural factors

2.4.1.1. Gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes mostly emanate from beliefs and traditional systems rooted in most patriarchal systems around gender roles and discrimination. Overtime societies developed cultures that support masculinity against feminism with the help of economic factors over social factors that help to maintain this stereotype. Till now the perception of women as outsiders in the workplace because of their physical differences still spread, especially in most developing countries (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2001). According to Fiske and Taylor (2013: 209), women leadership also suffers the challenge of perceptions. In their view, perception is a “process of creating internal representation of the external world”. Perception of what constitutes “good” or appropriate behaviours has been socially described as traditional stereotypes that favour men as having better leadership qualifications. Dalton (2013) asserts that traditionally, teaching has been seen as complementary to woman’s roles as wife and mother, and management on the other hand is seen as contradictory to these roles. Attitude about women leadership is informed by stereotypes and subjective biases resulting from “societal stratification” whereby women are viewed by men as less capable of leading, emotionally immature and sometimes considered nagging (Mberia, 2017:40). In addition, Schmidt and Mestry (2015:819) argue, “these perceptions degrade women and contribute to them having to continuously prove themselves as effective leaders”.

Morojele, Chikoko and Ngcobo (2013: 201), citing Bennet (1992), who maintains, “when a woman takes a management post in what was previously a male domain, whether in primary or secondary
school, this perceived intrusion leaves her exposed and vulnerable. Inevitably she faces challenges based on sex stereotypes and the uneasiness about women in leadership positions”. Additionally, female school principals are not perceived as incompetent and unable by male colleagues, but also by female staff members as a result of an entrenched culture of male dominance. This also concurs with what Graig (2017) says when saying that the principal position in a community was viewed as masculine and powerful.

Sandberg (2013:3) maintains that “our stereotype of men holds that they are providers, decisive and driven, while our stereotype of women holds that they are caregivers, sensitive and communal.” She says that when a woman acts forcefully or competitively, she is deviating from the expected behaviour. If a woman pushes to get the job done, she is acting like a man. Naidoo and Perumal (2014) argue that for as long as society continues to stereotype women, women principals will continue to experience challenges in their leadership roles.

On the contrary, Mayienga’s (2013) study entitled, “Success stories: biographical narratives of three women principals in secondary schools in Kenya”, reveals that women principals in her study had positive gender socialization from parents, teachers and a community at large. She (ibid: 97) proclaims, “the government trusted their leadership and recommended them for leadership, while the community acknowledged the women’s leadership.” She argues that three women principals were accepted irrespective of the fact that they had children out of wedlock, not circumcised as expected in the Kenyan culture and divorced. They were thus “bound to be considered misfit in society because they disrupted the traditional life path (P.98)”. She further asserts that there is a need for government to educate and sensitize men in particular to understand that independency is vital to a sustainable society. Saris (2017:112) claims that Arab female principals in Israel believe in their right for personal development and self- fulfilment; they believe in the abilities and perceive themselves equal to men or even suitable for the leadership roles than men. This will indeed contribute to the modernisation of social perception of women, and success narratives of women principals which will empower other women and also emphasise their abilities.

CA reflects a person’s ability to achieve a given functioning (doing and being). It is characterized by what people are effectively able to do and to be, and focuses more on people’s abilities. Capabilities are real opportunities, where opportunities do not refer to access to resources or opportunities to certain levels of satisfaction, but rather to what a person can do and to the various
states of being of this person (Robeyns, 2005). What is vital is that people have the freedoms to lead the kind of lives they favour to lead and do what they desire.

2.4.1.2. High expectations

Women principals are expected to go an extra mile while executing their management duties, for example, they are expected to perform miracles (this make learners lazy and underperforming). Schmidt and Mestry (2015) revealed in their study that one participant indicated that she disliked being labelled a “mother” and a “nurturer” “with the expectation that she should overlook poor student behaviour. Participants in the study reported gender bias in their management of schools. They (ibid) contended that as women they were expected to go an extra mile while executing management duties. Members of the community expected them to behave differently from who they were. On top of that they were expected to play the role of being mothers of schoolboys in the community as well as of some teachers in the school. In addition, patriarchal views, based upon the belief that men are superior still exists. Women principals also indicated that they were expected to understand teachers’ reasons for not reporting to work because they are mothers too, so they know what is like to have a family problem (Alexander, 2018; Collins, 2015; Cox, 2015; Khumalo, 2017). This concurs with Kattan, Heredero, Botella and Margalina (2016:98), when saying that women usually work harder than men for the same position in order to prove their abilities. On top, women leaders receive fewer rewards. Furthermore, Kattan et al. (ibid: 99) assert “if women leaders go against gender stereotypes, they are seen as too tough; however, if they go along with the stereotypes, they are depicted as too soft”.

Moreover, women high school principals are expected to meet certain expectations with less support than male high school principals. One female principal confirmed that teachers from her school are not always willing to assist a woman principal, and that she observed that a male principal in the school had many helping hands (Alexander, 2018). She complained that now that she is the principal of the school, teachers behave differently, expecting her do to all the duties by herself. Furthermore, women principals mention that they were also expected to be professionally dressed and presentable, and to consistently wear suits. Alexander (2018) asserts that this shows how patriarchy continues to influence the discourse of secondary educational leadership that the way a woman dresses could be such an impact on how others perceive their effectiveness as a leader.
2.4.1.3. Negative attitude and insubordination

Uncooperative male colleagues were cited by participants in various studies to reject women’s authority (Zikhali & Smit, 2019). Male colleagues scrutinized her leadership and tried to distract her from performing her duties. They also undermine women principals based on the fact that they are women (Arar & Oplakta, 2016; Ndebele, 2018; Ng’ambi, 2015; Mayienga, 2013) and there is resistance from the school staff ranging from open defiance to subtle noncompliance (Naidoo & Perumal, 2014). Male teachers also try to take over in the presence of women principals (Khumalo, 2017), and this results in jealousy and backbiting (Zikhali & Smit, 2019).

Furthermore, Khumalo (2017) conducted a study entitled, “Working against and working towards: narratives of South African women principals”, in which she and other woman principal were participants in the study. They assert that as they successfully moved up the ladder, their husbands became jealous because they felt undermined and could not tolerate that they earned lower salaries than their wives. The two participants both lost their husbands due to the inability to handle salary differences. This shows the lack of support for women principals from various stakeholders; and for as long as women are not supported by the all stakeholders; women will continue to experience leadership-related challenges.

On the contrary, Ng’ambi’s (2015) findings reveal that male teachers have accepted women as principals because they were open, consultative and treated them with respect. Ng’ambi also emphasises that female principals also reported that younger members of staff were more accepting of female leadership than older members because they were less culturally entrenched unlike older staff members who are conservative and patriarchal.

2.4.1.4. Sexual harassment and victimization

The participant in Khumalo’s (2017) study claimed that her male deputy principal made advance to her in her first month at school as a way of undermining her as her principal, in the belief that as her lover he would be able to control her. As a result, her husband wanted her to give up her position as principal. However, the participant’s resilience allowed her to overcome all these challenges. Furthermore, findings in Juma, Simatwa and Nyodo (2016) report that politicians and senior departmental officials have no respect for female principals, which results in sexual harassment which makes them despairing in the profession, and young female principals become
more affected than their incomparable groups. Schmidt and Mestry (2015:816) upholds that “the role of principal and school as institution are rooted in hegemony and become less able to protect the experiences of women from gender and racial marginalization, threats and violence”. Women principals experienced attacks such as local teachers’ union, threat of appropriating male power.

2.4.1.5. Community involvement

According to Naidoo and Perumal (2014: 42), the community in which the study was conducted failed to support women principals in dealing with issues of drug abuse and traditional customs in a sense that “efforts to rehabilitate addicted learners on drugs failed, and what made matters worse was the fact that the educators in the school found it difficult to differentiate drug abusers from drug peddlers”. Social workers were also called in to assist with the rehabilitation of learners abusing drugs but without success. Naidoo and Perumal (2014) designate that the community in which their study was conducted was deeply rooted in the traditional customs of sending boys to initiation school. This is a common practice by different cultural groups of Bapedi, amaXhosa, amaNdebele and others to send their boys into mountain schools for circumcision. The woman principal in this community reported that almost half the boy learners in grade 12 could miss the whole term attending initiation school. This negatively affect end-of-year examination results. In addition, the principal asserts that she has observed that the community does not take education seriously, in a sense that even though they lack financially, they still afforded to save a lot of money for boys’ initiation school at the expense of their daughters’ education.

2.4.2. Personal factors

Personal factors are internal factors challenging women principals in carrying out their leadership and management duties, and they include role conflict and high expectation from stakeholders.

2.4.2.1. Role conflict

Previous research reports that women principals are caught up in the middle of balancing work and domestic responsibilities, in a sense that women participants in this study claimed that they are constantly confronted with having to navigate pressing demands to perform domestic chores in their families, as well as their official school management activities. Naidoo and Perumal (2014:14) further contend that the option of sacrificing family life in favour of work can be interpreted as women principals refusing to be judged as incompetent or failing to succeed. They
argue(ibid) that “women principals in their study were virtually absent from their children, ultimately going against the social and cultural expectation of women being relegated to particular roles such as child rearing and performing household chores”. Furthermore, Saris (2017:110) contends that women understand family needs and are aware that their roles consume mental and physical resources at the expense of family, and in some cases, disputes that arose with people from extended family or disagreement with them in-laws.

The ongoing struggle to balance work and family should no longer be viewed as a “struggle” but rather a “failure” for as long as women principals continue to mention it as a challenge. Women have succeeded in breaking down the glass ceiling and all barriers on their way to leadership positions, which means that they are in a better position to continue to defy the patriarchal systems in their communities. Women principals must therefore sensitise their family members on socialisation of gender roles. Juggling one’s daily schedule will forever be a struggle for women principals and other women leaders, but educating family members and the entire society will help ease their roles.

Khumalo (2017) maintains that women participants in her study opted for divorce because their spouses were not supportive of their leadership roles, indeed adding more pressure and stress to them. This suggests that more women leaders weigh options before them, thus career or marriage; and they opt for their careers over marriage. Sharing of gender roles and raising awareness within communities for people to appreciate women ‘s work is also critical

Saris (2017:111) asserts, “female school principals in Israeli expect their children to behave according to their mothers’ status, in a such a way that they also invest in the family”. In addition, Acker (1992:569) argues that “a woman who aspires to leadership positions must overcome both her childhood socialization which discouraged development of some essential qualities, and a popular perception of maleness leadership both of which tangibly reduce the chance she will be judged qualified”.

2.4.2.2. Professional demands

The principal is regarded both as an educational leader and manager. He or she is also responsible for performing multifunctional roles, which entails, managing, coordinating, planning and leading. Research by Ng’ambi (2015) and Graig (2017) report on the demanding role of principalship
especially the complexities of the rural principal role, whereby some participants confirmed that
as principals they were sometimes forced to out of necessity to fill more than one job role which
could result inferior performance at either or both roles, which increase stress level for high school
principals. Women principals acknowledged the following areas adding more to their professional
demands; schools in rural communities serve as the main source of communication and
entertainment for the community; as result the principal is expected to be accessible whether in
session or not which put an extra level of complexities to the role (Graig, 2017); overload due to
the absence of assistant managers, thus deputy – principal or Heads of Department (Ng’ambi,
2015).

In South Africa, any educator qualifies to be appointed as a school principal as long as they meet
minimum requirements which are qualification in teaching and five years’ experience in teaching
in terms of Educator Labour Relation Council (ELRC). Wiehahn and du Plessis (2018: 3) argue
that with no additional qualification or skills development for the position of principalship, school
principals face a daunting task filled with challenges and obstacles which contribute to the school
administrative, leadership and governance teams being “technically unqualified personnel”.
Changes at the national and provincial levels of government, new legal requirements and changes
in legislation, a changing educational landscape and a large – scale cultural shift which affects the
staff corps, student body and society are reported to make the role of the principal more complex,
and could lead to uncertainty in job expectation. If the principal is not familiar with these changes,
it could affect his or her performance as a leader and manager which could result in the school
being dysfunctional.

In addition, Juma et al (2016: 52) who investigated factors causing stress among public school
female principals in Kenya uphold that “moderate stress positively influences performance;
therefore, withstanding the negative effect it hardly deters performance”. Women principals are
reported to experience this type of stress because they always want to prove that they are competent
and are capable for leading schools irrespective of the challenges they encounter.

2.4.2.3. Isolation

Women principals reported feelings of isolation in their new appointment as principals especially
those externally appointed; being a newcomer at the school, feeling alone in SMT meetings, when
monitoring learner punctuality in the morning and after break times (Naidoo & Perumal, 2014).
One participant in Khumalo’s (2017:52) study asserts that she orientated herself around the principal’s office, because there was no one from school, SGB and not even the circuit manager to welcome her. The cold reception, depressing reactions and ongoing threatening anonymous calls made her unsure of herself and ultimately leaving her lonely and scared.

2.4.3. Administrative challenges

These are challenges which emanate from human resources such as learners, parents and teachers and other management factors such as finances; will be discussed in the next sessions.

2.4.3.1. Shortage of highly qualified teachers

Previous studies reveal that shortage of teachers was experienced mostly in rural school despite the issue of gender leadership. Shortage of teachers was exacerbated by various problems such as new teachers are not attracted to rural teaching due to lack of transport facilities and other resources. Alexander (2018) asserts that the scarce public transport contributed to late coming of both teachers and learners; as result the quality of education was highly compromised. Female principals experienced a high rate of teacher absenteeism to an extent that they resorted to employing foreign teachers. However, female principals reported that this did not help for a longer period, because foreign teachers became unhappy and felt threatened due xenophobic attacks and utterance by other teachers. Furthermore, principals in small rural communities are somewhat challenged to recruit many good teachers. The professional development of staff was viewed as important by principals, however, due to financial constraints, professional development opportunities are few and much of which is offered were arranged and delivered by the principal themselves (Miller, 2015). This concurs with Du Plessis (2014) when saying that it is difficult for rural schools to attract good and suitable teachers because of the little resources that are available. Principals in rural schools mentioned that teachers complain about the quality of accommodation, school resources and access to leisure.

2.4.3.2. Uncooperative SMT members

In her study, Khumalo (2017) assert that cliques, and lack of confidentiality and support within the School Management Team (SMT) were noted as administrative challenges. Findings from her study reveal that some of them tried their level best to divide the staff and the School Governing Body as well to pull them down. They influenced anyone they came across negatively to ensure
that the SMT failed to reach the intended goal. The woman principal maintain that some staff members were not easily influenced and they continue to do their work and cooperate with other SMT members. In agreement with Khumalo (2017), Ndebele (2018) asserts that opposing camps were said to emerge in the school whereby some members of the SMT were siding with the former acting principal if one was still at the school; which incited other members of staff not to accept the female principals in the school. Furthermore, Naidoo and Perumal (2014) explain that women principals in their study complained about SMT members who distanced themselves from decisions taken at management meetings, instead prefer to discuss these decisions with other educators. Similarly, Arar and Oplakta (2016) indicated that female Arab leaders have difficulties with staff members who tended to repudiate their authority. Arab women reported that they also face hostility during their initial induction into leadership posts. However, research from various Arab countries show that women leaders cope effectively with the challenges they encounter in the educational institutions that they lead, mainly because of skills and strategies they learn as they overcome many barriers their long stay in mid-career.

2.4.3.3. Lack of commitment

Alexander (2018) indicate that younger teachers lacked commitment towards their duties; and time management skills; young teachers going to class late and also failing to meet deadlines. Some male teachers sometimes having affairs with school girls, which make them unruly. Moreover, Naidoo and Perumal (2014) assert women principal at Daffodil High, Anna, indicated that teachers were accustomed to early departure and late submission of learners’ assessment, and also refuse to accept responsibility for negligence regarding the submission of work.

2.4.3.4. Teacher Unions

The lack of professionalism by union members was also cited as a challenge by female principals, they indicated that union matters sometimes disturb the smooth running of the school. Teachers hold meetings during school hours, and schools have to knock earlier than normal times. Short notices of Teachers ‘Union meeting affected the whole school programme (Khumalo, 2017).

2.4.3.5. Disciplinary matters

Alexander (2018) and Ng’ambi (2015) assert that women principals in secondary schools had to deal with learner related problems such as drugs and substance abuse by both boys and girls which
make them unruly. Learners bringing dangerous weapons to school campuses which poses danger to the safety of other learners as well as teachers. The high rate of teenage pregnancy which is aggravated by social grants, girls looking forward to marriage as well as not taking education seriously. Other factors mentioned are HIV/AIDS and polygamous families which indirectly lead to depression, anger, the use of abusive language, jealousy, intolerance, destructive competition and fighting among learners. Learners’ lack of motivation and commitment to do well academically was also evident. This added more work for women principals, causing them to spent most of their times dealing with disciplinary matters.

Participants spoke of male teachers in their school as being cooperative, and acknowledged male colleagues ‘s help in handling disciplinary matters. This could mean that female teachers as well as female principals had a serious challenge when coming to disciplining learners, especially male students. According to Kimmel, (2005) in Graig (2017: 67) hegemonic masculinity is defined as “the idea of an ideal masculine figure who is representative of white, upper-class or middle-class, and demonstrating power over others, while men who are disadvantaged in one or more of these ideal qualities strive to prove masculinity in other ways”. Hence, Graig (2017) maintains that both fighting and lack of academic effort could be the cause of disciplinary action at school, and the researcher postulates that male student’s reaction to correction for behaviour intended to demonstrate his masculinity as described above could lead in a confrontational scene between student and the school authority. Women principals were faced with challenges stemming from rural conservation paired with a cultural expectation of male dominance over female, the potential of confrontational interaction is increased.

2.4.3.6. Parents struggling to pay school fees

Mayienga (2013)’s study highlighted some of the challenges women principals experienced in their leadership role. The study examined the impact of gender socialization on the self-image of the three successful high school principals in Kenya. Even though Joan (one of the participants) school did well in the national examinations, most of her students were struggling financially. Most parents owe school fees, as result most girls in her community did not get the same educational privileges as boys did. The school community was located in low socio-economic status, therefore when the family is financially constrained, boys were often given first preference to get education. Furthermore, Joan asserts that all the girls in the secondary school have attained
marriage age; thus, when they stay away from school due to huge school fee balances exposes them to early marriages. This became a worrying factor for Joan because her desire was to see all girls completing high school studies. She reported that every donation she got, she channeled some monies towards girls ‘s education in order to keep them at school.

Furthermore, school leadership in low- socioeconomic communities is bound to be challenging and discouraging to people leading them. It requires self-determination and a caring spirit for one to succeed in low-income school, such as Nancy (Mayienga,2013) the researcher indicated that throughout the interview sessions with the participants, she never heard participants complaining and blaming parents or society for failing to support the education of their children.

2.4.3. 7. School Governing bodies

Female principals complained that parents’ component serving in the SGB encountered some serious challenges with regard to legislations pertaining to school governance. Parents failed to comprehend some issues with regard to roles and responsibilities specific to them because mostly are not well educated. Therefore, do not effectively contribute to the development of the school as expected. Additionally, parents were reported to have confuse roles regarding governances and management issues (Ng’ambi, 2015; Khumalo 2017).

The lack of education among parents is also evident in Naidoo and Perumal (2014) when saying that parents of Zinniah High school joined the SGB in the hope of getting something financially from the school funds. Upon their understanding of South African Schools Act (SASA) 1996, they discover that they will not benefit financially, as a result they lost interest and then resigned as members of the SGB. They (ibid: 11) proclaim that “observations in disadvantaged communities indicate that they are often in need of health or other social care, have low educational qualifications or illiterate and are often single or act as substitute. This often result in conflicting beliefs and norms between that of the school and community at large”.

3.4.3.8 Lack of resources and facilities

According Miller (2015), principals in rural areas were faced with lack of infrastructure. None of the four participants led schools that had excellent or even good facilities. Two school, for example had flush toilets and two had old pit latrines that did not flush. In addition, not all principals had extra space due to lower or reduced numbers. Some schools had no electricity, while those with
electricity had few computers, so it became difficult to do anything technologically related. Health and safety implications are clear and need urgent attention (Naidoo & Perumal, 2014; Ng’ambi, 2015).

Furthermore, the shifting demands did not adequately support their work patterns and new responsibilities with two principals lamenting the fact that they did not have private offices and therefore could not readily deal with sometimes urgent or confidential issues in a timely manner. The lack of space was compounded by a weak communication infrastructure where, for three of four, mobile telephone access was not good, and for one principal, she had to stand outside under a tree in order to get a mobile signal. Health (Ng’ambi, 2015; Miller, 2015). Participants in Lumby (2015)’s study explain that the often-late arrival of state funding left schools without resources, compelled them to set some part of their income as insurance against future delays. In addition, the pedagogic challenges may be formidable, including language of instruction, large class sizes, untrained staff and a curriculum and testing regime that are perceived as unhelpful (Lumby, 2015).

One of the participants in Mayienga (2013) study reported that in her first year as principal she had to clear the mess created by the former principal at the school who had misused the exam fees from 12th grade students. The woman principal in this study claimed that she had to get money somewhere to settle the debt so that students can be enrolled for a national examination. She was threatened by students and their parents in case she failed to refund their money. The woman principal rode over these challenges.

2.4.3.9. Parental involvement

Parents’ lack of support and commitment for education of their children was evident in various ways such as poor attendance of parents’ meeting, those who attend meetings agree to suggestions and plans but were not too committed. Furthermore, Naidoo and Perumal (2014:11) contend that “the socio-economic status of parents in disadvantaged communities influences the level of interest they show in the education of their children”. Women principals assert that unemployed parents in these communities refuse to volunteer their services at school, because they mentioned that they cannot render their services for nothing. Some parents were reported by their children to switch off the electricity while their children are busy studying, saying electricity is expensive for them. However, Graig (2017) maintains that women principals’ obligation to provide a college and career ready curriculum for all students, stay within the budget, and provide a safe environment
sometimes came into conflict with the community’s status quo as many participants related a sense of frustration at the community’s lack of support necessary for changes.

2.4.3.10. Poor communication and service delivery

Female principals maintain that they were sometimes inconvenienced by the short-notice invitation to meeting and workshops by the department of education. This also implicated women principals as not good in planning because they have to reschedule their daily activities. The late delivery of Learning, Teaching and Support Material (LTSM) impacted heavily on quality of teaching and learning. In some cases, teachers missed subject workshops due to late arrivals of departmental circulars.

Secondly, the Post Provisioning Model, a tool designed by department of education to assist in the implementation of Resolution 6 of 1998, has not benefited rural school, instead had worsened women principals’ problems (Ntaka, 2013). The department of education is reported to have brought teachers who did not the curriculum requirements; and did not help women principals in increasing learner enrollment (Alexander, 2018). In addition, the Department of Education (DoE) poses a “one size fits all” approach to policies and expects implementation without a careful consideration of needs of rural communities. Ntaka (2013) further maintains that the DoE does not provide continuous support to rural schools as it is supposed to do. She also argues that DoE has training manuals to capacitate women in and into leadership management positions, but there is no implementation of such.

2.4.3.11 Political matters

Arar and Oplakta (2016) assert that women principals in their study encountered some problems with how to handle local tribal and extended family (hamulla) interests and politics, these groups had huge influence in teacher appraisal, and somehow women principals did not know how to succumb to the high level of pressure exerted on them. They (ibid) indicate that women leaders resorted to pedagogy and other professional rational decisions to overcome their challenges. Arar, Orucu and Kucucayir (2018) explored the challenges faced by female school principal educating Syrian refugees together with Turkish students in a public school in Turkey. The study aimed at exploring the challenges and strategies the female principal adopted to overcome them. The findings revealed the following: Arar et al. (2018) assert that her appointment as a woman principal
was met by cultural and gender stereotypes from the community and staff. The female principal was also challenged in dealing with refugee children with regard to building social cohesion under the shadow of ambiguous policy concerning integration. In addition, Arar et al (2018) highlighted some of the strategies she utilized to overcome the challenges in order to succeed in her leadership role.

Challenges faced by the female principal are recorded by Arar et al (2018) as follow: firstly, the female principal had to prove her capability by building the school community and strengthening the trust between and across teacher, students and parent. This was due to the community ‘s opposition to her appointment as the head of the school. Secondly, the unexpected arrival of the Syrians added more to her complexity of her role; in a sense that she had to mediate conflict between the Syrian and Turkish communities in the school constructively and collectively, and sometimes the lack of resources led to competition between the two groups. The other problem she encountered was that policy regarding integration of Syrian refugees into the Turkish school system was still in the pipeline; therefore, this posed more challenges on issues of citizenship, identity and education. Furthermore, female principal experienced stress and anxiety on other issues such as language support, dealing with traumatized children, dealing with bureaucratic decisions of the government as well as comprehensive planning towards social integration of the Syrian refugee children into the school. The research findings provided an understanding of the coping mechanism of the female principal in a complex political and human reality. Arar et al. (2018) maintain that she resorted to reflection and observation of the phenomenon while striving for educational-cultural relevance by means of joint-work, value-based commitment and an attempt to build social cohesion. The female principal managed to build positive construct in communication and trust between the two communities.

2.5. Leadership strategies employed by women principals to overcome challenges

Research shows that women principals in secondary schools in their difficult situations resorted to many coping mechanisms in order to deal with their challenges in their professional, as well as personal lives (Alexander, 2018; Bartling, 2013; Cox, 2015; Dinh, Lord, Gardener & Meuser, 2014; Edwards, 2018; Faulkner, 2015; Gilbert, 2012; Ginya & Perumal, 2014; Naidoo & Perumal, 2014; Ng’ambi, 2015; Khumalo, 2017; Li, 2014; Lumby & Azaola, 2014; Mayienga, 2013; Miller & Graham, 2014; Newman, 2013; Saris, 2017; Shezi, 2014; Slater, Gorosave, , Silva
It is evident from the above-mentioned studies that women principals employ a variety of leadership strategies to make their lives easier. Strategies employed by women principals include among others, mothering style, spiritual, servant, collaborative, transformational, instructional democratic and participatory; democratic and participatory as well as other coping mechanisms. However, Edwards and Perumal (2014) challenged the stereotypical interpretation of leadership based on gender to be problematic, based on their findings from their study entitled “Gendered leadership stereotypes in disadvantaged rural school communities,” in that it presents both female and male leadership from two distinct different paradigms. The argument stemmed which from their findings reveals that both female and male principals possess leadership qualities of servant and spiritual leadership. Edwards and Perumal (2014: 43) further indicate that within this critical explanation, “androgynous individuals embody qualities that Western Culture consider as feminine and masculine, which further denotes that “androgynous men and women are both seen as assertive as well as nurturing”. This could imply that the leadership styles employed by women are also used by male principals. When dealing with leadership styles researchers must avoid gendered leadership, because based on the above-mentioned assertion school leaders in the study used utilized whatever leadership style that fits the situation. Li (2014) declares that the public schools’ system is more hierarchical in China; in a sense that they have more layers of administration and management; and are closely bonded with the government with regard to school funding, teaching and learning resources as well as student recruitment. So female principals have to negotiate within and outside school systems, as result it constraints the practices of female practices of female principals regardless of what strategies they adopt. Female principals also indicated that the public system is not flexible in terms of implementing their own ideas and decisions

2.5.1. Ethics of care

In her definition of caring, Noddings (2005: 20) distinguishes between “cared for” and “the carer”. The carer is the one experiencing a state of “engrossment and “motivational displacement”. Engrossment is defined as “open non selective receptivity to the cared for”; and “motivational displacement” as “the sense that our motive energy is flowing towards others and their projects”. She emphasizes that the cared-for receives caring and shows that it has been received.
After Noddings, (2005:43) outlined the principle of the ethics of care in caring, she developed much of her attention to education. She suggests many ways in which the school systems may be improved by educators who operate through “motivational displacement” in response to their students. Noddings, (2005) argues that caring is not the only way educators can contextualize educational decisions, but that caring should be part of the curriculum. She says that the goal of educational system is to create competent, caring citizens. So, there is a shift of role for educators from teaching learners what is right and wrong, to teaching children how to care. This concurs with Noddings (1992:33) when saying participants in her study consciously chose to involve and become involved with the community as a way of educating the whole child. These practices were described through ethno-humanist role and specifically delivered through “other mothering” which is a maternal, nurturing type of leadership focused on meeting the needs of students. It was also noted that “other mothering” was a common practice traced to slavery and involved African American females fulfilling the needs of children in their vicinity, within their respective communities.

2.5.2. Mothering approach

Lumby and Azaola (2014) analysed the under-explored topic of a mothering style in leadership of women school principals in South Africa. The findings demonstrate the diverse ways in which participants utilize their reference group identification as nurturing leaders, as an attempt to reverse the “deficit model” (Aker, 1992) commonly associated with women in position of leadership.

Lumby and Azaola (2014) argue that while one possible analysis might interpret this as merely doing gender; that is reinforcing stereotypes of women as mothers, the article suggests that in the ongoing struggle to achieve greater equality for women school leaders, it is inappropriate to homogenize Western interpretations of doing and undoing gender.

The mothering approach leadership may be in part conformance to the expected community parenting role, or may be compelled by poverty learner, where water, food, clothing, medical care, and some protection from violence and rape are demanded before any learning can take place. The norms of group of “mothers” might be understood quite differently, as well as the contingent values of leadership. In South Africa, that may be differ from those in more economically privileged site. Hence, Lumby and Azaola (2014) argue that mothering is indeed a vital attribute of leadership, but in a quite different way from that understood in the West.
Lumby and Azaola (2014) identified three categories of women utilizing a mothering style of leadership. The first group consisted of women who reflect upon their gender identity as mother as personal development. They value the cultural and historical assumption of nurture and care bound to the notion of mothering. They centred their reflection on how motherhood has changed their vision of the world and how becoming mothers themselves has moderated relationships with learners.

The second group of participants in Lumby and Azaola (2014) ‘s study utilized motherhood to overcome social problems, the participants were aware of the effective and practical skills acquired through motherhood use them to try to cope with difficulties of their particular local context including poverty, AIDS and parental absence through death or work demands.

The last group utilized motherhood to trouble gender, by creating capital from gender in the workplace. This aimed to distinguish female and male approaches to leadership, portraying the latter as less appropriate and less effective. They depict male leadership as lacking mothering experience and therefore lacking skills and knowledge necessary to lead a school.

Furthermore, Lumby (2015) asserts that North West principal took a group of grade twelve students to live with her in her home for a month when examination was approaching. She maintains that gender construction in relation to ensuring that children are ready to learn is evident. Women’s socialization into normative role of mothering, including those who have no biological children, may have influenced the strong assertion in many cases that the undertaking of tasks outside the usual repertory of a principal was vital to their success. Lumby argues that (p17) the principals’ construction of what a mother does and their denigration of some men’s abilities to meet children’s needs may also reflect the fractured social relations of post-Apartheid South Africa. Caring for and providing a safe place for children were primary and axiomatic. Children gained from this, but the results for principals may have been negative by trapping them into a particular approach to leadership which may be perceived as more limited than pursued by men leading schools in more privileged location.

Lumby (2015: 15) asserts that stereotypically women are seen as homemakers, and amongst the group of women principals were those who stressed maintaining the building as would a home. North west secondary principal indicated that she started from nothing, by convincing learners to come and work together as a new family. From then, learners were able to donate sufficient funds
to acquire brooms and other items for their school. She maintains that in struggling to achieve level 1 goal, women may have been reinforcing the view of themselves as homemakers rather than professional leaders of learning. Furthermore, she argues that what proved positive for the learners may have impacted negatively on external assessment of this woman’s focus and abilities.

Lumby (2015:16) highlights that leaders of schools where the context allows efforts to be primarily directed at learning are likely to be praised as more successful leaders in terms of, for example, matriculation results. Leaders of school in communities of multiple deprivation may expend their time and energy to keep children in school, rather than on learning itself, and so be judged less effective in their results. Data suggest that keeping children in school may be implicated in reproduction of belief in women’s lesser competence as leaders.

2.5.3. Collaborative leadership

Miller, Graham and Al-Awiwe (2014) findings reveal that with regard to leadership styles preferred by female leaders, the indication is that they considered their leadership styles to be primarily collaborative. Teamwork was a hallmark of the working style of the four female school leaders. Miller et al (2014) indicate that interviewed female leaders repeated the word “successful” many times. For example, Catherine, one of the participants said that she arrived at her style of leadership through examples of “successful leaders”.

Secondly, women principals favoured a relational style of leadership coupled with care-focused decision making. They expressed a need to care for the welfare of students and faculty and make changes that enhanced learning opportunities for their students. They sought to empower all stakeholders in order to foster collaboration that produced changes to improve student learning. They circumvented their communities’ practice of maintaining the traditional status quo by employing a “power with” instead of “power over” leadership structure.

Newman (2001: 23) asserts that as a “Mother of the poor” Norma Wilson, female participant worked to alleviate the conditions that impede student growth and academic achievement. As “The Re-Culturing Principal” Margaret Russell, seeks to develop people through transforming her school’s culture, and Audrey Grant, “The Community Principal”, is concerned with building community in order to create a socially well-adjusted society.
2.5.4. Spiritual leadership

Shakeshaft (2013) s’ study was designed to gain understanding of how young African American women principals experience principalship. They findings indicated that these women rely on God, faith and family in their day-to-day work. Some of the women discussed the challenges they face dealing with ageism, sexism and racism in the workplace.

Faulkner (2015) conducted a longitudinal study in South through the use of narrative inquiry and life history methodology, to examine and explore the personal and professional pathways to co-education high school principalship of four South African women from diverse backgrounds. The study revealed that the women’s personal agency was a strong enabler to their progress: as a result, they were not constrained by societally imposed stereotypes and prevailing discriminatory attitudes. Their manifestation of their personal agency was also clearly interwoven with their deep spiritual faith. Furthermore, the study shows that it was a combination of these powerful forces and beliefs, personal agency and a deeply held belief that they were doing “God’s work” which enabled the four women to achieve principalship.

Edwards and Perumal (2014:6015), found that a stereotypical interpretation of leadership from two distinct and different paradigms. The study also revealed that spiritual leadership ad service are leadership qualities that both men and women possess. Within this exegesis “androgynous individuals embody qualities that Western culture consider both masculine and feminine” and in this way androgynous men and women are found in rural disadvantaged school communities.

2.5.5. Transformational leadership

According to Meuser, Gardner and Dinh (2016), the newest generation of school principals signifies how leadership theories interrelate and the findings in this research agreed with the same sentiment. Leaders influence and a definition of effective leaders may be found in various theories and the literature clearly noted that, “no unified theory of leadership currently exist” (Meuser et al., 2016: 1380). Components of transformational leadership which are focused upon developing the leadership capacity of all staff, servant leadership is rooted in ethical and caring behaviour, invitational leadership is based upon respect and trust, and followership theory which highlights the importance of teacher principal relationship, were all found in the conversation with secondary
school principals. There was no theory that had more representation in the findings of an effective leader than another (Leithwood et al, 2006).

Newman, (2001) using grounded theory explored how high school principals in Jamaica conceptualize school leadership. Participants in the study were three females and one male. Findings indicate four critical aspects of the principals’ conceptualizations; that the principals’ understandings of leadership are primarily moral; their leadership practices are organized around common values; their leadership is sensitive to and interacts with a wide range of overlapping contexts and differences in personal and school community contexts account for variations in their leadership emphases and practices.

2.5.6. Situational leadership

Ng’ambi (2015) affirms that female principal in her study employed different leadership styles from democratic and consultative to authoritative, laisse faire and autocratic. Participants confirmed that their leadership style depended on various situations in the school. The other participant explains that some teachers do not take their work seriously, and the only way the principal can get them do their work was by being autocratic.

2.5.7. Ubuntu

Shezi (2014) explored what women principals understand about leadership and management, what they experience as they lead and how they navigate challenges in secondary school in South Africa. The findings revealed that the concept of leadership and management were understood by women principals as two inter-related aspects that should be applied in South African education system. Furthermore, the findings revealed that women principals experienced leadership and management as rejection, nurturing people and exposure to management of funds and School Governing Body matters. In arrogating these challenges, the findings revealed that they are guided by certain ethics and values that reflect Ubuntu which is also a prequisite of transformation.

2.5.8. Breaking the glass ceiling

Saris (2017) examined strategies of Arab female principals from diverse backgrounds. The study revealed that female school principals understand the family needs and are aware of the fact that role as principals consume mental and physical resources at the expense of the family. Some of
the participants reported disputes arose from the extended family, or disagreements with members of the husband’s family. The study also indicated that Arab women today are far more educated than those of previous generation and many of them refuse to accept the traditional perceptions that places them humbly at home and leave the men to do things, run things, provide everything, and make all decisions.

Saris (2017) also maintains that once a woman has proved herself and becomes a successful principal, the attitude changes; the community and the family learn to respect her status, her leadership, and her abilities. Once the close circle supports her, the female principal can “spread her wings knowing that others will follow” P17. Moreover, the study revealed that female school principals expect their children to behave according to the mother status, so that they also invest in the family. Nevertheless, study participants emphasized that they do their best not to bring work- and work-related issues to their homes.

2.5.9. Dealing with conflicting roles

This study support Coleman (2012)’s view that despite the workload, pressures, and other problems, the female principals do not give up their desire to prove their worth, become successful manageresses, and find ways to bridge between the two worlds, management and family life. They adopted a more modern life style, divided tasks at home, and managed to get support and assistance from spouses and children. They learned to organize their time effectively, conducted diary and presented mental strength and the ability to say no. Their mental strength relies on environmental support, particularly the support and encouragement of the husbands and the immediate family. Furthermore, Saris (2017) asserts that Arab female principals believe in their right for personal development and self-fulfillment; they believe in their abilities and perceive themselves equal to men, or even more suitable for the role than men. Arab women principals learned to cope with the challenges by strategies that suit both circumstances and their personality.

Ng’ambi (2015) maintains that in order to cope with such challenges as this one, role conflict; women principals in the study adopted various management strategies. They adopted an open-door policy and strategy of working together with other member of staff and sharing power. Women principals created democratic practices in their schools by listening to and allowing staff members to be actively involved in decision-making, they were empathetic and firm as well as fair to their staff members. Women principals in this study claimed that through maintaining the open-door
policy and the collegial management styles, and established teamwork and co-operation with the staff members and learners. They did all these to ensure harmony at school so that they would encounter low resistance and build a sense of family (Ndebele, 2018; Naidoo & Perumal, 2014).

2.5.10. Using a masculine approach

Rhodes’s (2018) explains the main factors that influence the career aspirations of women senior leaders in New Zealand secondary schools. Rhodes explains that many women still perceive that to be a successful leader they must take on masculine traits. Citing Gillian’s (1982:18) who claims that “women view relationships as a web rather than hierarchical and are impeded by their belief that a hierarchical position would make it difficult to maintain equitable relationships”. Moreover, Rhodes (2018: 231) further asserts that women in her study believed that “they would need to be a steel woman, more masculine than male leaders to succeed. The latter implies that if a woman does not want to take on masculine model she feels is required, she may choose to opt out of that career”.

2.5.11. Inclusive leadership

Slater, Gorosave, Silva, Torres, Romero and Antunez (2017)’s study which aimed in how women learned to become social justice leaders. The commitment of these directors to social justice came from early family experiences that gave them strength and core values. They met adversity in young adulthood which reinforced their commitment to inclusive leadership. They showed characteristics of inclusive leaders which are described as follow; in the first place the women were willing to confront injustices based on what they had experienced in their own lives. Secondly, they went to work in rural areas similar to where they grew up, and became politically active and earned the trust of parents. One of the participants, Cecilia, mentions that she persevered through domestic abuse and raised a child with down syndrome; and often have to confront the authority to address his needs. They also developed empathy for immigrants outside Spain and travelled to see other cultures. The women spoke on behalf of the community and put parental involvement at the centre of their work. Inclusiveness was at the centre of their social justice. Mrs. Donna, one of the participants challenged dominant ideologies and had strength to admit that she did not have all answers; and had to enter into partnership with parents to educate their children. Creating an educational community and a sense of belonging characterized the accomplishments of these women.
2.5.12. Democratic and participatory leadership

As far as women principals’ leadership styles are concerned, they were found to demonstrate a more democratic and participatory leadership style, which are closely aligned with core values of feminine paradigms such as nurturing, empathy and consciousness of others’ feelings which allow for tolerance of diversity and enhanced participants involvement and communication (Alexander, 2018; Ntaka, 2013).

2.5.13. Servant leadership

Cox (2015) maintains that Black women principals’ ethics of caring are socially and culturally derived; Black women principals simultaneously engage in interpersonal and institutional forms of caring that are intimately connected to issues of justice; and she contends that Black women principals are servant leaders who sacrifice themselves for educational justice. Participants reported that they used their strong interpersonal skills to establish trusting relationship within their schools by utilizing female traits such as being caring, intuitive and open to become more persuasive and successful at bringing students, teachers and parents around to their standpoint while still making them feel understood, valued and supported (Li, 2014).

2.5.14. Instructional leadership

According to Witten (2017), the instructional leadership involves the processes of teaching and learning, and that is the main reason schools exist. He maintains that this type of leadership has three instructional core which are; the teacher, learner and curriculum and it takes place within the classroom. Witten (2017: 28) asserts that “the effect of school leader on learning outcomes is less direct, because the school principal is not in position to teach all learners in his/her school” but the principal can ensure that the teaching and learning environment is conducive in the following manner: by effectively leading and managing the SMT; building the school capacity to support teaching and learning; nurturing a school culture to support teaching and learning; and building relationships and partnerships to enable community support for the school.

Naidoo and Perumal (2014), one of the participants in their study maintains that curriculum leadership entails that there are pace-setters and a management plan to monitor syllabus completion and workloads per teacher, as stipulated by the Department of education such as the Curriculum Management Model, a tool to monitor, track syllabus completion and school-based
assessments. The participant further explains that as a curriculum leader she ensures that educators are developed and are exposed to new methods; in this way she was able to control teacher absenteeism, and gives them a chance to lead by presenting various reports on curriculum in addition, participants confirmed that communication and consultation channels are open at all times. On the contrary, findings in Themane, Mabasa and Mathedimosa (2017) indicate the women principals in secondary school in rural parts of Limpopo Province struggled with curriculum issues.

Leadership strategies utilized by women principals in secondary school sustained and enhanced their management and leadership roles. Next, this study will review literature on other factors that contributed to women principals in their being successful secondary school principals.

2.6. Factors accounting for the success of women principals

In this session factors contributing to the success of women principals will be discussed. They include both internal and external factors such as being the only female principal in their district; developed passion towards their work; vast amount of experience gained through their teaching careers; interpersonal and social skills were important to being successful leaders; encouragement from external source such as from district and local departmental officials; influence and support from family members; husbands, mothers and extended family members; and the ability to be reflective and introspective.

2.6.1 Internal factors

2.6.1.1 Personal attributes

Personal attributes include, “The way women choose to verbalize a conscious effort not to allow challenges to distract them from being effective leaders; they adopted the saying, behind every successful woman is herself” (Bostock, 2014: 9).

2.6.1.2 Self-confidence and competence

Saris (2017) s’ study points out that the society is more open now and ready to adopt modern values. They know the difficulties and are fully aware of the barriers confronting Arab women seeking executive position. Furthermore, women in this study perceive themselves as equal to men and believe that they have knowledge, skills, and the ability to be a school principal. Some of the
participants in the study perceive themselves as models for other women, and believe that they have to train and develop the next generation of educated confident women.

Collins (2015) asserts that women principals of the turnaround schools display confidence in their leadership gained from the lived experience, which involves behaving in an ethical and courageous manner while making focused decisions for change. In addition, self-confidence and self-efficacy guided visualizations of successful events that shape the performance of women principals in turnaround schools.

2.6.1.3. Professionalism

Findings in Khumalo (2017) indicate that one of the participants revealed that she was aware that women principals were assessed in various ways by different stakeholders, such as how they conduct meetings with different stakeholders, and how respectful they are towards others. Therefore, building collegial relationship helped them meet some of the expectations from stakeholders. Participant were professional in conducting their meetings with different stakeholders; and they also ensure that all procedures are followed. Participant were strategic in handling disruptive colleagues during staff meeting by delegating them the responsibility to lead staff proceedings. This concurs with Themane, Mabasa and Mathedimosa (2017) when saying that women principals in secondary school had school policies in place which displayed a fair amount of professionalism.

2.6.1.4. Dedication and commitment

Women principals were also dedicated and committed to effecting teaching and learning, even though they were sometimes not fully support by some members of the SMT. They confirmed spending more time with learners to ensure that curriculum delivery is effective. Staff members were delegated to manage school activities such as prize giving ceremonies, timetabling and strategic planning. Team work was evident in their leadership style. Participants in Khumalo (2017)’s study maintain that upon their appointment as principals they managed to influence the School Governing Body about the importance of reviewing the school vision and mission. And this is how she said she stood her ground:

With or without educators boycotting some activities, due to my ability to quickly realize interest in some educators, and to delegate
and effectively organize activities, all the activities went ahead and were all successful.

2.6.1.5. Solving problems through the use of a dialogue in assessing knowledge

Women principals of the turnaround schools in America use problem solving strategies to tackle some the challenges they face in the day-to day management of the school. According to Collins (2015), turnaround schools are places where there have been repeated failures, and for that reason it is essential that the leader have a problem-solving rather than a blame orientation. Problem solving approach involves analytical and conceptual thinking, as well as the ability to explain things clearly and to see related and unrelated concepts. Women principals as problem-solvers to improve the situation in their schools engaged by employing young male teachers, and recruiting male volunteers to look after young black boys who are fatherless. Thus, helped to improve the academic performance of student; which indirectly boosted teacher morale.

Collins (2015: 102) citing (Belenky,1986) when saying that “connection not isolation, is the key part of assessing new knowledge. Women principals of turnaround schools confirmed that the willingness to ask and learn more from others has helped their leadership especially on how to deal with various challenges and stakeholders. They engaged in activities such as recording everything in their daily plans and activities, they asked questions why things are not working. The use dialogue to explore knowledge and one’s claim of knowledge, in a sense that a dialogue is lively discussion about making knowing and intelligent decisions based on experiences and information (Collins, 2015).

2.6.1.6. Good repetition, experience and hard work

Using Black Feminist Standpoint, Collins (2015: 95) contends that black women place more value on “lived experience than on theory or job title”. Women principals confirmed that their prior experience and reputation in school improvement demonstrated that they were capable of turning schools around from failure into success. They work persistently and show their competencies aligned with turnaround competencies in various ways such as developing collaborative environment linked to a common vision; esteeming people and their roles; using authority and distributing it to others, demonstrating confidence as the leader to deal with issues, and caring for children and families who live in poverty.
She (ibid) asserts that women principals were perceived highly effective because they do not apply for a senior post until they have significant experience of leading. Women were appointed because they are highly experienced, hardworking and knowledgeable about the lives of learners and the wider community, they were likely to be the extremely effective principals demanded by testing school circumstances. This concurs with Kattan, Heredero, Botella and Margalina (2016), when saying that experience and knowledge play an important role in women leadership success. They argue that as more experiences women leaders have had at work, the more ability they have to accelerate their leadership skills and grant their success (P.98).

Besides, Mochizuki (2014:85) upholds that the power of experience had helped in shaping the leadership of women. One participant in her study, asserts: “every time you get through something, you gain from it; may be the experience was not all that great, but as you reflect, you say; next time I can do better, I can do this.”

2.6.1.7. Lifelong learning

Khumalo (2017) ‘s study investigated the experiences of secondary school principals in leadership. Using a phenomenological approach, school principals were asked in an interview to describe the essence of effective leadership through their experiences as secondary school principal based on their self- perception and needs in continuous learning as a leader. She (2017: 123), contends that women principals fought against all odds to become principals, leaving their children in the care of their unsupportive in- laws in order to get the necessary qualifications for principalship. They build their agency, they managed to be principals, mothers and wives, though their husbands seemed not comfortable with them being principals.

2.6.1.8. Creativity

This means how women leaders maneuver through complex educational system and how they used various innovative ways to dealing with some challenging issues in their schools. Mochizuki (2014), highlights that a woman leader in her study redesigned the Student Council by getting rid of it and replaced it by House of Representatives, and it was through this body she was no longer called the principal but the president. In this way she able to delegate duties to different personalities. Moreover, another participant indicated that she renamed the department a “company” and then allocated a budget so that each company(department) would then appoint a
CEO who will manage the company’s fund. She elaborated that her responsibility was to outsource funds instead of managing, which made her life easier. The creativity of these women allowed them to persevere in a complex system that presented many challenges (Mochizuki, 2014:105).

Kattan, et al (2016) citing Caliper (2005), identified four specific characteristics that distinguish women leaders from men as follows:

- Women leaders are more persuasive than their male counterparts
- When feeling the sting of rejection, women leaders learn from adversity and carry on with an “I'll show you” attitude.
- Women leaders demonstrate an inclusive, team building leadership style of problem solving and decision making.
- Women leaders are more likely to ignore rules and take risks than men.

2.6.2 External factors

Besides a woman herself, there are other human resources that helped shape their leadership. These are influential people in their lives, support from various stakeholders in the school such as family members, teachers and mentors.

2.6.2.1. Influential people

There is a saying that goes like”, Behind every successful woman there is…meaning that sometimes success is attributed to those around women principals. Khumalo (2017) in her study, working against and working towards: narratives of South African women principals, asserts that potential women leaders must be able to identify the most influential person in their lives. The participants in the study indicated their mothers as people who influenced their career paths, in a sense that their mothers motivated and encouraged them to further their studies; which ultimately helped them attain their principalship positions.

In agreement with Khumalo (2017), Mochizuki (2014) explains that family was a factor that shaped women’s characters in a sense that besides their influential mother, women leaders in her study credited their fathers and brothers and that they learned aspects of strength and perseverance from. She(ibid:93) further contends that “the upbringing of women influenced their values and
beliefs, whether listening, watching or raised by influential people; the women grew up to be a product of their environment”.

2.6.2.2. Parental involvement

Parental involvement and support were also identified as another contributing factor to women principals’ successful leadership. Women principals in the study ensured that parents are presented with learners’ academic reports every quarter, and for this the principals were respected and supported. Teachers were motivated to work harder than before to produce quality results. Women principals, SGB and parents supported them in outsourcing teachers who can help in challenging subjects, organize and conduct enrichment classes and camps. Additionally, parents were involved in disciplining their children who continually misbehave in the school premises. A log book system also helped educators have records of misbehaving learners, those failing tests as well as those bunking lessons. The cooperation and support of the SGB and parents were reported by participants as a tool of reassurance that resistance from various stakeholders is felt at a lesser extent. (Khumalo, 2017; Ng’ambi, 2015)

2.6.2.3. Support from others

Mochizuki (2014:96) asserts, “Being around the people who understood the challenges and demands of being a woman leader was of great support in itself”. In addition, Rouleau- Caroll, (2014) explored skills and strategies the female participants implemented that attribute to their successful tenure as a secondary principal. Findings reveal that all participants had some kind of support, husbands, extended family, colleagues, mentors and network of friends. In addition, interpersonal or social skills were deemed important and identified as required leadership characteristics.

2. 7. How do women principals know they are successful?

“The way success is defined shapes our working lives, it affects how organisations perform, who progresses within them and how power is exercised” (Bostock, 2014:9). She (2014) argues that it is a brutal fact that fewer women than men are recognized as successful based on current standards and value judgement. “A meaningful definition of success that works for the organisations, whilst also being personally engaging for both genders, starts to change the game, rather tinkering around the edges” (P.10). Bostock argues that success means many different things to many different
people. “If the way of valuing and promoting others is too narrow, then we shall never see the systemic change necessary for real gender equity (P.10)”. A broader, richer definition of success makes it far more likely that diverse talent will be recognized. The talented people, both men and women can then progress through their organisations and shape them for the better along the way.

In agreement, Lumby (2015) argues that we need to question the provenance of the standards by which we analyse and judge. She argues that given the poor material conditions in many schools and communities both in South Africa and elsewhere, such goals seem insensitive to the realities of peoples’ lives. The women principals do not reflect such attitudes. They view exceptions to the usual trajectory of impoverished students as just that exceptions of which I concur with her.

Leadership theory internationally arguably colludes with state administrations in locating the responsibility for the fate of children with school leaders. The structural impact of multiple deprivation is minimized by the assumption that leadership can make difference. Attention is misdirected away from poverty, violence and gender inequality. State responsibility to address such evils is removed from centre stage (Lumby, 2015).

She(ibid) argues that the women principals in South Africa accommodate and nurture but do not assess themselves, nor are necessarily assessed by other as enacting leadership in admirable ways judged by normative leadership standards. The South African women principals adapting to the context focus on unheroic tasks that underpin even limited learning relating primarily from level 1 to 3 goals. Fletcher in Lumby (2015:15), asserts that “assessment of this unheroic tasks may judge it as limited, rather the outcome of the context. Rather, there is wide spread collusion in a turnaround fantasy about how much they can achieve and are held accountable for. Despite progress, inequalities related to poverty, gender and ethnicity persist in being the overriding realities for the schools for women who lead them, whatever the determined efforts of the principals”. Based on the above-mentioned assertion, this study will review literature on how women principals redefine success in their leadership and management roles.

2.7.1. Redefining success

Bostock (2014) interviewed 144 women from Cambridge University on various topics ranging from what success mean to them, what their day-to-day challenges are, achievements that matter most and why, gender and its effect on working life, admired qualities and role models and what
advice, insight and learning experience these women can give. The women who contributed to the study claim to several of the following adjectives: smart, eloquent, gutsy, powerful, influential, funny, insightful, pioneering, supportive, demanding and driven. They are also flawed, human and susceptible to imposter syndrome as the next person. But they are not women who shield away from being seen as successful because they felt “less than”. Instead, Bostock (2014:9) argues that “women leaders just didn’t seem to buy a more traditional interpretation of success forged over centuries in workplaces that were shaped by and for men. There was a general sense that ideas about success had not yet caught up with the societal changes that had brought far more women into the workplace. Bostock asserts that women in the study embraced success, but only when it was reframed to have more relevance and meaning to them. If success was seen to be primarily about status, remuneration, prizes, papers in esteemed journals it was not appealing for them”.

Personal success or acknowledgement was most valued when it came as a by-product or consequence of having something important done, or as a result of having contributed to others’ achievements. In addition, influence or power was often embraced, but only in so far as it enabled a person to instigate an important change or set up a new project. One of the participants maintains ‘there was a sense of vicarious pleasure in the success of others that often seemed to be more easily embraced solely for oneself”. Another participant asserts, “I’ve had to get over low expectations of what women could do and be” P.15. She indicates that she is very interested in mentoring women towards leadership positions and encourage them simply to have a go. The participant maintains that she has learned to define success in her own terms and to focus on her work where possible on areas she can make effective contributions. Furthermore, Rouleau-Caroll (2014) in her study entitled; “Attributes and characteristics that contributes to successful female leadership in secondary education”, summarized the characteristics of successful school leadership as follow; that participants had external support of some kind, they also considered their interpersonal or social skills, they were passionate about their work, had the ability to be reflective and introspective, and they were aware and had experienced discrimination in some form and each verbalized a conscious effort not to allow this to detour them from being effective.

2.7.2. Acting as agents

Bartling (2013) explored the leadership experiences of female principals of rural high schools in Midwestern state. The study sought to describe the leadership styles used by these principals to
make changes within their schools. Kotan (2010) explains an agent as someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be pronounced in terms of her own beliefs and purposes. Khumalo (2017) asserts that women principals as agents ensured effective teaching and learning in their school, and this was achieved by introducing quarterly accountability sessions whereby SMT members were required to meet with parents to account for the academic performance of learners as per department. This meant that as part of School Management Team they were pressured to exert more pressure on teachers to do their work effectively. “Redirecting their accountability served to some extent to undermine their resistance to us as women and as school leaders” (Khumalo, 2017:122). Furthermore, women principals worked against all odd to get what they valued as principals, namely good matric results which contributed to their schools classified as performing school as per Limpopo Province benchmarking above 60%. Women principal’s claims that they asserted their own agency as well as those of other teachers through a series of school policies to make teachers more serious about their work. In agreement, Li (2014) asserts women principals in her study also proved their competence in improving educational and academic results.

Zulu (2016) explored the strategies used by a woman principal to build a successful high school, South Africa. The study tells a story of a woman principal who battled social, patriarchal and institutional odds and still succeeded as a leader. Findings revealed that the woman relied on her womanly attributes of caring, empathy, knowing the community and involving parents. The woman cared and supported the community in which she served and through her courage, she was able to transform her school. She is a transformational leader who managed to change the school from being dysfunctional to being successful. Other strategies she employed to ensure the school succeeds are collaboration and staff development.

2.7.3. Providing safe environment

Matheri, Cheloti and Mulwa (2015) conducted a study on principals’ gender and management effectiveness in secondary schools in Kenya, using a quantitative research methodology. She explains an effective public secondary school as one with safe and positive learning environment, where students are able to achieve their personal goals and develop the skills to make contributions to the society in the future. The school will also have high discipline and good use of financial
resources. The study established that both the male and female principals were perceived as highly effective.

2.7.4. Moral responsibility

Palladino, Haar, Grady and Perry (2016) investigated how women superintendents have aspired to and sustained success in rural principalship. Findings in their study explain three characteristics of successful school superintendents which are people skills, moral responsibility and personal characteristics. According to Palladino et al. (2016:140) “a consistent trait researcher has identified is the superintendent’s ability to perfect people skills through which constitutes genuine care and interest. Moral responsibility included moral connotations such as being conscientious, trustworthy and a Christian”. Participants in this study also confirmed that school board members seek out their instructional leadership skills for successful leadership. Lastly, more emphasis was personal characteristics that qualified them for being hired in their positions. Findings reveal that a successful superintendent should be a moral person with exceptional skills and instructional traits. Palladino et al. (2016) asserts that participants in the study linked their behaviour with cognitive skills. The women superintendents examined each problem and understood how its resolution would require genuine relationships with community members, parents, teachers and principals. They reflected about and replicated their previous collaborative successes as classroom teachers and principals to their present superintendency challenges.

2.7.5. Reflective leaders

Among others skills noted by participants were clear communication, sense of humour, empathy, patience, listening, collaboration, nurturing, intuitiveness, and being inclusive. Moreover, participants in this study were passionate about their work. They enjoyed their work and were committed to the work and to kids; passion, commitment to the work, and impact on students seemed to be a general theme for these women in educational leadership. Each woman referred to her concern for children, this illustrated their reasoning for pursuing a career in educational leadership. The other finding from this study shows that being reflective was considered an important aspect of being an effective leader and practiced by participants. Lastly, each woman verbalized an awareness and encountering of gender bias in their journey of secondary leadership, however, they spoke about focusing or allowing these experiences to detour them.
Lumby (2015) conducted a study in South Africa of 54 women principals who had therefore been successful to a degree in career terms. She argues that they reacted differently to various discriminations. In response to gender discrimination, Lumby (2015:7) maintains that women principals use one or more strategies to position their identities in relation to the group to which they belong and to the other reference group. She (ibid) asserts that the strategies they used were also evident in other studies conducted which are “transforming the value of low-status identities, promoting the identity of women, and deflecting attention from stigmatized identities”.

2.8. Summary

This chapter examined the research into, and the literature from leadership and management challenges as experienced by women principals locally and internationally. Due to the context of the study, rural school leadership and its challenges were highlighted. Thirdly, the characteristics of both successful school leadership and successful school were discussed from available research such as Leithwood et al (1999), Gurr (2015). Research on women principals is growing in South Africa, however more focus is on the challenges faced by women principals, the leadership styles of women principals, and factors accounting for underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. Few studies focus on women secondary school principals especially in rural areas (Shezi, 2014; Khumalo, 2017; Ndebele, 2018; Lumby & Azaola, 2015; Naidoo & Perumal, 2014). Literature reviewed the small but growing research on how women principals know that they are successful in their leadership and management roles. It is the main objective of this study to add to contribute to the few studies of successful women principals in rural schools. In the next chapter, the study employed the CA as a lens to investigate how women principals are able to function as successfully in secondary rural schools. The Capability Approach of Sen, Nussbaum and other educational scholars such as Walker were used as the basis for this study to investigate how women principals in rural secondary schools develop capabilities that enable them to function both as successful managers and leaders.
CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Introduction
This chapter presents the Capability Approach (CA) as the theoretical lens through which rural women secondary principals’ experiences will be analysed and interpreted. It commences with the synopsis of the CA, and thereafter relates the historical development of CA. The third session of the chapter discusses the core concepts that explain CA; followed by the main arguments of CA, and then the criticism levelled against the CA, whereby the limitations as well as the strengths of CA will be presented. The last part of the chapter will present the relationship between CA and education, as well as the relationship between CA and women, as well as the reasons for choosing CA.

3.2. Understanding the capability approach
The Capability Approach (CA) is grounded in the ideals of justice human development and which aims to guarantee individuals the substantive freedoms and opportunities to choose and lead their lives in a dignified manner (Nussbaum, 2000a). It criticises purely resource-based approaches to equality and human development, arguing that a focus on access to resources, while important, does not take into account differences in real opportunities, abilities and freedoms, to enrich the choices they have, and the conversion of those resources into valuable functionings by diverse people (Sen, 1999).

Alkire (2003: 5) proclaims that CA is an “evaluative approach, which proposes that social arrangement should be primarily evaluated according to the extent of freedom people have to promote or achieve functionings they value” It has been used to assess different aspects of people’s well-being such as inequality, individual well-being, and poverty. Moreover, it has been related to human needs, human security, human right and development more broadly. CA claims that “in social evaluations and policy design, the focus should be on what people are able to do and be on the quality of their life, and on removing the obstacles in their lives so that they more freedom to live the kind of life which upon reflection they find valuable” (Alkire, 2003:6)
Sen (1999:30) asserts that “capability approach to a person’s advantage is concerned with evaluating it in terms of his or her actual ability to achieve various functioning as part of living. The corresponding approach to social advantage, takes the set of individual’s capabilities as constituting an indispensable and central part of the relevant informational base of such evaluation”. However, there has been some slight development in the Capability approach by Alkire, (2003: 6) proclaims that Martha Nussbaum “has employed CA as the basis for partial theory for social justice” Moreover, Nussbaum (2000a:11) claims “CA is fully universal, in a sense that the capabilities in question are important for each and every citizen, in each and every nation and each is to be treated as an end”. The CA is especially valuable because the focus on the individual’s opportunities to achieve valued functionings extends beyond calculations of people’s goods, income and other means as is more in other theories of social justice (Sen, 2005). CA also allows for the understanding of human development because it accounts for the understanding that income, happiness or resources are needed as means for other valued ends, and not their own sake” (Baxen, Nsubuga & Botha, 2013; 96).

3.3. Historical developments of capability approach

The capability approach was initially developed by Amartya Sen, an Indian economist in 1979, and has contributed a lot in economics and development studies. In an attempt to develop Sen’s concepts, The Human Development and Capability Association (HDCA) contends that “the basic objective of human development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy, and creative lives” (HDCA, 2005: np). The HDCA (2005) further used an example of a bicycle to explain how different concepts relate to one another (concepts of resource, functioning, capability and utility). According to Alkire (2005: 45), the capability approach contended that “utility can be distorted by personality or adaptive preferences; functionings can be enjoyed in prison, or a shifted environment; and a bicycle can be useless if you cannot balance, so capability represents the most accurate space in which to investigate and advance the various forms of human being”.

Sen’s theory of development as an expansion of capabilities is the starting point of the human development approach which defined human development as the process of enlarging a person’s functionings and capabilities (Chikunda & Chikunda, 2015:10). On the other hand, Martha Nussbaum, an American philosopher has made valuable contributions in expanding Sen (1999)’s
Capability Approach as” a normative model for assessing the quality of life and to theorise about social justice (Robeyns, 2005:97)”. Her version of the capability approach is however different from Sen’s, in a sense that she emphasises on the significance of several features impacting a person’s quality of life; hence the term “Capabilities Approach” (Nussbaum, 2011). She (ibid, 2011: 20) asserts, “we may continue to treat the approach as a single, relatively unified approach to a set of questions about both qualities of life and basic justice”.

Furthermore, Nussbaum (2011: 19) pronounced how Sen views all capabilities as valuable freedoms and therefore “does not employ a threshold or a specific list of capabilities, although it is clear that he thinks some capabilities (for example, health and education) have a particular centrality”. She (ibid, 2011:33), outlined 10 central capabilities where a minimum threshold is required which are as follow: “life, bodily health, bodily integrity, sense, imagination, and thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, other species, play, and political and material control over one’s environment”. The capabilities relevant to this study are:

1. life: being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one’s life is reduced as to be not worth living.
2. Bodily health: being able to have good life including reproductive health, to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.
3. Bodily integrity: being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure from violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.
4. Senses, imagination and thought: being able to use the senses to think, imagine and reason-and to do these things in a “truly human” way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no way limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training.
5. Emotions: being able to have attachments to things and people outside our selves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude and justified anger.
6. Practical reason: being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical planning about the planning of one’ life
7. Affiliation: being able to live with and toward others, to recognise and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction, and to be able to imagine the situation of another.

3.4. Key concepts of Capability Approach

The following concepts define the capability approach; functionings and capabilities, agency and freedom, conversion factors and means-ends distinction.

3.4.1. Functionings and capabilities

The difference between these two concepts is that a functioning is simply an achievement, whereas the ability to achieve is referred to as a capability (Robeyns, 2003). A capability is defined as the ability of a person to do things, and to choose for a way of life according to one’s personal values. According to Alkire (2005b:118) “capabilities are described by what people value and what they are really able to become and do”. In other words, capabilities are valuable opportunities accessible to people into functionings (Robeyns, 2005).

Moreover, functionings are outlined as “constitutive of a person’s being” (Alkire, 2005b:118), and Walker (2006: 165) maintains that “the list of functionings is endless, and might include doings and beings such as being well nourished, having shelter and access to clean water, being mobile, being well educated, having paid –work, being safe, being respected, taking part in discussions with your peers, and so on”. Therefore, functionings are more to do with who the person is, and what they value. Furthermore, these functionings are meant to be of great importance, in a sense that they should not harm or be utilized for evil goals. Alkire (2005b: 111) emphasises that functionings differ from the individual to individual, for example, two principals with the same competencies might have different achievement due to the choices they make. “The freedom to achieve well-being is to be understood in terms of people’s valuable capabilities, that is, their real opportunities to do and be what they have a reason to value (Robeyns, 2012: 1)”.

3.4.2. Agency and freedom

Agency refers to “what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he/she regard as important (Sen, 1985:203)”. An agent is “someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether
or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well (Sen, 1999:19)”. Furthermore, agency aspect is more concerned with what people can do to achieve well-being, in terms of policy and political changes as well as norms and social commitment. Besides, human beings can be agents of change through both individual action as well as collective action. (Crocker, 2008: 114).

Freedom is explained as “the real opportunity that we have to accomplish what we value”. The “good life” is somewhat a life of authentic choice, and not one in which the person is forced into a particular life, however, it might be in either respect(Sen, 1985:200). It is an authentic self-direction which focuses on the ability to shape one’s own destiny and a part of various communities. According to Sen (1985: 201) freedom has two aspects which are process and opportunity. The latter refers to the “ability to act on behalf of what matters(agency) such as institution, movement and democratic practice”; whereas the opportunity aspect applies to “the real opportunity to achieve valued functionings selected from among various good possibilities (Alkire, 2005a: 9).

3.4.3. Conversion factors

Robeyns (2016:398) defines a conversion factor as “the degree to which a person can transform a resource into a functioning”. According to the capability approach, agency and well-being, functionings and capabilities are the crucial features that play an important role in conversion of capabilities into functions (Robeyns, 2016: 399). Walker (2006:155) proclaims that there are many factors that can help a person to achieve functionings, such as personal, social, political and economic. In other words, conversion factors in the capability approach serve as an instrument to better understand why a person is able or unable to perform an activity. Additionally, the conversion factors in the capability approach are classified into three categories which are social, environmental and personal (Sen, 1999:5). Social factors include social norms, public policies, gender roles, societal structures, power relations, etc. Environmental factors are factors such as location, climate pollution, geography etc., whereas personal factors include factors like an individual’s intelligence, sex, internal motivation, physical conditions, reading skill, metabolism, etc. (Robeyns, 2005: 94). These conversion factors can be deemed low or high, depending on the degree an individual can change a resource into a functioning. In other words, if a person learns to do something, he or she would have a high conversion than the one who does not (Robeyns, 2016: 400).
3.4.4. The means-ends distinction

Robeyns (2016: 402) avers that capability approach proposes “the ends are better than the means, because people differ in their ability to convert means into valuable functionings or capabilities”. In this case, the means are the resources, while the ends represent the capabilities and functionings. The means – ends distinction proposes that we should see others as cable being and not as people lacking a without a specific skill. It also suggests that we evaluate others with their capabilities and functionings. Thus, consider what ends others have in mind than the means. In other words, what others do to improve conversion factors, rather than getting more means (Robeyns, 2000:13).

3.5. Main claims of Capability Approach

Firstly, the Capability Approach claims that “we should focus on people’s capabilities on what they are able to do and to be on the quality of life, and on removing the obstacles in their lives so that they have more freedom to live the kind of life that upon reflection, they have a reason to value (Sen,1999:5)”. Secondly, CA’s core principle is that when assessing the quality of life or asking what kind of policies will be more conducive to human development, we should look not to resources or preference satisfaction, but to what people are able to do and to be. Thus, the main focus should be on their capabilities. Thirdly, “the real opportunity that we have to accomplish what we value” (Alkire, 2005a: 05). The “good life” is somewhat a life of authentic choice, and not one in which the person is forced into a particular life, however, it might be in either respect. Lastly, we evaluate others we should also consider the degree an individual can change a resource into a functioning.

3.6. Capability Approach: women and education

Sen (1999) explores how women’s education can lower fertility rates, when women exercise their agency by adopting family planning methods and also having a say in the number of children to have. Sen also shows how educated women end up raising healthy children and encourages their children to also be educated. The conception of agency comes from acknowledging women as responsible people who have choices to act or not to act (P.3).

In his book, *Inequality Re-examined*, Sen (1999:9) defines agency freedom as “one’s freedom to bring about achievement one values, and one’s agency achievement as “the realization of goals one has reason to pursue”. In addition, Sen explains that one’s agency freedom can be critical to
achieve goals (agency achievement) which influences their well-being. Improving female education and employment chances can enhance women’s agency has helped in overcoming their challenges and improve their wellbeing.

Human development is explained as a “process of expanding human beings’ choices, and according to Sen (1999:10) the most important ones are, “being able to live to a healthy and long life, as well as becoming educated in order to live a good quality of life”. Additionally, education is seen as a capability which serves “for both intrinsic and instrumental reasons” (Robeyns, 2005:92). In other words, “having knowledge and the means to get the education gives a person an opportunity to flourish is argued to be a valuable capability (Robeyns, 2005:113). Apart from being intrinsically important, education has instrumental roles it can play in a sense that when a person is well-educated, he or she has the opportunity to expand on other capabilities (Robeyns, 2005:112).

This study aims to explore whether women secondary school principals are capable to achieve their functionings in the role of leading and managing the advancement in their lifetimes. The women principals’ capabilities, functionings, the well-being and agency aspects will be revealed as they narrate their stories in this study. The main focus is on how women principals practice and function as successful school principals. Thus, “what women are actually able to do (leadership and management roles) and be (successful principals). in other words, CA discourages us from judging women based on what they are unable to do and be, or how much women are able to function by changing the available resources in their environment in the way of resources. Instead, we should focus on what exactly women are capable of doing and becoming? (Nussbaum, 2000a: 203). According to Sen (1999: 10) “obstacles to the well-being of women are present in the world, and identifying these is important when considering social justice issues”. This study hopes to understand how women principals in secondary schools identify and eradicate the immoralities that demoralize their welfare.

Moreover, Sen (1999:191) upholds that “there are many and varied aspects of agency which include women’s earning power, economic role outside the family, literacy and education and property rights. On the other hand, while these aspects of the agency may appear diverse, they however, add force to women’s voice and agency through giving them independence and empowerment”. CA “is a universal approach, that acknowledges cross-cultural norms of justice,
equality and rights. Yet it is also sensitive to local particularity and to the circumstances that shape options, beliefs and perceptions of people” (Robeyns, 2012:18). This study acknowledges the distinctive nature of women secondary school principals, instead of homogenizing and generalizing study findings, therefore understanding and analyzing women’s narratives as a single account based on their capabilities, achievements, and what they are free to do.

Locating the evaluative space of quality of life in the Capability space requires that the women themselves be the subjects of development (Robeyns, 2000); and that development should be achieved through the “freedom agency of individuals” (Sen, 1999:4). Agency is an important outcome for women, since they all have too often been viewed “as passive recipients of many developmental interventions, and unjust backgrounds have limited their agency (Kabeer, 1999:434)”. Education plays an important role because it makes women’s agency more informed and skilled (Sen, 1999). This contributes to women’s confidence to speak up, to influence decision – making I the home, to leave abusive relationships or claim legal rights (Nussbaum, 2000b).

However, Jayaweera (1997) postulates that not all educated women will be able to exercise their agency, because exercising one’s agency depends on various factors; for example, the form of education one receives as well as education policies which may serve as hindrance to the development of other capabilities.

On the other hand, Nussbaum (2000a) contends that acquisition of education can help one to drop habituated preferences and adjusted aspirations in line with a sense of dignity and equality. Thus, an educated woman has a chance to go through the two stages of awareness, one being able to realize that they are in a bad situation, and secondly realizing that as human beings they have the right to a much better situation (Nussbaum, 2000a:140).

The role of both formal and informal education in the lives of women principals will be analysed using CA rather than focusing on other resources as evaluative tools. This study sought to explore rather than what women principals really want and what will make them live a life that they have a reason to value.

Walker (2006) claims that in making evaluations in education, it is important to note the relationship between the available resources and the ability of each person to convert those resources into capabilities. She argues that it would not be rational to make evaluations based on
men, able bodied people, or one racial group only, as this tends to mask the differences in terms of gender, race or disability. These factors have an impact on how one converts resources to valued beings and doings. Thus, evaluation must be based on the opportunities available to each individual to live a flourishing life (Wilson- Strydom & Walker, 2015).

Kamsler (2006:19) supports the importance of a list of capabilities saying that they have a role in “specifying, and thus making capabilities practically applicable and operational”. Nussbaum (2000a) also defends a list of capabilities for women due to the power differences in society. She argues that the most powerful (men) may choose capabilities on behalf of women (who are marginalized). A list of capabilities can be used as an evaluative tool for the promotion of social justice. According to Walker, McLean, Dison and Vaughan (2006), a list of capabilities has three main purposes in higher education; the first being to narrow own the concept of capabilities to the specific field of education; secondly, to promote education that foster capabilities and equality, and the last one being to test the usefulness of the application of CA to education which may apply to women principals in their tertiary education. Walker, McLean, Dison and Vaughan (2010; Walker, 2015), identified the professional capabilities for working in South African context focusing on making contribution to the reduction of poverty. They argue that professional can lead and change lives, thus have identified professional capabilities which are:

1. Informed vision: Being able to imagine alternative futures and improved social arrangements; understanding how profession functions and how structures shape individual lives.
2. Affiliation: Means care and respect for diverse people; understanding lives of the poor and vulnerable; developing relationships and rapport across social groups and status.
3. Resilience: Perseverance in difficult situations; fostering hope.
4. Social and collective struggles: Community empowerment approach; promoting human rights; identifying space from change reducing social injustices, listening to all voices and working in professional teams.
5. Emotional reflexivity: Empathy, or narrative imagination, compassion, personal growth, self-care.
6. Integrity: acting ethically, being responsible and accountable, striving to provide quality service.
7. Assurance and confidence: Expressing and asserting own professional priorities, contributing to policy, having confidence in one’s professional work

8. Knowledge: Having a firm, critical grounding in disciplinary, academic knowledge, problem-solving, open minded, creative and flexible

Education is seen as a capability (Nussbaum, 2000b; Sen, 1999) and this is because it is able to support an expand other capabilities in life. For example, it was through education that women participants in this study were able to take up principalship management posts and achieve a sense of satisfaction from that work. Even though it took them years to climb the leadership ladder, but by becoming school managers is an outcome achieved after many years of education and practice as an educator. This study focuses on what capabilities these women principals hold and how they developed these so that they are well prepared for principalship and function both as leaders and managers of secondary rural schools.

CA discourages us to point at numerical measures such as capita income which are inadequate measures to measure a person’s development, performance and achievement (Saito, 2003:19), but rather CA focuses of what people are able to do and to be. Thus, this study applies CA to understand how women principals develop and function as school managers.

3.7. Reasons for choosing capability approach

The Capability Approach is defined as a “broad normative framework for evaluation and assessment of individual well-being and social arrangements, the design of policies, and proposals about change in society (Robeyns, 2005: 97)”. The approach consists of functionings, agency, services and resources, the conversation factors and means-ends distinctions. This study sought to find out how women secondary principals become successful in their leadership and management roles, and CA was helpful for this study in the following ways: how women secondary principals use their abilities to create the choices to live the life they have reason to value, how they build agency, how they convert their capabilities into opportunities as well as the way they utilize available resources to accomplish their preferred results. Capability Approach serves as a normative frame for analysis of values and beliefs of women secondary principals, and level of capability and constraints they experience in enacting those values as school managers. CA discourages the use of stereotypes of gender, race, and social status in judging people, rather focuses on what people are able to do and to be.
Furthermore, the Capability approach will benefit this study because it focuses on evaluating human-wellbeing, but also on advancing it, and it also focuses on freedom and agency, which makes it an appropriate framework for analyzing the aspirations in this study. Lastly, the Capability Approach provides direction for linking individuals’ capabilities and functionings in empowerment into one’s evaluation of freedom (Walker & Mkwanazi, 2015). Thus, empowerment implies women’s’ ability to create life choices in areas from which they were previously restricted. This concurs with Robeyns (2000) when saying that CA is more concerned with what a person can do, and the kind of life she/he leads to eradicating inequalities. The framework will assist me understand how women principals persevere, make appropriate choices and pursue their lives as they wish without being pressurized. Finally, Robeyns (2000:11) claims that CA is applicable “across geographical spheres”; hence I believe that it will be feasible for this study to utilize CA within the bounds of Limpopo province.

I employed Nussbaum (2000a:79-81)’s central list of human capabilities to determine which capabilities are developed which enabled women secondary principals to function successfully in their management and leadership roles. The basic human capabilities are senses, imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason as well as affiliation. I also found the work of Walker et al (2010) more pertinent to this study because professional capabilities reflected how women as professionals in education have developed into capable top managers in the school. when comparing the Capability Approach especially the central human capabilities list, and Walker et al (2010) professional capabilities list with the successful school leadership, model of Gurr (2015) and Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999), I found common features which are relational and can be aligned to Successful school leadership.

3.8. Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the main claims capability approach of Sen (1999), Nussbaum (2000) as well as the professional capabilities of Walker et al (2010). I have also discussed how education can enable women towards achieving agency achievement, as well as discussing the main concepts of Capability Approach which was founded by Sen (1999), and then expanded by Nussbaum with a list of central human capabilities. In the next chapter, I discuss the methodology
which was used to understand how women principals function successfully in their leadership and management roles.
CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter examined the Capability Approach (CA), which is the lens through which the experiences of women secondary school principals were analysed and interpreted. CA argues that we should focus on people’s capabilities, “on what they are able to do and to be on the quality of life, and on removing the obstacles in their lives so that they have more freedom to live the kind of life that upon reflection, they have a reason to value (Sen, 1999, 75)”.

This chapter looks at the various aspects of methodology. I provide the rationale for methodological paradigms within which my research is rooted. The research procedure highlighting the sampling, participants and site selection are discussed in the third part of the chapter. I further discuss strategies and instruments that were used to gather data and how data collected was analysed. Lastly, I discussed how I guarantee trustworthiness; and state how considerations for ethical issues were observed in my study.

4.2. Methodological paradigms

Lynch (2014: 29) defines research methodology as a general term to cover whatever the researcher decides to include in the chapter which discusses methodological paradigms. This refers to “how the researcher position him/herself in relation to current and past discussions within which one’s methodology is located”. Morgan and Sklar (2015:70) define research paradigm as a “set of conceptual frameworks that explain a particular theoretical approach to research”. The paradigm that underpins this study is interpretivist.

4.2.1. Interpretivist paradigm

Interpretivist paradigm is defined as “the epistemological stance to qualitative research which includes phenomenology, or hermeneutics and symbolic interaction” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 276). The paradigm also relies “heavily on naturalistic methods of interviewing, observation and analysis of existing documents”. According to Niewenhuis (2007:47), “proponents of interpretivism argue that “human experience can only be understood from the viewpoint of people”. Thus, “reality is socially constructed”, and there are therefore “multiple realities”. It
stresses the interactive link between researcher and participants whereby the researcher can actually gain access to people’s common sense of thinking (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:33). Niewenhuis (2007: 48) emphasises that the researcher does not decide “what counts as knowledge, but what the participants view as knowledge emerging from the interactions between participants and the researcher”. The stories, experiences and voices of the participants are the medium through which researchers explore and understand reality (Niewenhuis, 2007). Thus, the researcher can only do this by speaking with a participant in order to understand what she or he is thinking of the context. Prominence is set on how the individual interprets the world around them. In this way, the reality is socially constructed which is one of the key principles of interpretivist paradigm (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

The study focused on how women secondary school principals despite their challenges still manage to become successful school managers in rural communities. As guided by (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017:34), the study draws from interpretivist paradigm based on the following assumptions: “admission that a social world cannot be understood from the standpoint of an individual, the belief that realities are multiple and socially constructed, the acceptance that there is inevitable interaction between researcher and participants, the belief that context is vital for knowledge and knowing, the need to understand the individual rather than the universal laws, and the belief that contextual factors need to be taken into consideration in any systemic pursuit of understanding”.

4.3. The research approach
4.3.1. Qualitative research

This study is rooted within the qualitative research method which adopted an interpretive paradigm. The word “qualitative” implies “processes and meanings that are not rigorously examined or measured” (Hammerberg, Kirkman & de Lancey, 2016:498). In this section, I discuss the reasons for choosing qualitative research approach. According to Hammerberg et al. (2016: 499), “qualitative methods are used to answer questions about experiences, meaning and perspective, most often from the standpoint of participants”. Patton (2002:38) asserts that qualitative research methods are used when one wants to find out what people know, think and feel by observing, interviewing and analysing documents. Moreover, these methods provided participants with the freedom to express themselves spontaneously about their life-world. In other
words, the study participants were given an opportunity to talk about how they become successful in their leadership roles, and what factors have aided them in being successful women principals in secondary schools, and how they know that they are successful. Creswell (2013:48) asserts, “we conduct qualitative research because a problem or issue needs to be explored. This exploration is needed in turn because of a need to study a group or population, identify variables that cannot be easily measured, or hear silenced voices”.

Furthermore, Clark and Braun (2013: 120) maintain that, “it is impossible for qualitative researchers to establish a meaningful understanding of human experience without taking into account the interplay of both inquirers and participants’ values and beliefs”. This means to understand women principals’ lived experiences, as I interacted freely with them to establish a profound understanding of their beliefs, norms and values. Therefore, a qualitative research method was best suited for my study, in a sense that the research method helped me characterise the participants’ perspectives and experiences, and generate the comprehensive description of processes, mechanisms or settings (Young & Hren, 2013).

In addition, Clark and Braun (2014) explain the fundamentals of qualitative research in the best way that fits into my study, which are to “establish meaning which captures some aspect of social or psychological life, putting and organizing a framework on the messiness of real – life”. In this study, women principals of rural secondary schools narrated their experiences which reflect the social and other aspects of their lives and which also enhance or hamper them in their leadership roles. For example, speaking about their childhood experiences, their challenges, successes and describing successful school leadership from their perspectives. By talking to the two women principals, I was in a position to gather different stories which could provide a different or similar answer. Women principals give meaning to their real-life situations, including asking questions like, “What is it to be a woman principal leading a school in a rural community?”. Clark and Braun (2013:4) also claim that, “telling one story among many that could be told about data does not mean that the story is fictional; the truth can be compelling without claiming to be absolute”.

The qualitative research method stresses the importance of context because data were produced within the contexts by participants who are located and come from specific contexts. In this study, data were collected from two women principals specifically leading secondary schools which are located in rural communities of Limpopo province in South Africa. “Unlike the quantitative
research method which remove bias, qualitative researchers recognize subjectivity of data they analyse and incorporate it in the analysis (Young & Hren, 2013: 14). Moreover, the qualitative research method is characterised by all sort of data such as production of data, selection of data and rich data. Data were produced from using semi-structured interviews women principals, and personal documents such as curricula vitae and narratives. Through interviews, narratives, curricula vitae, letter writing and journaling from women secondary school principals, and these provided the rich data which helped me answer my research questions.

4.3.2. Narrative inquiry

Qualitative narrative approach was helpful in my study because I intended to use the experiences of women secondary school principals to understand what makes them successful in their leadership, and how they know that they are successful. This method also allowed me to examine women principals’ stories through personal, social and historical contexts while identifying paramount themes in reference to their leadership experiences (Creswell, 2007).

McAlpine (2016:33) asserts that narrative research is a “daily event that provides practical means for a person to construct coherent plot about his or her life with a beginning, a center and an end; a past, present and future”. It is a way of integrating past experiences into meaningful learning, recognizing oneself and others and foreshadowing the future. Narratives have influence both on how the narrator sees herself and decides to act, as well as how other people see the narrator when told to others (McAlpine, 2016).

Furthermore, the narrative research, as a method, integrates “temporality, a social context, makes difficult events and an evaluative conclusion that together creates a coherent story” (McAlpine, 2016:34). I chose the narrative method because it is an interpretative approach which involves telling stories, telling how people feel about events and how actions make sense of events in their lives as agents of their lives and thus portraying stories about human experiences. Butler-Kisber (2010:195) adds that a narrative inquiry is “valued as the human enterprise to understand the deepest and most universal human experiences; and that beside revealing the experience as an inherent knowledge and giving the meaning out of the storied lives, narrative Inquiry transforms the hidden reality” In addition, Clandinin and Huber (2010:20) endorse that, “these lived stories and the talk of stories are one of the ways that fills our world with meaning and enlist one another’s assistance in building lives and communities”. 81
4.3.3. Phenomenology

“An important relationship exists between paradigm and methodology because methodological implications of paradigm choice permeate the research questions, participants’ selection, data collection instruments and collection procedure as well as data analysis (Kivunja & Kiyuni, 2017: 36).” Phenomenology, as a research design, seeks to comprehend, define and interpret human behaviour and meanings created from their experiences. Padilla-Diaz (2015:103) upholds that phenomenology originated from the Greek word “Epokhe”, which refers to “the suspension of suppression of judgement and positioning of the researcher with regard to the experiences of the studied phenomenon”. This means that as the researcher who has placed herself or himself within the qualitative research method, I must set all perceptions and judgements towards a particular topic in order to make an objective analysis of the information participants bring to the investigation. Padilla-Diaz (2015: 103) asserts, “all qualitative research has a phenomenological aspect to it, but the approach cannot be applied to all qualitative research”. All qualitative research describes the richness of content in human complexities on the systematic study of the problem. Qualitative research is also centred around the interpretation of informants, depending on the research problem studied.

Padilla-Diaz (2015) explains three types of phenomenology which are descriptive or hermeneutic, eidetic and ecological which I think perfectly fit within my study. In this study, women school principals described and interpreted their personal experiences in order to make meaning in their lives, this is what is referred to as descriptive or hermeneutic phenomenology. Furthermore, Padilla-Diaz (2015:103) maintains that, “eidetic phenomenology analyses the essence perceived by consciousness with regard to individual experience”, whereas “ecological phenomenology refers to the analysis of the oneself as a conscious entity, appeals to universal consciousness”. In addition, phenomenology claims “that human beings and the world interact with each other the whole time, one influencing the other; I am in the world and the world in me”.

4.4. Sampling and sampling techniques

4.4.1. Sampling

According to Lal, Suto and Ungar (2012:10), “the possibility of prescribing sample size within narrative inquiry is complicated by the fact that sample size is predicted on decisions; including the type of data to be collected, the number of contacts with the participants as well as the size of
data to be sampled for analysis”. They (ibid) argued that the actual number of participants used in a study does not necessarily translate to quality of findings. Hence, this study focused on two women principals and employed purposive sampling, which is defined as “the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses” (Etikan, Abubakar & Alkassim, 2015: 2). As the researcher, I decided what needs to be known and set out to find people who can and were willing to provide information by virtue of knowledge and or experience. Therefore, women secondary school principals were identified and selected as participants because they are proficient, and well–informed with phenomena of interest. Besides knowledge and experiences they possess, they are in a good position to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive and reflexive manner (Etikan et al., 2015). The target group for this study comprised two women secondary school principals. Lastly, the sample in education is determined by the size of the culture sharing group (Guetterman, 2015).

4.4.2. Participant selection

The study aimed to investigate narratively women secondary school principals in order to understand how they speak to the leadership challenges in South African secondary schools. Two African women leading secondary schools were selected. They are women principals in South African public schools, and have been in their leadership positions for at least five years and more. In addition, Floyd (2012) maintains that narrative research studies indicate that adequacy of sample size is not dependent upon the quantity of data acquired, but rather on the richness of such. The participants were therefore limited to two to gain the depth of individual response not generalizability across any racial groups, which may have been possible through a larger or more diverse sample.

Furthermore, women secondary school principals were selected on the basis that the schools they lead are academically successful as per the criteria and other components of success of the Department of Basic Education. Women leading secondary schools in Limpopo province are very few and the target group for this study is those women principals leading performing secondary schools as per the Limpopo Department of Education benchmarking. Statistics continue to indicate that there are more women principals in primary schools than in secondary schools (Motshekga, 2014). In addition, I believe that a small sample would make my study successful, manageable and meaningful.
Moreover, the target population for this study was women secondary school principals currently in the education system. I asked for the Limpopo Department of Education directory in which gender, names of secondary school principals and personal details are published, and then extended an invitation to the most potential participants to participate in my project. Furthermore, I made use of the directory for circuit managers, as the I was able to enquire about the women secondary school principals’ leadership records and history before sending invitations.

Lastly, I also checked with registered South African Teachers’ Unions for reference. The challenge I was facing was not to access women secondary school principal, but successful women principals in secondary schools. According to Vogt and Johnson (2011: 244) snowball sampling is “a technique used for finding the research subject, which includes a chain that begins by one subject giving the researcher the name of another subject”. This was useful when I was trying to find participants who met the study requirements. Women principals in secondary school were requested to help in identifying successful women principals. I also requested colleagues to help me identify the potential participants for the study.

4.4.3. Site selection

The study was conducted in South African rural secondary schools, Limpopo Province. Two school were selected based on the following criteria; they are secondary public schools in rural communities, classified as quintile one, and have experienced various levels of success in the advancing student achievement as well as stakeholders’ participation. I sought permission from the Research Ethics Committee of the University of South Africa, Limpopo Department of Education and secondary women principals. Letters requesting permission to carry out the project were sent to the participating districts and women principals. Follow-ups were done through various channels of communication.

4.5. Data collections

Data collection is the “compilation and interpretation of information from primary and secondary sources” (Etikan, Musa& Alkassim ,2016: 12). There are different instruments or methods that are used to collect data in qualitative narrative studies such as interviews, written documents and artefact (Lal, Suto & Ungar, 2012: 18). For this study, the primary type of data collection were in-depth interviews and narratives of participants in addition to written documents.
4.5.1. Interviews

Seidman (2006:9) asserts, “at the root of in-depth interviewing, is an interest in understanding the lived experiences of other people, and the meaning they make of that experience”. I used interviews because I was interested in women secondary school principals’ stories, and the only way to know of their stories is by talking to them”. Moreover, Rubin & Rubin, (2012: 3) contend, “Interviews provide researchers with rich and detailed data for understanding participants’ experiences, how they describe those experiences and how the make meaning of those experiences”.

This research employed semi-structured interviews to gather empirical data on the social world of individuals by inviting them to speak in-depth about their lives. “Semi-structured interviews are a combination of both structured and unstructured in such that a researcher designed a list of questions to be asked in interviews, but I also asked follow-up questions to get deeper detail or explanation from the participants on the basis of her/his response (Rubin & Rubin, 2012:3)”. Additionally, Creswell (2013) maintains that narratives researchers are interpreters, in a sense that they negotiate interactions. This assisted me to “reconstructs events that researchers have never experienced” Rubin & Rubin (2012:3). Moreover, Chase (2005) and Reissman (2008) maintains that narrative inquirers have described the use of a narrative interviewing technique wherein the focus is not only to actively listen to the stories in participants’ accounts, but also to actively engage in the telling of stories.

This study was intended to interview two women secondary principals in rural public schools, using semi-structured, face-to-face interviews for approximately 60 minutes long, and follow-ups depended on the previous interviews held. Open-ended questions were utilized because “they have the ability to evoke responses from participants that are meaningful and culturally relevant to the participants, unexpected by researcher, and rich in nature and exploratory” (McAlpine, 2016:40). In addition, Reissman (2005) asserts that researchers set open-ended questions in the language that suit both the researcher and participants. Thus, interview questions were set in English because the participants understand the language. This gave the participants opportunity to elaborate their stories in details; at the same time helping the researcher to make up follow up questions easily.
Furthermore, interview sessions were conducted in a quiet place to avoid disturbances, and to ensure that good recording quality is maintained. A quiet environment ensured confidentiality of participants, and convenient place for the participants was identified. Participants were interviewed individually during four separate interview sessions which focused on the following: personal stories, details of experience, reflection on the meaning and the last one for clarification and follow-up questions. Seidman (2006:17) maintains that “interviewing a participant more than once is optimal because it provides an opportunity to reflect upon the first interview session”; and secondly “to build upon and explore the participants’ responses in the second interview thereby providing richer and thicker descriptions”.

All interview appointments of four sessions were scheduled telephonically and then the agreed time schedule were sent to participants via email, so that the quality of study was not compromised. Establishing rapport with each participant helped me to acquire the desired information. During the interviews, I asked questions prepared from the interview schedule, and used verbal signals and body language to encourage participants to speak more.

I requested consent from participants to record all interviews, to capture words and their tone and pauses, which helped me listen to the interviews more often during the data analysis process. I listened attentively to the participants, and at the same time taking notes. Finally, I gave a briefing to the participants so that if they have additional information they wish to add or extract during the last session of the interviews they may do so.

4.5.2. Narrative interviews

One of the characteristics of narrative Inquiry is that it consists of a story as a tool to make invisible visible or opaque to transparent (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narratives are frequently collected through interviews from individuals or small groups (Butina, 2015). “Every whole story has a beginning, middle, and end, and in order for people to tell their story, they must reflect on their experiences” (Seidman, 2006:7). Creswell (2013: 190- 191) highlights some of the benefits of using the narrative approach in qualitative studies which are that “humans are natural storytellers and as such it is easy to elicit stories, gathering in-depth data is easily accomplished as narratives usually provide thick descriptions, and it is possible to gather in-depth meaning as participants usually reveal themselves in their stories”.

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Denzin (1989) maintains that stories are multifaceted, in that they are told in many different ways and come in different forms. He (ibid) explains some stories as narratives with a plot and a storyline, which exist independent of the storyteller and described these as “Personal experience narratives”. Unlike “self-stories” which involve critical life experiences; personal experience narratives focus more on shareable experience and are based mostly on anecdotal, every day, common place - experience. Based on the above-mentioned assertions, I expect to listen to stories that recount experiences in hope rather than life stories (P.120).

The study was about listening to the stories of women secondary school principals. I was mainly interested in asking women principals to recount stories about their experiences in their role and discuss how their experience helped them to become successful secondary school principals.

4.5.3. Documents analysis

Written documents can “influence how we see the world and its people, and how we act” (Liamputtong, 2013: 90). For this study, relevant documents requested from participants were curricula vitae, letter writing as well as journals; and these documents are very important because, they document what participants do in the world without being dependent on researchers. According to Bytheway (2012), diary-like methodologies are usually used in addition to other methods. In some instances, where participants are unable to submit their diaries, the researcher will use what has been gathered, because they serve as additional data collection method.

4.5.3.1. Letter writing

“In letters, we try to give an account of ourselves, make meaning of our experiences, an attempt to establish and maintain relationships among ourselves, our experiences, and the experiences of others” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000:106). The intention was to reveal the most inner thoughts of the participants that could be limited in a face-to-face interview. Thus, I requested the participants to write “unsent letter” to role models or mentors as other documents to allow them to write with honesty and depth, because the letters remain unsent. I used these unsent letters as field texts because in narrative inquiry letters may be used among the participants and researchers (Copper, 1991:99).
4.5.3.2. Reflective journal

Narrative inquirers recognize that any piece of autobiographical writing is “a particular reconstruction of an individual narrative, and there could be other reconstructions” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990:39). In addition, Copper (1991:104) postulates that through journal or diary writing “we are able to nurture ourselves as we simultaneously illuminate our lives and emotions”. As guided by the above-mentioned assertions, I requested participants in this study to keep a reflective journal for two weeks; recording their daily activities at work place. It is through journal writing those participants were able to tell a story and “it becomes a quest for understanding and integration, a bridging of the inner mindscape and outer landscape” (Copper,1991:99). Copper also emphasises that participants also “gain a new perspective of their experiences and to further transform the experiences themselves (P.99)”.

4.5.3.3. Curricula Vitae

I requested women principals to send me these documents because they provide biographical details, educational and professional background and work experiences of participants.

4.6. Data analysis

Data analysis emphasizes “the relationship between the individual and larger structures. (Bryman, 2012: 40)”. Initial analysis begins during the first interview or observation, while the researcher “identifies emerging insights or hunches, and this can direct the researcher to probe further or refine interview questions” (Butina, 2015: 192).

Butina (2015) maintains narrative analysis does not rely on fixed methods, but there are processes and guidelines published for analysis narratives. There are however, four approaches that a narrative analyst may use which are: narrative thematic analysis, structural, dialogic or performance and visual narrative analysis. I chose narrative thematic analysis because it places the content within the text as the main focus. Moreover, thematic data analysis is a method of analysis that is “driven by both the research questions and broader theoretical assumptions”, and “it is typically a recursive process, with movement back and forth between different phases” (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 86).

Narrative thematic analysis comprises five stages which are organisations and preparation of data, obtaining a general sense of information, coding process, establishing themes and categories, and
lastly interpretation of data. In the coming sessions I discuss how data were collected from interviews, narratives and documents, from the participant were analysed.

4.6.1. Organization and preparation of data

The first step in thematic data analysis is data reduction; a “form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organises data in such a way that final conclusion can be drawn and verified (Ibrahim, 2016:42)”. I prepared and organised the content of data using Microsoft word. In other words, preparing data to be analysed word by word, using tables to show any significant themes or patterns. I also read data a few times before and after coding at least twice. Huberman and Miles (1994) as cited by O’Connor and Gibson (2003: 65) assert, “Valid analysis is immensely aided by data display that focused enough to permit viewing of full data set in one location and are systematically arranged to answer the research question at hand “. This suggests that as a researcher, I had to go back to the interview schedule in order to organize and display data as per participant response based on specific research questions This stage began with transcribing audio tapes immediately after interviews, and making sure and check that transcripts are accurate and reflect the totality, including the pause, punctuation and non-verbal data (Huber & Miles,1994).

Lacey and Duff (2007:20) assert, “unless words are transcribed verbatim, the researcher is likely to bias the transcription by only including those sections that see relevant or interesting to them”. I transcribed verbatim so that I could be able to pick out emerging patterns and themes, which I noted them down in the transcript margin. Thereafter, I compiled two transcripts into one document for each participant, assigning participants pseudonyms, removing any participant identifiers as well as casual conversations.

4.6.2. Obtaining a general sense of the information

O’Connor and Gibson (2003:68) define data display as “organised, compressed assembly of information which aims to make sense of collected data”. I displayed data in various ways using tables or theme map which helped me to gain an in-depth understanding of the data. In this way, I was in a better role to make comparisons through different theme tables or maps. I did this by keeping a list of different responses and also checking the following as guided by O’Connor and Gibson (2003: 68 -78): firstly, “the words or phrases commonly used by participants.
secondly, finding meaning in language which is targeted at the words that participants use to express themselves. This assisted me in finding out underlying the implications of those expressions. Thirdly, watching out for the unexpected responses; meaning that I was able to notice immediately when participants deviated from expected responses. Lastly, listening to stories whereby many events, themes and meanings were generated from was also crucial”.

4.6.3. Coding Process

Glesne (2006: 48) defines coding as a “progressive process of sorting, defining, and sorting those scraps of collected data that are applicable to your research purpose”. In the first stage I re-read and highlighted prominent ideas and any recurring words”, within two sets of transcripts (Glesne, 2006: 48). Later in the second stage, I started by “highlighting the sentences for each participant that could be used to answer the research question, by taking excerpts from the participants” (Butina, 2015: 194). After that, I took the highlighted data and break it into smaller themes, thereby establishing the first level of themes. I used the same method, tabulating themes and saved them in a new word document. I did this because, this helped me prepare for identification and classification of the second level of themes. After, data reduction, I moved to the second stage which was data display. I then developed corresponding code, a shorthand designation to easily identify the recurring words or ideas for each passage and placed them in the margin of the transcripts” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003: 21). By noting all these, I was able to organize ideas or concepts into codes and categories which assisted me develop the master code list.

4.6.4. Establishing themes

O’Connor and Gibson (2003), explain that each of the response categories has, has one or more related themes that offer profound meaning to data. I then arranged different categories under one main theme, which at a later stage of analysis branched into sub-themes. Reading and re-reading of data helped me identify merging themes and patterns as they occurred. Furthermore, the lens chosen to analyse this study, Capabilities Approach, was taken into consideration, thus, Nussbaum’s human capabilities’ list as well as Walker et al (2010) which assisted me in coding words, themes, and sub-themes.
4.6.5. Interpretation of data

This stage involved “the studying of categories and their corresponding codes to determines if there are any overarching themes or theories” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003: 22). In this stage, I the drew data conclusions, whereby I generated meaning from data by following these steps: I looked for patterns or themes as well as statements that were similar or contrasting each. From this, I then developed categories of information that can work together; and at the same time identifying how interrelated they were. Lastly, I looked for “conceptual coherence and consistency”, which at the end I used to “explore the validity “of my findings, so that they can be adequate for the theoretical framework” of my study (Ibrahim, 2016: 44 – 47).

4.7. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is “the degree of confidence in data, interpretation and methods used to ensure the quality of a study and that establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research is an ethical issue, because poorly designed studies may lead to misinterpretation that risks harm to participants” Amankwaa (2016:16). Creswell (2014: 19) defines qualitative validity and reliability as” the steps a researcher takes in order to check for accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures”. Creswell (2013) mentions that there are no definite approaches for the narrative inquiry, but He (ibid) applauds that researcher utilize at least two approaches. Guba and Lincoln (2005) propose that researchers may include confirmability, credibility, dependability, transferability and authenticity. However, Guba and Lincoln (2005) contend that not all procedures should be used in each study.

To ensure the level of consistency in my study, I explained all procedures on how data were collected and analysed. This study employed different methods which check consistency of findings generated by different data collection methods. Interviews, document analysis, the substantial description of the interpretation process, verbatim quotations from data were provided, to support and illustrate the interpretation.

Furthermore, credibility of the study began with the use of member checking, sharing interviews scripts, and final draft report with research participants to make sure I was representing research participants and their ideas accurately. Transferability refers to the” extent which findings are useful to persons in other settings” and this also include “providing rich, thick description”
According to Meriam (2009:45), the *thick description* is defined as “a highly descriptive, detailed presentation of the setting and in particular, the findings of a study.” Rich, thick description was employed in this study giving the description of the content, the participants involved and activities of interests (Meriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used these when comparing data collected during data analysis. Furthermore, the theoretical framework identified, Capability Approach as lens for this study aided me to explore the commonality and dissonance in the experiences of women principals in the study. After each interview session I looked up for new and reoccurring themes.

4. 8. Ethical considerations

Johnson and Christensen (2014:134) define ethics as” principles and guidelines that help us uphold things we value”, and assert that “deception is morally wrong and should under no circumstances be used because it involves lying to research participants”. It is important to seek permission to conduct research gatekeepers for a variety of reasons, because it can involve both formal and informal processes.

Prior to my field work, I sought permission from the UNISA ethics committee. Ethical issues will be considered throughout the various research processes. When permission was granted, I then followed a formal process which included formal application to the Department of Education in Limpopo (LDOE). My application letters emphasized the benefits of my research, issues of anonymity, as well as confidentiality. Upon the LDOE approval of my application, I started to write formal letter to potential participants, fixed appointments based on participants’ availability. All this I did before entering the field (Harris, 2016).

During field work, I was granted permission to record all interviews and informed consent from all participants. Upon completion of interviews, I sent a formal thank you letters and a copy of the results. Lastly, I established and maintained the rapport with research sites and participants for future needs (Harris, 2016).

To ensure participants dignity and respect, I designed a consent form which explained fully the purpose and benefits of the research, what is expected from participants, that participation was voluntary and they may withdraw at any time. Participants’ identities and names of sites were kept
confidential and that there were no risks at all. Consent forms were sent to all participants well in advanced before the commencement of all interview sessions.

Participants in this study narrated their experiences whereby names of some people might be revealed. Thus, issues of anonymity and confidentiality were observed; I used pseudonyms for participant’s identities and names of sites in all field notes, transcripts and writing. All data are kept safe in a well secured password computer, and hard copies are locked in a safe cupboard at UNISA.

4.9. Summary

In this chapter I have detailed the rationale and motivation for choosing qualitative narrative inquiry study design, I have also described my choice for purposive sampling, selection of participants and site. Furthermore, I have also explained both the methods of data collection and data analysis. Issues of validity and reliability as well as ethical issues to be considered were explored. In the next chapter, I present narratives of two women principals to understand how they succeed in their leadership and management roles.
CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION OF NARRATIVES

5.1. Introduction

This narrative study was designed to understand two women secondary school principals’ success stories. The qualitative approach assisted me to listen to the voices of the two participants in this study. According to Clandinin and Roseik (2007:359), “understanding teaching techniques require that we pay attention to teachers both as individuals and as a group, listening to their voices and the stories they tell about their work lives”. In other words, as a researcher, I listened to both the personal and professional stories of women secondary school principals. Clandinin and Roseik (2007) assert that narrative inquiry normally starts by concentrating on the individual and her or his “personal understanding”. In the process of the understanding of the individual’s personal understanding of her or his story, it is crucial to place the individual in the chronology of the story, at the same time taking all contextual factors that impact the work (Clandinin & Roseik, 2007). In this chapter, I present stories of women secondary school principals by sorting out the “the structures of feelings or frame-based on the specific perception of the social life created by those who lived it” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000:15).

Two women principals of successful secondary schools were selected and interviewed. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews, and narrative texts such as letter writing and curricula vitae as well as journal entries. Interviews were transcribed and analysed using research sub-questions as headings. For protection of the participants, confidentiality and anonymity were observed, thus pseudonyms were used, namely, Norah and Violetta. Narratives of women principals are presented separately.

5.2. Violetta’s narrative

In the first section Violetta talks about her childhood memories of her family, as well as the community in which she grew up as a young girl. This is how she recalls her childhood.

5.2.1. Childhood years

I was born in 1969 in one of the villages around Tzaneen. So, I am 51 years of age, divorced with four kids. I am the third child and the first daughter in the family of four children, two boys and
two girls. My only brother passed away and this left us being three sisters. I also lost both parents in 1996. I grew up with many challenges…my strict parents. Growing up, I never had someone to look up to in my life because I was never serious about life and schooling. So, I had no role model in my life, or mentor throughout my career. The many challenges I had, I believe I brought them upon myself. I was born into a religious family, but I hated going to church, and only went there when my dad was home.

Both my parents were not educated. My dad worked in a steel company somewhere in Benoni, and my mother was a housewife. My father’s wages were not enough to cater for all our needs. So, my family received some financial support from my rich maternal grandfather until his death in 1976. The situation at home changed, and my mother started selling traditional beer and other items, such as fruits and scones, to augment my dad’s wages. Even though my parents were not educated, they worked very hard. They both tried to provide for their children by all means. However, as a young girl I grew up bitter towards my dad because he never bought us Christmas clothes or gifts. Instead, he would buy us textbooks, uniforms, school shoes, school bags and stationery for the new academic year. This made me sad because when other kids were in their new clothes, my siblings and I would be in our new school uniform.

I was worried about the way my dad treated us. I mean, we never had clothes or any items girls of my age in the village had. I had so many questions that I wanted to ask my dad, but I was scared of him. One day, I faced my dad, and asked him many questions. What surprised me was that my dad was not educated but he knew prescribed textbooks for each year. He would buy all the prescribed textbooks without us giving him the list. This was a big surprise for us all. Not only that, my dad would even know who of his children would pass or fail. When schools reopened all the textbooks he bought were the prescribed ones. Once I asked him how did he know. He said to me, “I buy Reader’s Digest magazine in September, and that’s where I find the list of prescribed textbooks for all grades”. When I asked him why he did not buy Christmas clothes and gifts, he told me, “I am more concerned about your education and future”. At that time, I did not understand him, until when I was old enough. I would forever be grateful to my dad, because he used his money for the right reasons, our education. It was for this reason that people in my village thought that my family was rich, because every year we would wear new school uniform with new textbooks, and stationery in new schoolbags. I think people calculated wrong, my family was not
rich...we had basics for school, and never went to school barefooted. My dad got retrenched and came back home when I was about to go to a tertiary institution (institution of higher learning).

My dad is my hero. He was not educated and had never attended any school, but he taught himself how to read and write. He worked and provided for us especially in matters of our education. When I graduated from a teachers’ college, he was very proud of me, hence I am proud of him too...He never gave up on me... yes, he was very disappointed with me for being naughty, but he supported me throughout. I still remember when I decided to go back to school to complete my matric... well he seemed not interested because he was still angry with me... I think part of him was... thinking ‘what is she up to now? … and he was afraid that I would misbehave, and then bring the family into shame again. [Ma’am, but you mentioned earlier on that your dad said he is done with you, now you say he supported you... in which way?]

Yes, I said that.... But when you are angry and disappointed you .... You express your feelings, honestly so... but he supported me because when I told him that I had passed matric, he paid for my registration ... and not only that, he also made sure that all my tuition fees were paid until I finished my studies. He bought me all the basics that I needed to start my life at teachers’ training college ... that was when I realised that he was supportive... he wanted me to be serious about my future. You know, my dad saved some money for our education...... when I started at institution, he was retrenched... he however managed to pay my tuition fees. I will forever be grateful for that ... I am a school principal today because of my dad... he could have refused to pay my tuition fees... so he was supportive.

My mom was a quiet person, but she remained my pillar of strength. She was always calm and would not show her emotions, sometimes her emotions would be reflected in the actions she took. She supported me throughout my two pregnancies, caring and nurturing me as well as showing me how to care for my two children. I felt sorry for her because my dad blamed her for my mistakes, saying that she was too lenient with me. I will always cherish my mom for taking care of them. My children related more easily to my mom than me. They even called her their mom and me their sister. They only realised that I was their mom when my mother passed on and it took them some time to adapt. They were used to be cared for by my mother, especially for the three years that I was at Teachers’ Training college. Otherwise I could not have not gone to college to pursue my studies. I will forever be grateful to her.
5.2.2. My community

I grew up in a big village where most of the people were very poor. Many people were not working, or, let me say that the majority of the people working then were males … our fathers and brothers who worked in cities for mining companies and factories. For example, my dad worked for a steel company somewhere in Benoni. Many families relied on farming for survival… and few had livestock. Most women remained at home as housewives and looked after their children while their husbands and sons worked far away from their families. Some men worked in the nearby towns. Some women worked on farms owned by white people, but they were not many because during those times women were expected to stay behind and continue with their cultural roles. So, my mother never worked. She took care of us, my siblings and I. It was so depressing to live in such conditions, it was not easy to go to town, with gravel roads and only buses operating according to a schedule. There has been so much development in the village, because now there are shopping centres with grocery stores, clothing shops, banks, etc. Even though houses are electrified and people have running water, there are still some who fetch wood and water. Life is much better now as compared to then, in my days; I only started going to town while at tertiary institution. There were no resources to do that, besides when my dad bought everything for us when he came home.

The village where I grew up in had only three schools, namely, a primary, higher primary and secondary… no preschool or crèche [day care centre]. Both primary and higher primary schools were located right in the heartland of the village, and both were near my home…. {pause},ooh!!!! but the secondary school was situated on the outskirt of the village, and during my time there was no scholar transport… so all secondary learners had to walk to school every day. I think it was due to the apartheid system that was in place at the time. [ getting emotional]; I guess the separate education for blacks and whites; how can a big village like that have only three school?

At that time, it was okay …. what do I say…? There was nothing our parents could do about it, I guess they did not complain about it; even if they did it would have not changed anything. I think the people in my community were just happy that their children were able to attend schools. The higher primary school though not far from the village, it was built between mountains and scary bushes. Parents were not comfortable with this…I mean this situation… to an extent that they had to come up with a plan to safeguard their children to and from school. So, our mothers had to
accompany their children to school in the morning, and also fetch them in the afternoon; they had a roaster for doing this.

Life was so difficult… I think most parents especially women, our mothers had to come with a plan to share this duty of escorting their children to and from school. Anyway, here I am today, a school principal of a big secondary … a successful school…I am a product of this village that I have just described. I am very proud of myself and then, [she laughs] … I can’t believe it, that I was raised in this kind of a village. What I saw was just my mother working tirelessly with no one to help her take care of her four children. So, I had to help her with some of the duties, sometimes cooking and doing laundry. When my mom goes to fetch some wood, it means that I had to cook and wash the dishes. If time allows, I will go to fetch some water especially on weekends. my dad was always away, and she was just on her own…. whether she was ill or not, she had to wake up very early in the morning every day and prepare us for school. I am very proud of my mom, when I think of her, I remember an idiom in my language which goes like; Mosadi o swara thipa ka bogaleng” meaning that a mother can do anything to protect her children even if it means risking her life.

Violetta speaks about herself in relation to her family, her mom, dad and siblings. She also talks about family challenges they went through; the activities she grew up doing. In the last paragraphs of the section, she talks more about the village in which she grew up and what she went through. However, her childhood will not be complete without her schooling years.

5.2.3. Primary, secondary and tertiary life

Violetta talks about her schooling years and experiences in this way:

Schooling was very difficult … as I said early on…… there were only three schools to accommodate all children in my community. Classrooms were not enough. Churches and community halls were used to accommodate some grades, and these were overcrowded…. The schools used rotational time-table … just like now during lockdown restrictions…. There is nothing we can do as school principals… there is not enough infrastructure and furniture as well.

I still remember while in higher primary, attending in a church… we were many and church furniture was not enough…. So, our teachers drew a schedule for groups that sit on chairs for one week, and then the next week they sit on the floor… winter or summer it was the same…. When
I went to high school it was better because furniture was enough for all learners. For form I and II (grades 8 and 9), I attended all classes at community hall... not community hall as such but royalty hall (chiefs’ kraal), a big hall where the chief and his assistants hold meeting every Wednesday, so we did not go to school because their meetings started at 9h00 am. The hall was too big, partitioned into four sections to accommodate four grade 8 classes. …heh... It was not easy to learn and concentrate…… [laughter] I mean if you are in class A, and in class B the teacher is shouting or making jokes while you are trying to concentrate. it was not easy to learn in those conditions… any way it was how things were done. Sometimes, when I think back, I just laugh…. sometimes some teachers took us out of the hall to avoid disturbances… especially if it was time for dictation test.

Primary school years were a nightmare for me, because I didn’t know what was going on but, in any way, I passed all my standards. I was playful…. didn’t care. I recall my standard 5(grade 7) math’s teacher who made us come to school earlier than expected. This teacher was hard working and always wanted his learners to pass well. One day he gave us a test to write and he was disappointed with our performance; and then decided to give us another test so that we can improve our marks. Unfortunately for me, I got 60% at first and then 64% in my second test, and he was not impressed with my effort. He was angry at me for not meeting his expectation. I did not understand why he was angry. It was a pass for me…. the teacher was supposed to be happy because all learners passed the test including me. When I became a teacher, I started to understand why my primary teacher was not impressed with our marks. I think my math’s teacher did not want us to settle for less, he always wanted more from us. At that time, I did not understand.

I was playful even in my secondary schooling to an extent that I had to repeat grade 10. I was surprised when my peers say they study because I didn’t know what that involves. So, I failed because I never studied my school work, and I wrote examinations without hardly studying anything. The situation was worsened by me falling pregnant which made things more complicated for me to study. I was surprised that I failed because I was not struggling., and the fact that I never failed my primary classes. I became serious after failing grade 10. This was an eye opener for me and now I was stuck with a baby to take care of. My boyfriend was also a learner in the same grade. My mom helped me take care of the child, and I went back to school. I was scared and became serious and then passed grade 11, and was promoted to grade 12. When doing grade 12
I fell pregnant again. I was disappointed, scared, and ashamed of myself…. In my mind I was thinking about my parents, especially my dad. This was the most difficult time for me and my family. Both my mom and sister were scared for me. I could read through their eyes. When my dad came back from work, I had to tell him the bad news. On spot, he slapped me and I fell far away from him, and he said to me, “I am tired of you not taking your school serious, pack your things, and go stay with your boyfriend’s family.” I thought that my dad was just angry and didn’t mean what he said. I was wrong because it was late in the evening he went straight to bed after we talked. In the morning I was woken up by my dad, chasing me out of the house, and that’s when I could see how serious my dad was. I left my home crying and went straight to my boyfriend’s family. Most people in the village were scared of my dad, they knew how strict he was. The situation at my boyfriend’ home was not nice, too stressful for me…. Because I felt so humiliated, and I mean staying with these people (my boyfriend’s family) made me think deeper about life. People were talking badly about me, and everyone laughing at me and my family. With no one to share my problems, I felt so bad and frustrated.

Yaah, I stayed at my boyfriend’s house for a week with no one from my family to rescue me from this difficult situation except my maternal grandmother. My grandmother was the only person not scared of my dad. Immediately after receiving the news that her granddaughter has being chased out of her home, and she is staying at her boyfriend’s house. She was furious and went straight to my home and try to solve my case. My dad was still angry and he did not listen to my grandmother, and that means I could not come back home. When my dad went back to work, my grandmother took me back home. My mother was worried instead of being happy for me, that at least I am home. I think she was scared of my dad, because she knew how angry her husband (my dad) will react when he finds out that her pregnant daughter is back home. I didn’t not understand why my mom kept on saying that she cannot betray her husband, but my grandmother insisted that I stay home because that’s where I belonged. I was just happy that I was finally home. I was angry at my mom for not rescuing me when my dad chased me out of the house.

I gave birth to my second child, and life was even more difficult because my dad told me that I must look after my kids. My dad made it clear he is done with me…I am stuck at home with two kids…. jooh... I had to repeat the grade12 because I dropped out while pregnant. I had many challenges, and was under too much pressure because my little sister passed grade 11, and now
doing grade 12. My sister was always smarter than me, so doing the same grade with my sister was going to be a nightmare for me. I wanted to go back to school but I knew that my dad will not pay school fees for me…. My dad said; he is done with me. I only discussed this with my sister, because I didn’t want to bother my mother. My sister talked to her boyfriend who promised to pay school fees for me. All I needed was just school fees, I had all my previous textbooks and my school uniform was still okay. When the deal was sealed, then the next day I went back to school, when I came back in the afternoon my mom asked me why did I go to school without telling her? I told my mom that there is nothing for me at home, so I have decided to go to back to school and finish my grade 12.

When my mother learned that someone has offered to pay for my school fees, she immediately, gave me the money to pay school fees. I think my mom was not happy with the arrangement I made with my sister’s boyfriend, or maybe she was embarrassed…. I don’t know maybe if it was a relative, she could have accepted that. Every time I think of my two kids, I always felt some butterflies in my stomach…… [pause] …. I think was so troubled, and will always say to myself; I don’t want my children to suffer., I want them to have everything they want….at least… and there was part of me that keeps saying that; I ought to do something extra to raise my kids well. Something that dominated my mind was; you can do better than your parents! My parents were not educated, but they provided for us… I kept telling myself that my dad took care of his children with a wage from a factory, so if I become a professional, I can be in a better position to provide for my kids and help my parents.

I never struggled with career choice, when I got pregnant with my second child, I was overwhelmed; how am I going to take care of my kids? I was very scarred… I don’t want to lie. There were only three careers I know; teaching, policing and nursing. Teachers at my school were only talking about those three. I fell in love with teaching… [laughter] for various reasons. One being that teachers ‘college was not far away from home, so I will come home to see my kids at least once a month depending on my schedule…… that’s’ when I started feeling the pressure of becoming a teenage mother and I was terrified. A teaching diploma was only three years to complete, so I can finish and then start working as soon as possible. I also thought that by becoming a teacher I will also be appreciating the good work my teachers did on me and others. This also motivated me to become a teacher…. Making a difference in the lives of the children
especially in rural areas. Teachers played a huge role in my life even though I cannot single out. I wanted to become a secondary school teacher, and teach mathematics which I was good at. Maths teachers at that time were in high demand. I completed teacher’s diploma in three years, and I became a teacher... I was never recruited into teaching.

When results were announced, I found out that my sister and I both passed matric with exemption. This was the happiest day of my life. At that time, I was matured and always thinking about my children and how am I going to provide for them. Unfortunately, for me and my sister, my dad was retrenched from work, he was home. My dad was happy for us, but he told us that there is no money for us to further our studies. I was more serious with my life, that despite what my dad told us, I decided to go, and seek admission at Teachers’ college. I felt that I had wasted more time with my pregnancies, and now I wanted to do something important with my life. I got admitted at the college, but did not have registration fee. At the end of the week, I went back home to tell my parents that I have been admitted at a college. Only to find that my sister updated my parents with everything I have been telling her. I was surprised to find that my parents bought everything I would need for my college education, and also provided for registration fee. My parents bought me everything, new bedding, clothes, toiletry and a trunk to put my belongings. I was so happy; they also gave me registration fee and pocket money... joo... I was so excited. I couldn’t believe this; I was happy that something positive was happening in my life. I think that when my dad said that he does not have money to take us to tertiary, he was just testing us, he actually had saved enough for our tertiary education.

When I asked my mother, who bought those things and where did they get the money from. My mother told me that everything was done by my dad. I was surprised because my dad said he did not have money to take us to tertiary. While still surprised, my dad came into my room and said to me, I did all these because I can see that you are now serious with your life and education.

I left for teachers’ training college, and I completed the diploma which was scheduled for three years. I was focused and never experienced any serious challenges except that sometimes I had to go home to check on my family and two kids. My tertiary life went smooth and I passed well. Towards the end of my final year, I was worried whether or not I will get employed immediately after completing my qualification. I did my teaching practice at a local school in my village, while there I asked the principal if I could be employed there. The principal indicated that there are no
vacancies at the moment but I must come back to check when schools closed for Spring. I went back to check if there was any chance that I could be employed there. Unfortunately, there were no vacancies, but the principal referred me to another school in same village. I was so excited that I got appointed near my home; I didn’t have to travel for long distance to get to work or stay away from my kids. I think I was lucky to get employed immediately, when schools reopen at the beginning of the year I started working.

These are schooling years of Violetta from primary, secondary to tertiary. Her schooling years were not easy, but she manages to pass her matric and choose a career for herself.

5.2.4. Career journey

In the next sessions Violetta narrates about her work-life as a teacher and marriage life. This is what she says:

I started working at 24 years of age, and then got married at 25 years to my high school boyfriend; who never cared for me and kids. I was aware that my father hated my boyfriend, but went ahead to marry him against his wish and blessings. We stayed together with my in-laws, and encountered so many challenges as a couple. My boyfriend ‘s family started to complain when I sometimes help my family financially. I was surprise because my boyfriend was working and supporting his family too. I did not understand what was wrong when I support mine? I was so annoyed that I was being prevented from helping my own family… how possible was it… It didn’t make sense to me… Then we decided to find a place of our own, and moved out. At first, I thought some family members were creating problems for our marriage, and later on discovered that my husband was not really serious about our marriage. He was working, but there was no change and things remained the same. I thought things would be better and different, but I was wrong, he kept on supporting his family with our money (his salary), saying that I am earning better, I can take care of everything with my salary. My marriage did not last long, we divorced years later. When I told my dad, I could see that he didn’t want to say to me; I told you not to get married to that man. I did not listen to my dad because I wanted to make my own decisions, and not be controlled … one thing I know about my dad. (hmmm). he likes to be in charge. All I wanted from my husband was to raise our children together. As time went by, I realized that I was actually alone in raising our kids, and then decided to quit. I guess we were not meant for each other.
When I started working as a teacher already, I had two kids to support. I worked for three months before my salary could be processed. When I got paid, I took all my three cheques and presented them to my parents. My dad said to me; “I am very proud of you my girl, this is your money, you have worked very hard for it. Take care of yourself and your children”. I was surprised that my parents did not demand even a cent from me. My mother never said anything to me. Well, I just felt it right to do something big for them. I decided to buy them some new furniture for lounge and dining room. I was also happy to help the family whenever they needed financial assistance. I realized while at tertiary that my dad had saved enough for his family and especially for our education. While at college I never lack anything, as compared to other students until I finished my diploma. When I started working my dad provided for me those three months that I was not paid for. I was always amazed by my father, how he managed to take care of us, my two kids and still continues to do that even after retrenchment. I learned a lot from my dad, even though not educated he was a wise man. I will forever cherish my dad for the best lesson taught, especially about saving money for the future.

I started working as a teacher at a secondary school in the same village where I grew up. I started off not being serious, I was very lazy, and this was well observed and well known by my colleagues and seniors. I taught grade 8 and 9 maths. I was never given higher grades because I was lazy and did not commit fully to my work. I was late for classes, sometimes late to work and always the last person to submit marks. There were only three maths teachers including in myself in the maths department. The other two teachers shared grade 10 to 12 classes. My two colleagues were annoyed by my unprofessional behaviour and sometimes complained that they are tired of receiving learners from me (grade 9) who were not well prepared. Many times, they had to remind me to go to class and attend my learners. I was also told that my learners were struggling in grade 10 to solve simple sums because they lack basic skill and knowledge. They further indicated to me that they are tired of me not doing my work. I think … they were right because I intentionally taught only sections, I considered important when setting the examination paper. It was such a mess and no one wanted to work with me, because my results were very poor. I spent five years teaching maths in the lower grades, and this made me unhappy. As time went by, I started feeling embarrassed and felt that I was not recognized as an important teacher, and my colleagues looked down on me. I really wanted to teach maths in higher grades, but as things where I could not because I was so lazy, and not committed to my work …. I was not proud of myself…
I then decided to further my studies in mathematics for FET at University of Johannesburg in 2004. When I got there, I told them I want to do maths for higher grades, and then I got enrolled for Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) in FET maths and computer studies. The qualification was scheduled for a year, then in 2005 I came back to work again in the same school. I came back a changed person, because I was tired of people complaining about me. I started working hard, I was no longer bunking my classes, and was punctual for all my lessons and activities. I further registered for Bachelor of Education in leadership and management with the university of South Africa. I became more committed to my work. By then I had four children who were growing up so fast and have started to demand, yah… my salary was no longer enough to cater for family demands financially. I wanted a promotion…. I realized that no one will promote a lazy person like me, no one. I came back with a new attitude, a positive one.

I was lucky enough, because promotional posts for maths (HOD) were advertised in June 2005, I applied and other colleagues also applied, but I was the only who was shortlisted. Some teachers complained that I do not qualify to be shortlisted because according to them I did not have the experience of teaching maths in higher classes. So, they lodged a formal complaint to SADTU and a dispute was filed, and finally the teachers who were not shortlisted, got in. The three of us; me and my other two male colleagues were invited for interviews. I never attended the interviews before, but I knew the dimensions for HOD interviews. The mood in the school was very disturbing for me, I could feel that colleagues were not happy even after the other maths teachers were shortlisted. I think they wanted me out… I could not tell exactly what was going on. A day before the interviews, I overheard some of my colleagues talking about me, saying that; I am wasting my time and energy because I will not be appointed. Instead of being scared, I felt more confident about myself and this made me prepare well for the interviews.

Due to SADTU dispute, the District Senior Manager (DSM) sent two officials to observe the interviews, and the senior manager even requested the SGB chairperson to constitute a new interview panel. On the day of the interviews, when I left the interview room, I felt happy… I knew that I did well, I responded well to all questions asked, so it was up to interview panel and the department to decide. I competed against my colleagues, and could see by their behaviour that they were confident that at least one of them would be appointed. I could see that they were
undermining me, even in the staffroom they would say it’s between me and you. Actually saying, the post was meant for one of them, and not me.

A month later, I received an appointment letter, and finally the battle for an HOD post was over. I was very happy; I got the post against all odds. I worked harder as an HOD as well as teaching grade 12 maths, I drafted departmental policies, was punctual and continue to do well in my duties and other delegated responsibilities. I worked there for two years, my learners passing well and I also started working in neighboring schools on weekends, helping maths teachers and their learners. Grade twelve maths results in the circuit improved, I became well known and received an award for best maths teacher in the district. At the end I got the recognition I longed for. When promotional posts for deputy- principals were advertised, I applied, and finally appointed as deputy- principal in another school. I left the school with a good mark. I was very proud of myself.

Unfortunately, I was appointed a deputy- principal in a school far away from my home and children, and could only see them on weekends. On arrival at my new school as deputy- principal, I was warmly welcomed by the principal, and then later introduced to other SMT members, and the staff. I joined the school towards the end of the second term; teachers were busy with reports and schedules. I only worked for five days and then schools closed for winter vacation. On the day of closing, the principal called me into his office and told me that when schools reopen for third term he won’t be coming back, he is retiring. I thought he was just trying to scare me. Indeed, when schools reopen, he did not report to work. On the same day, the circuit manager arrived at school, came into my office and requested to see the principal. I told him; the principal is not at work. Then, the circuit manager told me that she was talking to the principal (referring to me), the principal is not coming back. My mind was only ready to learn from the principal in preparation for becoming a school principal one day, I never thought it would be this soon. I told myself that I successfully ran the Maths and Science department in my previous school which was dominated by male colleagues. So, I accepted the responsibilities and the duties of acting principal. Things were difficult at first, but I used the knowledge I acquired in leadership and management course to run the school. I did not experience serious challenges with teachers and learners except with School Governing Body members. My relationship with the SGB members was not pleasing at all. I was actually hated for not taking in their demands, our relationship went sour when I discovered that SGB chairperson was embezzling with school funds. At the end of the year the SGB would
use the norms and standard funds to throw a party for teachers. As the acting principal, I tried to advise them but the SGB chairperson couldn’t listen to me. I finally reported the SGB chairperson to the circuit manager. I think this was the main cause of the conflict between me and the SGB, especially the chairperson. Some SGB members started threatening me, and telling me to leave their school. Indeed, when principalship post were advertised the SGB chairperson told me not to bother applying for the post I was acting on school, because their school needs a male principal. I was not scared by him, instead I did the opposite. I was aware of the situation, so I applied to many schools including same school I have been acting as principal. I was shortlisted at four schools but get appointed in another school. I was not surprised by the outcomes; I was appointed the school principal in another school…I was happy to finally leave the school because my life was in danger. I left the school and bought myself a new home in nearby suburbs. I was happy without this school and was excited to start my new life in another as a principal and not acting principal. (laughter).

Violetta narrated her story from being a teacher, to an HOD, then deputy until her final appointment as school principal. She also highlights some of the difficulties she went through in her career life.

5.2.5. Leadership philosophy

In this section Violetta narrates her professional life, as a school principal. She tells about factors that makes her a successful principal. This is how she succeeds:

5.2.5.1. Knowledge of departmental legislations and policies

When I join the new school, I had to deal with Redeployment and Replacement (R&R) process which was incomplete. The R & R process is guided by post establishment; which is calculated in terms of learners per subject and the number of educators in the school. It happens that sometimes leaner enrolment decline due to a variety of reasons. R & R is a process of verifying those educators in a school still meet the curricular needs of the school, and if teachers are declared in excess to the post establishment, the department of education places them in other schools where their qualifications are needed. I used the departmental policy so that everyone would be satisfied, I was to be transparent and honest. I also followed the Limpopo Department of Education (LDOE) management plan, followed all stages as stipulated. Finally, seven educators were declared in
excess to the school’s post establishment and were redeployed. I was surprised that no one asked questions. I explained all details to make sure the process was a success. When I joined the school, I was the 35th educator, now the school was left with 28 educators. I finally submitted the list of educators in excess to the school establishment to the circuit manager. In the process I was worried that if I failed to do R & R, it means I am failing. I wanted to start on positive note…. That was my first achievement, and I was proud of myself. The circuit manager was impressed with my first submission. He asked me how I managed to complete, my answer was simple; I was transparent, honest and fair when dealing the whole process, that is why there were no disputes from Teachers’ union representatives.

As the school principal you must know departmental policies and regulations pertaining to leadership and management of school because you cannot lead a school with your imagination, you will fail. I always familiarize myself with legislative and policy framework in education, and where I do not understand I ask for clarity. Whenever we hold staff meeting, I refer them to the relevant departmental policy and legislation. I always say to my colleagues that whatever I am going to say or do here is not out of my imagination but guided by policy. My colleagues now know that before they could challenge me on decisions I made, they must refer me to policy and not their opinions. I am very happy now things are unfolding smoothly, and most stakeholders are on board. To an extent, staff members are slowly getting used to quoting Acts, resolutions and regulation, and some of them have thanked me because they now know better.

5.2.5.2. Appointment of competent teachers

When the school is due to appoint new teachers, I always advise the School Governing Body as well as the interview committee to recommend the best and competent candidates; and not recommend their relatives and friends. Immediately when LDOE has approved, when new teachers report to work, I call them into my office and state the school’s expectation to them. I orientate the teacher around the school, showing them school building and introduces them to the entire staff, especially to the relevant head of department. I recall when the school appointed an HOD for agriculture sciences, the teacher was externally appointed, he was so happy to join the school. One day he said to me; thank you mam for appointing me, I don’t know what I can do for you. All I said to him was; I want excellent results, and nothing from you. You were appointed because you were competent and had a good reputation of producing good results…. Work hard and keep up
the standard, that’s all I want from you. New teachers start to work knowing what is expected from them and this help improve the learner performance.

5.2.5.3. SMT members lead by example

When I join this school, it was declared dysfunctional due to poor matric results. To make it functional again was difficult and it took me years to actually see good results. In a school like this, the principal must lead by example. The school has enough maths teachers, but I volunteered to teach some maths lessons in grade 10 and 12. I have ten periods per week to teach and did all this to show other teachers that I am also a competent teacher, and can do what other teachers are doing besides my other administrative duties. When the HOD calls a meeting, I attend and during the meeting I am a teacher not a school principal. I listened to my senior and do as requested. This behaviour has helped me change how some insubordinate teachers think about their seniors. I perform all teaching duties and responsibilities such as teaching, setting tests for my classes, record marks and submit to my senior. I am always the first one to submit and meet deadlines, where possible I assist my colleagues with other duties.

I also encourage the School Management Team (SMT) members to also lead by example, because they are actually the engine of the school. When I arrived in the school most SMT members had the tendency of missing their lessons claiming that they have administrative duties to perform. I appreciated what they were doing, but I told them administrative duties such as moderation of Continues Assessment (CASS) file, tests, marks and class visit must be done when they are free. I told them to honour their periods and lead by example. The SMT complained about too much work they have and deadlines to meet. I told them that they cannot compromise teaching learners to perform other duties. If they cannot finish their other duties, they must take them home…. Teaching time is meant for teaching learners and not for moderation of tests and CASS files while learners are unattended. I told them, this cannot be right; what about teachers, should they be marking tests and compiling marks when they are supposed to be teaching learners… please rectify this… this cannot continue. I was not happy that SMT members were not leading by example.

5.2.5.4. Managing the curriculum

Teachers hated to be reminded of their duties…. This had led to my colleagues calling me an autocrat, because time and again I check on them, and how they carry on with their duties.
(laughter) that’s what I have been hired to do…. for example, sometimes I will be in my office after break, and be alerted by learners’ noise that they are not attended to. So, I go and check on them, it’s my job. When learners continue to be noisy for more than ten minutes, surely there is no effective teaching and learning taking place, so I have to check and yes, I asked learners what period is it? When they tell me, I go straight to the staff room, check the main timetable and request all teachers who are still there to go and attend learners. I will be doing my duty …. Even though they call me an autocrat, but I engage them in all decision making of the school. Yes, sometimes I take decisions and tell them later, due to departmental pressure and some limited time. I do not negotiate with a teacher to carry out her/his assigned duties. Teachers know what is expected from and if they forget I am here to remind them (pause for a moment) I am the accounting officer here; I account to all stakeholders here. When things get out of order, everyone looks at me…. all I am doing is taking precautionary measures.

I do not compromise when it comes to curriculum delivery, because this is the core business of schools, to teach learners and make sure that learners do learn. I do class visits and don’t spend most of my day in the office. I wander around as a school manager. I am a leader who want to see for myself, I don’t rely on people telling me so and so came late today, yesterday etc. Yes, it is true that I can’t be all over the place and witness everything that is taking place inside the school. I hate the office... I prefer to be out there, listen to teachers teaching, and sometimes help with invigilation and other duties and also sit in subject or departmental meetings. I rotate in my visitation, though at first some staff members were not comfortable with the practice… is what I do to keep the engine running. They have learned to get out of their comfort zones. When I sit in departmental meetings is an advantage because they do not have to report to me, if they have challenges, I will be near to help overcome the challenge. It becomes much easier because I save them time and energy to come to my office.

5.2.5. Monitoring and support

At the beginning of the year, all HODs and committee leaders are expected to submit their management plan to my office, so that I have all plans that I can incorporate their plans into the school’s year plan. I try by all means to stick to the school plan. Sometimes I do notify my colleagues of class visit whereby I join the HOD…. Sometimes staff members are not notified. I do monitoring not to spite anyone but so that I can offer support where necessary. This works for
me as a leader, keeping everyone to do what they are supposed to do…. when I don’t do class visit, I will busy inspecting school building and other resources, chatting to maintenance and administrative staff and see how they do their work. By so doing, I am encouraging everyone to work to the best of their abilities… everyone… even those who lag behind with their work… at least they can get courage. I also motivate both teachers and learners in different ways such as hosting awards ceremony every year, and sometimes I sent them messages of appreciation for various task well executed, writing special support and encouragement messages to them.

When the year starts, I also secure personal commitments with all educators. In each meeting with an individual educator, I requested them to set their own target for the term, indicating how they are going to achieve their targets, what type of support they would need to achieve their targets. Mine is to listen carefully to every teacher, record their needs as they spell them out to me. Later on, during SGB meeting I encourage the SGB to allocate 60 % of the norms and standards for curriculum provision so that it can cater for teachers’ curricular needs.

5.2.5.6. Changing stakeholders’ mindset

I grew up in rural area, I am village girl. I know exactly what life is like there. I grew up in a village where I saw male people always taking an upper hand, I can also see this happening right in this school. {what do you mean?} When I came here, office bearers in the RCL were male learners, as well as chairpersons in different committees in the school. Girl learners are expected to help with activities such as cleaning classrooms, and dishing up during break-time…. Oh, sorry mam… our school is quintile 1, and therefore qualifies for National School Nutrition Programme which provides at least 1 meal for learners per day. We have parents who cook and are paid a stipend by the department of education. Senior girls in the school are busy helping in the school kitchen…. While boys take the lead in various committees. Yes, is good…. according to me is another way of strengthening some gender stereotypes and roles … I was very much concerned about what we teach these learners, for example boy learners in this school are not included in the cleaning roaster. When I made some follow up with class managers, I was told that its useless to put boys on the list because they do not cooperate. I noticed that, but I didn’t want to make it an issue. In my heart I knew that I am the right person to change the situation for better…. Especially in a democratic country like ours. I told myself that I must rectify this behavior and thinking… how? I did not know. But I could not remain like that.
In one of the SGB meetings, the chairperson of the SGB suggested that the school, classrooms need some new painting because there was a lot of graffiti on the walls. I supported the SGB, because even the learners’ furniture was dirty and has graffiti on it. I then proposed to the SGB that if they can buy paints and other cleaning chemicals, I can engage the whole school in painting and cleaning of classrooms and furniture. When I tell staff members, immediately one teacher spoke loudly saying “operation hlasela”, then we ended we are calling our cleaning campaign… Operation Clean-up…. The whole school was excited. Timing was perfect, because it was towards the closing of term 3… I wrote a letter to the circuit manager to notify him about the campaign. I did not want to disturb the curriculum activities, so I suggested that the cleaning campaign be done on a Saturday. To make the campaign more interesting and fun day… the SGB volunteer to provide some music system and fruits… fundraising committee contacted local business sectors for donations such as drinks and other food items…. Then, on the day of the cleaning campaign, I suggested that males and females switch roles, …by the way some parents also volunteered…girls painting and boys scrubbing the floors… it was fun… day. The day was a success, and since that day I have instructed all class managers to include boys in the cleaning roaster, and requested that if they find challenges, they must report those to me. No complaint was submitted to me, and girls are no longer complaining…this was achieved through teamwork.

5.2.5.7. Passion for learners

When schools re open for 4th term, we establish forums for girls and boys in the school. This was an idea from a group of life orientation teachers, well I guess they had their own concerns. I was very happy about these forums… this will give me an opportunity to motivate girl learners to consider competing for leadership roles at school… I was not sure how to do it… when you are a leader… you must be careful…because you don’t want to be labelled a sexist. These forums were both helpful for our learners especially at FET level (Grade 10 -12), because they discussed academic and social challenges and how they can help one another to overcome challenges they encounter. I have always encouraged girls to also compete for leadership roles such as chairperson and president, and stop serving as secretaries…I always tell my leaners that leadership starts at school and home… and if you are not afforded an opportunity at home… you must then use the platform at school, you start now to gain your confidence now… so that when you go out there you know how to stand your ground. You are also born to lead… so starting from next year I want
to see competition…become “chairpersons and not…additional members”. I also encourage girls to support each other. Indeed, the following year three girls were voted as chairperson of three different committees in the school, and many more girls have now seen that it is possible to lead as young girl.

If you come to our school during RCL campaigns and elections of executive members, you’ll be impressed with our learners … they take it seriously…they get excited because they canvass for their candidates and I think the whole process excites everyone in school, even teachers. I am very happy that there is competition and change of power. I also encourage the learners to always check that genders are balanced in all committees…when learners are happy, I am also happy.

5.2.5.8. Familiarity with the school community

Another thing that makes life easier is that I grew up in this village, most parents know me… I guess I am popular, and I also know many parents as well as their children, I mean learners. “I am daughter of the soil and relate well to the community. I have the support of the community members because they know and wish well for me…. But sometimes it can be the opposite…yes…some people can play fault finding games because they know you, your family history and quarrels that took place long before you were even born… Being familiar with the community has the good and the bad side. When you are too connected to the community, you sometimes fail to handle some issues with parents or any other member in the community. Other than that, some members will sometime want to take advantage of you …heh… calling you by your nickname… in front of learners etc., but as time went by, they realized that I am no longer the same person I used to be…I mean business, I am the school principal now.

The good thing about being daughter of the soil, …. You get support from people and also from senior members in the community such as the chief and his assistants. I become rest assured that I would be supported. It is never easy to deal with people you know, you played with them in your childhood or they were your classmates at some point…. I mean it is no easy to say No to those people, for example some parents will come when schools reopen in January to seek admission for their children or grandchildren. I can’t say no, because sometimes I know their situation…. The good thing is that when learners know you, and you know their parents and where they stay; they behave, and this put them on their toes to be good learners, when they misbehave… they come rushing to my office to plead with me not to inform their parents. If it is minor, I just punish them
…but there are cases that need parents. When teachers complain about the same learners who misbehave and not to do their work, I do home visit to check the situation, and where possible I involve the social workers to intervene.

5.2.5.9. Community support

The school is part of the community, so as a leader in this school, I automatically became part of the community. I serve the community inside the school and I must also be visible in community gatherings and events. The community become part of the school because the SGB has allowed community members to use our facilities such the hall for memorial services, elections, and school grounds. Sometimes the school uses home ground for school athletics practice and soccer tournaments. This has a positive impact because the community feels that they own the school, there is sense of ownership, everyone looks after the school; any incident of theft or burglary they notify me or the police. I still remember at some point ten laptops were stolen from the school, I opened a police case, and it was announced at the local radio station for community members to help if they have any information on the case. Before the end of the day, the police called me to say that they found a lead. The ten laptops were found hidden somewhere in one of the mountains by some women very early in the morning when they went to fetch some firewood. Yes, it feels nice to know that some people care, when you are hurt, they are hurting too. I really appreciate all the effort by community members.

5.2.5.10. School-Based Support Team

Our school is successful, because we care a lot about one another. Most parents are unemployed, some learners are orphans and don’t know what to do. I coordinate the School Based Support Team (SBST)… just to tell you briefly about this team… the team identifies leaners with psycho-social problems such sexual abuse, substance abuse and domestic violence which can disturb them to be fully committed to their studies, and learners with learning disabilities such as hearing and vision. Most of learners experiencing these problems are gifted. The SBST step in to help remove some of the obstacles so that learners can perform to the best of their abilities. I think we have made a difference in the lives of many learners and their parents, especially because we work hand in hand with local social workers. I am also proud to mention that we are blessed and honored because one of the social workers, we work closely with the chief’s wife. She has handled so
many cases, and we are very proud of her and her team. She also gives us the necessary training where necessary, so that we can also identify indicators of social ills learners may be experiencing.

I guess we cannot disconnect the school from the community…. what happens in the community will end up in the school… but if we join hands with the community we can overcome. I think we are winning. Sometimes I also invite the social and health department teams to talk to parents about issues of concern during parents’ meeting, just before we start with our meeting. They also work closely with some of our life orientation teachers, they come and present during school assemblies and engage our learners in awareness campaigns such as on gender based violence, illnesses and wellness.

5.2.5. 11. I lead a unique school

I never compare this school with other neighboring schools; because every school is unique, the staff, learners and parents are also unique. When I deal with problems in this school, I do not always ask for advice, I get down to the problem by myself until find a solution. Some problems are like family challenges that we face every day in our lives, you can’t always ask people to help you solve your family problems. As a school we operate like a family, if there are problems I cannot solve on my own, I have the SMT members …. I engage them as well as other stakeholders. I don’t recall asking for solutions outside.

5.2.5.12. Changing the system of allocation

When I took over the leadership of the school, I changed the system of allocation with regard to duties and responsibilities of teachers. When I was an HOD at my previous school, many teachers used to complain about how allocation was done, saying that having both senior and junior classes to teach was exhausting. I was also a teacher at one stage of my career; I have seen that the way allocation is done in most school could be contributing to learners underperforming. When teachers are allocated both senior and junior classes, they mainly focus on senior class, sometimes neglecting junior learners, not intentionally. Their focus is more on grade 11 and 12 because that is where more attention is…. Grade 12 results. This is the practice in most school especially secondary schools; that is why there are so many extra classes when learners get to grade 12…. And still, some of them do not make it. These learners did not have good foundation, so teachers
are trying to close the gaps by conducting extra classes ... on weekends, school holidays and afternoon; poor learners do not have time for themselves.

There is too much to cover up which was left from grade 8-11. The gap is too wide to be close in one year. When I came here, I changed the system of allocation, I checked with all the teaching staff, looking at their profiles. When I brought the idea to the staff, they supported it and immediately I requested them to write their wish list with regard to allocation. It was not a smooth decision to take because it means that everyone will be affected by the changes... but for the better. The time-tabling committee also was highly inconvenienced. So, I ended up having two groups; those teaching grade 8 and 9 only, and the other one for grades 10 to 12. All teachers will devote more time to their classes, those in grade 8 and 9 will give learners more attention and the foundation they need. This has also strengthened teamwork amongst teachers around here, because they plan together and always alert each other of areas that must be emphasized. Teachers here also do team teaching especially in grades 10 to 12. Changing the system of work allocation, is one of the strategies that has helped the school to succeed. Now we work smart and that is why we succeed.

5.2.5.13. Empowering others

When I came to this school, I requested two teachers to step in and act as HOD to replace the two deputies who left the school. They were scared and did not know how to handle the assigned duties. They were not fully committed in their duties, and I realized that they used to belong to the stronger camp. So, when posts were advertised, they refuse to apply, I guess they suspected that they will not be appointed, so they avoided the humiliation. However, they cooperated with the newly appointed HOD. They decided to change, seeing that they were the only ones left from their camp. Things were running smoothly. Everyone is on board and supporting the school in its mission to achieve its vision. When they see that others are on board, they automatically join the group. Sometimes, I do not tell educators what to do and how to behave. They learn in the process that they are just wasting their own time and energy because the school is doing well, with or without their support.

Factors that enabled the school to succeed were highlighted in Violetta’ narratives such empowering others, working as a team, leading by example, working with the community, and changing the school systems.
5.2.6. Perception of successful school leadership

Next, is Violetta’s perception of successful school leadership, and it goes as follow:

5.2.6.1. Leadership style

Well… I can say my management style is participative… this is about empowerment of others, giving others a chance to develop themselves because I always delegate tasks to teachers irrespective of their level (teachers and HODs), I look at one’s competencies. Teachers are always happy about that; it also makes my life easier as a school manager. I always tell my colleagues that teaching is team work, if some people work hard and succeed and others do not commit themselves … failure is bound to happen… others become disappointed because they know they have worked hard, because of other people’s lack of commitment, their hard work is not recognized.

5.2.6.2. Teamwork and accountability

Teamwork makes members to share the responsibility and credit. The credit does not go to the principal alone, but to the whole staff. If the team succeeds, we celebrate together, even when the team fails… we all take the blame… no one to blame. I encourage teamwork, because they hold each other accountable [she sighs] … making my job a lot easier. I remember one year, I think it 2017… beginning, we dropped by 5 percent in our matric results. Immediately, I called everyone to a staff meeting; that was a toughest meeting I have ever conducted in this school. The language department blamed science teachers for letting the school down, also complaining that the teachers in the science department were sponsored for conducting enrichment classes so that they can do to better, and help all learners pass as expected. It was a very hot meeting… I was also disappointed but was not aware that other staff members were so angry. I tried to be strategic and said, okay colleagues let’s give the science department to go and prepare so that they can respond to your questions, I also said I understand your frustrations but please…. they said, we want answers right now…. One teacher said, no mam, they failed us… they are the reason school x is number one in the district and not us. The science department, HOD, maths and science teachers had to account on spot. Team members will hold you accountable if you don’t deliver as planned. There is a sense of ownership with teamwork and shared decision making as well, which is good because it keeps the school running effectively. I don’t have to instruct anyone anymore… I just lead the team, share ideas and decisions. I think we are doing well as a team, pushing each other to do their work.
5.2.6.3. A positive environment

I regard myself as a contributor. I always ensure that the environment of the school is positive so that teaching and learning take place effectively. I do this in various ways possible, such as respecting others so that they can respect me. I do treat them in the way I want to be treated. I also do not rush to take actions I take some time to get all my facts right before talking and acting. I also appreciate the good work from my colleagues, some teachers are assets to the school, and for motivation I show that their valuable contributions towards the school is noted and appreciated. It’s never easy, but I always start with the very few members that go an extra mile without expecting any cent, a thank you means a lot to them. Besides, I support and protect the right of each individual within the school, their privacy by keeping personal issues confidential as agreed with each one of them. By so doing I earn their trust in return. It feels so good as a leader to know that your subordinates trust you with their personal and professional issues. I try by all means to embrace every staff member irrespective of their personality. Some personalities are so difficult to handle… but I accommodate all people.

I am also welcoming, and they know that they can confide in me, I listen and show empathy when people explain their difficult circumstances. One of my leadership strengths is that I am a patient person by nature, to an extent that some people think that I am slow… but I always give some feedback when they don’t expect it. Secondly, I am a leader who does not hesitate to apologize, from my childhood, I have learned that when you wronged people, they get hurt and you must make things through an apology, ask for forgiveness so that life goes on. I am so happy that colleagues also do the same, when they hurt me, they quickly apologize.

According to Violetta, successful school leadership is all about teamwork and commitment of all stakeholder, holding one another accountable, creating a positive environment for teaching and learning to take place. Violetta says is also about the leadership styles that a leader employs.

5.2.7. Leadership and management challenges

In the next paragraphs, Violetta confirms that challenges exist even in successful schools. she says:
5.2.7.1. Instability of teachers

Year in and year out I have teachers leaving the school, very good, highly qualified and competent teachers. For example, this year I lost grade 12 maths teacher, very young and fresh from the university. She left the school end of the month of January. She tried to leave the school some time last year, and the SGB top-up her salary and then she remained. At that time, I knew that the reason could not be related to salary because she was not the first teacher to want to leave. The school is losing many teachers of this caliber, offering key subjects and producing excellent results. It is always difficult to replace such teachers who are committed and sacrifice their lives for learners. This lady teacher said to me; mam, I love teaching these learners, I so wish I can take them with me, they are such a blessing to teach. but this place is just not for me. please don’t get me wrong... I love people in this school, the team is good to work with, and I have learnt a lot from this school. I miss my life. I am a city girl... miss entertainment and the fast life, you know. My other problem is that I want to further my studies on part-time basis, and I cannot do this if I am here. It will be costly for me and again I have been offered a part time job at this university as a tutor... I cannot afford to miss these opportunities.

This is one of challenges that I am faced with as long as I am the principal here, rural schools experience this problem especially secondary school. Young and qualified teachers only accept appointment in rural schools because they cannot find employment in places, they love… and once they are settled and are more experienced, they move on to urban areas…they are competent and marketable… so they go for greener pastures. I still remember the same year I was appointed the principal here, the school appointed a maths and IT male teacher, and within six he resigned from the school saying that he wants to teach both his major subjects, because he was afraid that he would become redundant … and he left the school because the school did not offer IT as a subject due lack of resources…. No computer lab, no Wi-Fi, etc. at that time… [she laughs] now we have all those things.

5.2.7.2. Sexual harassment

At the beginning of my principalship, I encountered all sorts of sexual harassment. Some secondary principals in my area or district were mostly male and being the only female principals left me vulnerable. I was harassed verbally and emotionally. The way my male co-workers were looking at me and the type of comments they utter about me were always about my beauty and
body started to bother me. All my seniors were all males; the circuit manager as well as district
director. I had no one to relate to with my frustrations. My circuit manager used to tell me that he
likes me and wants to spent the night with me. At first, I thought he was just playing. He persisted
on calling and requesting me to get away for a weekend with him. I decided to stop him; I denied
the offer. He called me saying that if I do not comply, he is going to make my life difficult as a
principal and make sure that the district finds someone to replace me. I ignored him and then I
realized that he was serious, when I submit documents to the circuit office sending someone, he
usually sends the person back telling them that the principal must personally submit those
documents. However, when I do that personally he will continue harassing me telling me that he
likes me. I told him I am going to report him to the district director and I did that. I could see that
he took advantage of me, that I am new, and I am a woman. The district director promised me that
he will take care of the matter. I do not know what he did, but the circuit manager stopped telling
me all those things.

5.2.7.3. No one to deputizes me

When I joined the school in 2010, the school had two deputy- principals. Unfortunately, the two
had to leave the school because of the R and R process. I had spent many years without a deputy
principal. I had to rely on HODS in the school, and this has put too much pressure on them. It was
stressful for me at first, because I wanted to lead the way; I did not want to delegate duties to staff
members without first performing tasks just to show them how they are done. So, for two years, I
was solely in charge of the curriculum, drawing timetable, allocating duties and overseeing that
things falls in place. When I performed some duties, I always make sure that there were two or
three teachers to see how some tasks are performed. Then, at a later stage I started delegating staff
members. That is how I have survived without a deputy –principal.

5.2.7.4. Gender stereotypes

I strongly believe that gender has affected my working life especially in my early years of
principalship. I was appointed a principal at younger age than most of my colleagues. I am a pretty
woman. My male colleagues did not take me seriously. Maybe, because I was the first woman
principal to be appointed in secondary school, they were not used to work under the authority of
female leader. They looked down at me as if I am incompetent; I was new to the school but already
they judged as not capable of doing the job. I was surprised by how people think about women
leaders, honesty already they judged me for just being a woman, that I am young woman and therefore cannot lead and manage the school. I think it’s very unfair, not only to me but to other women leaders out there.

5.2.7.5. Dilapidated buildings

This school was built in 1974, so most of the blocks were dilapidated ever since I came to the school, I requested the School Governing Body to renovate the school, because according to the SASA (South African Schools’Act1996), and it is within their responsibility to maintain the infrastructure. The school has 16 classrooms to accommodate 434 learners with 17 state-paid and 3SGB paid educators. Learners use pit toilets and the administration block are not in good condition. Now with Covid-19, it is worse and that’s why we have only grade 12 attending. This has made the SGB to speed up their maintenance plan...the administration block was completed in January, and I think that in three months’ time the environ- loo will be completed.

5.2.7.6. Cliques among staff members

Upon my arrival at the school, I found that there were two camps in the school consisting of the stronger and weaker camps. I experienced more problems from the stronger camp members because they were not cooperative at all. Always against anything good I try to do for the school. Unlike the stronger, the weaker camp was cooperative, but I could see that they were scared and that they could be suffering some intimidation from members of the stronger camp. On days when I have to attend departmental meetings or workshops; members from the stronger camp always released learners before the scheduled time. I was happy that at the end the seven teachers from this camp had to leave the school. Things were better and ultimately normal. Teachers started doing their work whether I am present or not. The seven teachers also included three members of the SMT, (HOD and 2 deputy- principals). Some teachers also told me that the seven teachers delayed the R and R process intentionally because they knew they were supposed to leave the school but didn’t want to leave. They continue playing games with the acting principal who was there. There was no order in the school. Teachers are now more positive and committed to their work.
5.2.7.7. No mentor

I was one of the first woman to be appointed secondary principal in the circuit and the entire district. One male colleague (principal) told me that other male principals were reluctant to help because they were afraid that I will report them to the district director. At first, I was not aware, but later I realized that they were behaving and treating me in the same manner as the circuit manager. For example, whenever I call any of them, they always pretend as if they are in the middle of something and then promise to call me back, but they never did. I kept on calling them but getting the same responses, until I decided no longer contact any of them including the circuit manager. I learnt the hard way, with no one to listen and willing to help me. I do not know why they were behaving like that, but it made me stronger. But they are okay now, I don’t call them, but they do.

5.2.7.8. Learner performance not satisfactory

When I came to this school, I was surprised that all stakeholders were pleased, and thinking that the school is doing well. Well… that’s how they felt. During my first meeting with the SGB and SMT members, I could see and hear that everyone was happy about the learner performance, especially grade 12 results…. praising each other for the job well done. I kept quiet… didn’t know what to say… because average pass percentage was 52. But they were happy…. maybe it was because the school operated for a long period without a principal, it was good to applaud the SMT and teachers for having achieved that percentage…. I was new … therefore I was not even aware of the challenges they went through. Anyway, I also congratulated the school. I didn’t want to look and sound negative, but at that time I knew that I was not being honest to everyone in that meeting.

The next day I requested grade 12 previous results so that I can do my own analysis of the results. … so that I know what to do next… there was a lot of work to be done. When I compare the results there was a difference of 2 percent… meaning that there was an improvement of 2 percent only. There were 13 secondary schools in the circuit, our school came fifth…. I then realized why the SGB and SMT were so excited……the school was in the top five of the circuit. The number one school in the circuit got 72%… now I get a clear picture. It was clear that the whole circuit was under performing…. Honestly…. There was nothing to be proud of… nothing at all! I was not impressed at all…. It says to me there is still too much work to be done. [ she laughs… loudly].
That’s not me…. I am not average… and I cannot settle for less, 52% and be content with. I wanted quality results.

I called staff meeting… and then displayed the results…. I got the same feeling that I got from the SGB and SMT meeting .... Excitement and joy for the job well done. I also congratulate them, and said to the whole staff…. I still remember the exact words I said to the entire staff; Well done… you did your best… however, this year we must to come position one in the circuit…. And they were excited when I said that…. I was so relieved that … they also agree with me that as a school we cannot remain at average… we must get out of our comfort zone and aim higher. I organized strategic planning knowing that they will be on board for action in order to improve our results.

5.2.7.9. Leadership is a difficult job

Leadership is not as easy as many people think, it is too demanding. I learned that as a leader, I have to recognize that human beings are unique in their own ways, and they differ in their thinking, and behavior. I have to accept that as a leader I also have to know my strengths and weaknesses… before gunning at other. This helps me to become strategic in my leadership role and become a better leader. For example, when you experience some setback, you must adapt, … pull yourself together, forget about the setback…and move on. I have also learned that when we work as team, don’t focus more on what others cannot do… rather focus more on what they do best.

Madam! human beings are too complex to understand sometimes… for example, I sometimes feel sad and hurt that staff members here do good for the school, I always commend them…. but I am never applauded for anything, … for going an extra mile… or anything. I am blamed when things go wrong in the school, when things are in good shape…they know you have done good things they just keep quiet….it is difficult and sometimes I feel like crying. I have learnt some tough lessons. I always remind myself that I am here for the learners. Sometimes when you delegate some duties to them, and are not well executed, everyone will be looking at you… blaming you. Again, if you delegate task to them to do and you step in to do them yourself, they complaint to say why did I delegate them those duties in the first place. There is something that some teachers do not understand, and that is I am the accounting officer…. if the work is not performed as expected, I am held accountable… I cannot point fingers at them. I think that teachers forget that when I delegate, I afford them an opportunity to grow professionally… and not that I cannot perform the task myself.
5.2.7.10. Dealing with human resources

- Uncooperative staff members

I had two teachers who were always negative about any school plan and activities the school initiate to undertake…. They were actually friends... my concern is that one of them was an HOD for languages. This teacher was not active, always postpone submission dates and worse is that she did not adhere to her departmental management plan… a plan she submitted to me at the beginning of the year. You know when you are externally appointed to a school, there would be some teachers who always remind you that they have long been in the school. When I suggest something new, they try to counter that saying we used to do this in this way, stating whatever they used to do in the past the way they say it ... It is as if I am not competent on how to handle some problems or projects in the school. I felt like … they were dictating to me … what I must do and not do. This made to instruct them especially in my early years of leadership. I listen to them arguing during staff meeting and not even reaching any resolution at the end. I was not much worried about them, part of me was saying as long as they do what they are supposed do, it was okay with me… I can deal with their attitude… I did not expect everyone to be on board from day one… but as time went by, they will understand that change is good sometimes. What bothered me most was, they liked showing off sometimes.

- Unprofessional HOD

Then one day I was scheduled to join this HOD for a class visit, when I get there, I found myself alone with the teacher and learners, the HOD was not there. I spent the whole period there, and topic the teacher presented was interesting and well planned. Then after the lesson, I told the teacher to tell mam x(HOD) that I was there for class visit. I thought that when the teacher told her I was in her class; she would come to me with an explanation why she was not there. She did not say anything to me, I also did not say anything to her. Then in the same week, the HODs were also scheduled to submit their reports on written work audit from teachers, she submitted late. I also recorded that in my journal. Class visits in our school are done for a week as per department, so they run for one month in a term, for example first week of the month is for sciences, followed by languages, commerce and then humanities. When I check her management plan, I realized that she
only attended one class visit, but reported that she had visited all classes as per plan. SMT members reported verbally and then all said were captured in our SMT minute book. The next day I checked her personal teaching time-table and then saw that she will be free for two consecutive periods, then informed her that I would like to see her in her office. I wanted to confront her for giving a false report during SMT meeting, I produced some evidence that she could not deny; when I requested to see proof of written work audit, it was not there. There was no proof… I then indicate to her that she is not doing her work as an HOD, she must lead by example… indicating that she cannot draw a plan and then not follow it, soon teachers will do the same because they will be emulating their senior. She was so ashamed of herself. I told her that if she is not careful and rectify that she will soon be a dysfunctional HOD… which I will not allow. From that day she followed her schedule and even stopped her negative attitude towards me. I was very assertive yet polite when talking to her, reminding her of what her job description states and I also quoted the code of ethics as stipulated in SACE (South African Council for Teachers), just to remind her how she is expected to relate to others, her colleagues including me as the principal of the school, learners and parents. She apologized for her unprofessional behaviour.

- Corruption in the recruitment system

Earlier on I told you that when I took on the leadership of this school, I had no one to deputize me due to the process of Redeployment and replacement process…… (the 2-deputy principal at the school was redeployed to other schools). The vacant deputy-principal post was registered in departmental gazette and then later on advertised. Just a week before the shortlisting and interviewing process, I received a call from my circuit manager (the new one) to come to the circuit office in the afternoon. When I asked for what?... she told me I will know when I get there… when I arrived there, she told me that she needs a favor from me ……… I was so quiet and listening…… then she continues talking… there is Mr. X who applied for the deputy-principalship post at your school, I am going to propose that you convince your interview panelist to recommend him for the post, because Mr. X is good maths teacher, he will help improve matric results. I was taken by surprise…. I didn’t know what to say to her. At the same time, I felt the urge to use the bathroom and then excused myself. While in the bathroom I prayed a short prayer…. I needed that because I felt that I was put on test…. I asked God to give me the wisdom to respond to the circuit manager. When I went back…. I said to the circuit manager, I think that if Mr. X meet the requirements of
the post, he will be shortlisted and then invited to attend the interviews. I cannot promise anything; you know the procedure…. I am new here… and all I want …is to do the right thing in the right way. I don’t want to set the wrong precedence… NO… she said to me, I understand you…. Then I left. I told myself that I am not going to tell anyone about this… Then, the SGB chairperson constituted a panel committee for shortlisting and interview for deputy- principalship post. All went well, candidates shortlisted were invited for the interviews, at the end of the interview panelist made their recommendations and then all documents were duplicated before submitting them to the circuit office. Ever since then, my relationship with my circuit manager was affected negatively…..we don’t talk much, there is tension between us. I thank myself now that I did the correct thing…. I decided well…by following procedure…. I am very proud of myself for not compromising my integrity… just like.

- Late coming

Late coming was a big problem at this school here, teachers and learners the same. I was worried because more time for teaching and learning was lost…. Staff members were even late for staff meetings, and admin staff not different. I remember one day I wanted to make copies early in the morning, I think it was around 7am and there was no one to assist… I operated the machine myself. Immediately, after assembly I called a meeting with all admin staff to address the problem of late coming. My main aim was to instill time management in everyone in the school. I encouraged everyone to come earlier than the expected time; and teachers to honour their contact time sessions with learners. I also made sure that all time books for teaching and non-teaching staff were placed in my office. Right now, I am sure that if you see a learner still in the street by 7:30, he or she does not attend at this school, because all learners in this school are expected to be in school by 7:00 am and we start at 7:30. It was very difficult in the beginning, but now everyone can see that the system produced good results. I used to wait for late comers at the school gate every day alone, and then some male colleagues have volunteered to help control late coming. Everyone in the campus is time conscious and I happy that teaching and learning time is no longer compromised.

The leadership and management challenges that Violetta encountered were as follow: late coming of both learners and teachers, corruption by senior officials, insubordinate HOD, no one to mentor her, no deputy-principal when she started, gender stereotypes and sexual harassment, and instability of staff members.
5.2.8. How do I know I am a successful leader?

Despite these challenges Violetta manages to overcome and become successful. In the next paragraphs, Violetta knows that she is successful, when:

5.2.8.1. Supportive parents

Parents of learners at this school are supportive in matters that interest them, such as celebrations, farewell, prize giving and helping in the nutrition project because they benefit in one way or another. For example, sometimes they take leftovers to their homes for their children (which is not a problem). However, when you call them to a formal meeting to discuss more important issues they seem not to be interested. They do not come in large numbers as I would expect. Well, at first but now it has changed for better. They majority of parents do not come to parents’ meeting, I had to summon them to come to the meeting. Some parents told me they would come to the meetings even if they sometimes do not understand what is going on.

5.2.8.2. Excellent academic results

I know that the school is successful when there is improvement in learners’ academic performance, earning trust from all stakeholders, and more parents demanding admission for their children in our school. When learners perform better, this makes all staff members to work harder than before. When I joined the school, the performance of learners was very poor, especially for grade 12. I was very excited that there was a remarkable improvement. In 2018 the school got 90,5 %, 2019 it was 94,4 % and this year 2020 we aim to get at least 100 % pass rate. This makes me feel proud of myself and the team. I am happy that the school is heading in the right direction. I think we worked very hard as a team and went through unbearable challenges together. I can say it was never easy, it took me years of hard work and commitment, shoo…. sleepless nights to make this this successful.

When results are poor, it becomes difficult to manage the school. The school community blames you for everything, from bottom to top. However, when results are good, they also appreciate the good work. Stakeholders are more supportive and they have started showing interest in the education of their children. I can see that parents now trust me with their children and they believe...
in me as a leader, and not necessarily the woman principal. When women principals do not perform as leaders, it has a negative impact on those ladies out there aspiring to lead schools… so yah …. I am proud of myself up to this point to also serve as a role model for other women. What makes me happy the most is that those who used to look down on me have started to recognize me. The school always gets position one in terms of grade 12 results in the district. This thinking that women cannot lead secondary school in is the past, because I am doing far better than schools that are being led by male principals. I am very proud that now those people (male principals) are now forced to recognize me as capable woman principal. [ she laughs].

5.2.8.3. Increased learner enrolment

The school enrolment has drastically increased during the past four years. When parents see good results, they become thankful, and willingly start to support the school and their children. The whole community is impressed with matric results, and at the beginning of the year I had to battle with parents seeking admission for their children at our school. This also was an indication the school is doing much better as compared to other neighboring schools. I also had unexpected visitors (parents) paying the school a social visit, when I asked them how they want to be helped…. Parents especially of new learners indicated that “they came just to meet the principal because they didn’t know her”. They also commended me for the good work that I am doing for the community.

When I started teaching, I never thought I would become a school principal one day. When I reflect back into my career life, I still remember my maths teacher’s words, that we should not settle for less in life. I guess I carried his words in my heart throughout my life, but I was not aware… I never wanted to settle for less maybe because I had children to support, I never intended to be a principal… it happened sooner than I thought.

According to Violetta she knows that she is successful when parents start to supports the school, learner enrolment increase, and learner performance has improved.

5.2.9. Advice to other women leaders

Next, is a letter of advice that Violetta was requested to write to other women principals and women aspiring for leadership.
Well, my advice to other women principals would be that they must have courage. Sometimes as women leaders we fail, because we are scared and not bold enough. We become scared of the systems that are in place. If systems in place are not working for you, please change them. Some women leaders fail in their leadership role because they are fearful, they don’t want to change the systems. If you are fearful, you are bound to fail especially when a school is under-performing. If a school is not performing academically, it is a sign enough that systems in place are dysfunctional, they must be substituted. As leaders we are hired to make things better, I mean to improve the situations in our schools for better. No one can manage and lead effectively within poor systems. I want to be honest with you women, if as a leader you afraid to change things in your school, it is better to get out, and let others who can the job better to get in. If you walk in fear, there is nothing you are going to achieve as leader.

Secondly, women leaders must get to know their human resources very well. Know every individual, understand them personally; their strength as well as their weaknesses. When you do this, then you will know how to handle them as individuals. Intimidation comes in various forms such as in the way people behave towards you as a leader, how they air their views. Women leaders must always remain strong, courageous to confront and deal with unprofessional behaviour on spot. You can only deal with these if you are well conversant with policies and legislations. Teachers will take you seriously if you quote these legislations and policies; and sometimes they contravene these policies just to test you. If you don’t act with the first incidence, it is going to be difficult to act in future.

Women principals must believe in themselves; and even the decisions they make. They must learn to be influential and believe in what they do as leaders; influence stakeholder to buy in, so that together they can work towards achieving a common goal. They must not give up on their dreams despite the challenges they face. Rome was never built in one day. Success does not come cheap; you must dig deeper and tell yourself that until you get what you want you will not give up. If they want to succeed in their leadership and management roles, they must set goals and prioritize them, one step at a time. They must strategize, assess their challenges and see which area needs more attention, then deal with it. One step a time, is all I can say.

The other shortfall I have seen in most women principals, is that they always want to do things by themselves. Okay, let me say, [laughing]… I am one of them. I think that is because as women we
always want to prove a point; that we are capable, and we were rightfully appointed. It is good to show people that you are the right person for the job. However, you must show people and let go; otherwise, if you continue showing people that you are independent, you can do everything alone, they step back and watch you dig a grave for yourself. My advice to women principals is that always show others that you value them and rely on them. People want to be appreciated as valuable being. You need a unified and strong team to succeed as a leader. When your colleagues see that you trust them and rely on them, they come in handy and play their roles.

Women leaders must be professional in every way possible and at all times. Fellow women leaders must lead by example. Demonstrate what they also want to see happening in their schools. They must open channels of communication, respect everyone and have compassion. Women principals must never compromise the culture of the school. They must see to it that they uplift and protect the status of the school at all times. Lastly, women principals must also learn from others; however, they must bear in mind that what works for school A may not be applicable for school B. they must see their schools as unique.

I would advise women to be confident in their leadership, to be courageous and not be afraid, to appreciate their colleagues because on their own they cannot make it.

5.3. Norah’s narrative

This section is about the second study participants, woman principal. Norah is her pseudonym. She talks about her childhood memories and she narrates it in this way:

5.3.1. Childhood years

This beautiful woman was born, 1966. 09.19, I am 54-years of age, widowed with four kids. I am the first child of the seven children of my parents, three boys and four girls. I was born into a religious family, we attended church every Sunday. As a young girl I attended Sunday school, and when I was at secondary school, I became a youth member. I was raised by both parents until my dad passed on in 2007 February. I remember that I used to play with my siblings because my dad never wanted his children to play in the street. My dad believed that he had enough children who can play together, therefore we had no reason to go outside the home yard. My dad was very strict especially with her daughters. I think he was trying to protect us from boys, it didn’t feel right because we never had a chance to play with other kids except at school.
As I said earlier, I grew up in a religious family, where prayer, praise and worship were practiced and not compromised. I remember that as a family we would sing and dance together... it will be my dad who will always lead us in singing even though he would not dance but he encouraged us to dance for the Lord. My dad was good at singing. As a family we prayed together before we go to bed on a daily basis, and every Sunday we would attend church together... no compromise on these two issues. I meant you want to be in good terms with my dad... Attending church was a must not an option. [and then laughter].

... I remember something... Sometimes when I didn’t want to go church on Sunday, I will tell my younger sister to pretend to be sick, knowing that my dad will say that I must remain at home and take care of her while other family members go to church. [why didn’t you want to go church] Soooh... it happened on a number of occasions. Okay, aish!!... the church was very far from home, and walked because my family had no car to take us there... most families walked to church. Worse, it took 2 to 3 hours, and after those parents had to remain behind for some church meeting... It felt like the whole day... there was no shelter, we attended church services in an open space, spending the time in sunny and cold weather. I enjoyed church but conditions were not pleasant.

I have to do my school work... I am exhausted. If I had more school work to do I didn’t want to go to church so that I could push my school work.

I got away with murder just like, but my dad was not happy with that. My dad became suspicious that were played them, hiding behind sickness... one Sunday I tricked the family again... when my little sister was just about to go bed pretending to be sick as always... my dad came in rushing and furious, and he said; we are all going to church. anyone who is sick will be prayed for at church.... He went on to say... if you remain at home while we go to church, the devil will own you... and you will his, because you chose him instead of choosing God.

Since that day I never missed church.... I have learned so much from both my religious and spiritual upbringing. I am a Christian and that is where I get my strength from to face each day, and also to deal with challenges, I meet both in my life as well as at my work. Yes, all work related and life challenges I give them to my Creator, my God to address them on my behalf. I also am prayerful... I pray for everything challenge I encounter. I also believe that God has placed me in this school for a purpose; I am just thankful that the majority of people here are Christians... as a
school we start our day with morning devotion, those who are comfortable in sharing the word of God do so…… we feel motivated to start the new day. We sing together with the school choir leading the whole school, and it’s very nice. Sometimes learners don’t want to stop singing. The mood is so peaceful that you wish that you can suspend lessons for the day and just spent the whole day in praise and worship. Well, now under Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, there is no assembly, but I have encouraged teachers to start with a prayer before the commencement of lessons, especially those having first period. In all our school meeting, we open with a prayer.

My dad was a hawker selling clothes and other items to support his family. He was not educated, he left school when doing standard two (grade 4). My father was …. [pause]… he was a man of his own character. He was a quiet, loving, very strict and very protective of his girl children. As the oldest child of the four children at home, I was also responsible for taking charge of some duties at home such as making sure that dishes are washed and that my siblings eat when they comeback from school and change school uniform and put on casual clothes. I helped my mother because she was a full-time primary school teacher, and my dad was always with farming especially during rainy seasons. When they come back, they expected food to be ready, and that’s how I helped. It was not easy, because I had school work to do.

My mom got married to my dad at a very young age, because her parents died when she was seven years old. She never had a stable family, and her uncles took care of her. She would spend two years with one uncle and then another two years with another uncle, and so on. changing families, and schools as well as friends. I think my mom became a burden to her uncles, and to an extent they wished her to get married as soon as possible regardless of her age (this is what my mom thinks). Indeed, she got married to my dad. When she got married, she had already passed standard eight (8). My dad took her to tertiary to further her studies at teachers’ college. My mom holds a Primary Teachers’ Certificate (PTC). It was not easy for my dad, because family members started talking, saying how can he take his wife to school while he is not educated. I was young at that time, but I could hear what relatives said. Most of them were not happy… saying what if my mom leaves my dad after getting her qualification. I don’t how my mother convinced my dad to pursue her studies. I do not know how she managed that, but she did. For this, I will always cherish my dad for not being selfish. My mom completed her qualification and came back as a qualified teacher. She worked hard as a teacher to provide for us all. My family was well respected, and
many people in the neighborhood thought that we were rich. I think because my mom was a teacher. We were not rich, but we lacked nothing as compared to other families, because my mom could afford to buy basics needs for the family, but we were not rich…. No… she was a hard worker, she will come home late from work, help us with our homework, and sometimes on Fridays I know that I must help her carry learners’ books home… she marked learners’ books even on weekends… she never rested.

My mom played a huge role in my life even though she lost her parents at a younger age, she never settled for less. She grew up in a very difficult circumstance, but she never gave up on herself. Up-to-date, I don’t know how my mom managed to convince my dad so that she can further her studies. My mom left us with my dad to better herself and knowing well that everyone will benefit from qualification. She became a teacher against all odds. She is an inspiration to me; I mean even now.

5.3.2. Professional life

I began my teaching career by enrolling at nearby Teachers’ College (Kwena Moloto) for a three-year diploma in Limpopo province. I therefore hold Secondary Teachers Diploma (SPTD). I never further my studies. I started working as a secondary school teacher in my childbirth community and taught there for 5 years. I then moved to another secondary in another community, and teach there for another six years. Then I was appointed an HOD in primary school, two years later I was appointed primary school principal. I wanted a higher level principalship post.

My former principal was my inspiration to become a leader. The principal discovered me in my early years of teaching. It was during staff meeting when the principal requested teachers to join the SMT, and no one came forth. Later during the week, the principal approached me personally to join the SMT members. I didn’t want to join the team because, firstly, I didn’t know what I was getting myself into. Secondly, I thought the principal was referring to senior teachers in the school who were more experienced than me.

When I decided to join the SMT members, I was assigned duties such administration of grade 12 examinations, writing weekly summary registers for both learners and teachers, helping with time-tableing etc. I have learned a lot by volunteering in the SMT. To me my former principal was a
father-figure who helped me gained confidence faster in my teaching career. He was always impressed by how well I executed my duties and handled other administrative matters.

I still remember how my former principal encouraged and motivated. He said to me; mam, you must not spend five years as a level one educator, you are destined to be a school principal and even a circuit manager. This made me feel as if I did not belong in the lower level of the teaching profession. This also made me aspire for leadership especially in my early years of teaching. Whenever promotional posts were advertised, I made sure that I submitted my applications. I didn’t wait for someone to shift from the post like most female teachers do; they wait for internal posts. As long as I have the resources to apply, I applied, there are no boundaries for me. I then moved to another secondary school away from my community for another 10 years. Then later, I was appointed HOD at a primary school and two years later I was appointed principal of another primary school. Then realizing that the principal post level at that school was low I decided to apply for another post at a secondary school, higher post levels.

5.3.3. Contributing factors to successful school leadership

In this section, Norah explains factors that contribute to her successful school leadership:

5.3.3.1. Leadership experience

When I took over the leadership of this school, I was more concerned about keeping the engine running, making sure that the school is operating well daily. I started as a manager; you know I am responsible for many areas in the school. What dominated my mind was to do things in the right way. As a school leader, I am responsible for looking after human and physical resources, curriculum, finances etc. these duties and responsibilities are so many that … you get overwhelmed sometimes. It is not easy to handle all at once. What I did was to assess the areas that needed more attention, and I prioritizes them. The areas that need urgent attention and improvement for the school to be effective and efficient. What I also found helpful was my professional experience that I accumulated while working as an HOD in my previous school. This assisted me a lot, especially in curriculum management. Experience is the best teacher, so they say. Becoming an SMT member has boosted my confidence as well as my leadership experience.

I never thought of becoming a school principal in my life, until I started teaching. Within six months of my teaching career, I was inspired to lead. I was asked to volunteer in the SMT, young
as I was, and inexperienced I was prepared to learn about school leadership. At first, I was not sure what to decide. I asked myself a question, why me? I showed interest and took action to equip myself for future leadership. Although it took me fifteen years before I could lead a school, but when the opportunity came, I was well prepared. Fully armed and excited about it. I was appointed HOD, then a school principal in primary school and then secondary school principal. I never served as deputy-principal in my career. I don’t know how to deputise. It all started in my first year of teaching that I was so inspired to lead.

5.3.3.2. Creating a vision

When you take control of a school, as a school principal you must have a vision, instill a sense of purpose, and ensure unity. You make people realize the purpose of who they are, and why there here at work. When I arrived at this school, I gave them my core verse 1Peter 5:3, “We are the shepherd of the flock”, just to make them feel that they have a duty to perform. I wanted my colleagues to know who they were, and what as a school want to achieve. As a shepherd you cannot leave the flock go astray. A teacher is a shepherd and therefore, he or she must be concerned about the learners and their well-being.

Human beings are so unpredictable. Mam, I was once a teacher; I know that when dealing with teachers you must know the policies, quote and implement them. I recall when I came to the school, we argued with my colleagues about the seven hour working conditions which states that teachers have to work for seven hours. They were right, but they overlooked the lawful instruction in the Employment of Educators Act of 1998. What shocked me was that by 14:30 some teachers were ready to leave the school yard; no extra- curricular and co- curricular activities, nothing to offer… is school out. I had to put a stop to all this, by reminding them of work ethic. I asked them a question; Is teaching your job or your work, because if it’s your job, then it means you don’t care about anything else except your salary. A job is an exchange of money. If teaching is work, then you will expect to see the outcomes”. I asked them questions but did not want answers from them, I wanted to tell them what teaching is according to my perspective. I still remember my lecturer from college saying that “a teacher must have a burning desire to see the outcomes at the end; satisfactory or excellent one”. So, I also expected teachers here to start worrying about the overall performance of learners. To end the meeting with my staff I said to them; I therefore lawfully instructing you that these learners need more time to perform, please go and check your results,
think about how best you can help your learners perform better. Knowing how teacher are, I didn’t want to impose on them on what was to be done, but also wanted to show them that they are also part of the problem learners are not performing, and everyone must think about the intervention strategies that we can embark on as a school for better results.

5.3.3.3. Disciplined learners

When I joined the school the learner academic performance was not pleasing at all. I had to remind my co-worker how good the school used to be. In my analysis of the school in general, I realized that there were two major concepts which were fading; discipline and excellence. For the learners, discipline was a big problem, with regard to how they presented themselves. Many times, I would always find learners outside the classrooms and not attending their lessons. Both boys and girls had different funny hairstyles, girls with big braids and boys with dreadlocks which looks untidy. Proper school uniform was compromised. I strongly indicated to them that they must change how they look, because how they look or appear determines how they behave. This was a big concern in my mind because it means there was a need to review learners ‘code of conduct. I called their parents to a meeting and main item on the agenda was learners’ code of conduct. I told them my concerns about learner’s behaviour and how this could be remedied. She was happy that most parents supported the idea and they signed the amended code of conduct. Only one clause was inserted in the code of conduct, which was all learners must cut their hair short, no braids, no dreadlocks and no funny hairstyles. All hair must be manageable. This was not easy especially in the first year, because some parents were not convinced that appearance could not affect learner performance negatively. I had to caution parents that secondary school learners especially teenagers behave differently when they feel different from others, they get distracted easily.

5.3.3.4. Classification of learners into learning abilities

The other major decision I took at this school was to classify learners according to their learning abilities. I decided on this strategy after releasing that learner are given extra lessons during weekend and in the afternoons, and I think I started to worry because learner performance was no longer improving… you know…. It was as if as a school we have reached a plateau… The main purpose for the school to embark on this process was to get all learners pass especially in grade 12 classes. My idea was, we start we grade 12 and see what happens… and then take the process to other grades gradually. This classification of learners was aimed at benefitting the learners because
when they are in their learning abilities groups, they will get the relevant and necessary attention they need. This too created discontent among teachers and parents; their concern was that I am discriminating learners which will cause other learners especially those with lower levels of learning abilities to be demoralized. According me, this programme will be of great assistance to teachers when they do their teaching planning and preparations. Teachers will move a faster pace with good and smart learners because they will be able to know what to emphasize more and vice versa. More attention will be allocated to learners at high risk of failing the grade. Teachers will know best how to assist these learners to achieve at least a level 2.

5.3.3.5. Empowerment of others

When I arrived at the school, I found that the school is operating with two HODs. The two departments, science and humanities were not operating effectively, because there had no one to lead them. I had to call all senior educators to volunteer and act as HODs in the meantime. Only two ladies stepped forward to assist in the School Management Team., but they told me that they were afraid and when I looked at them, I could see that indeed they were scared…. I mentored them throughout until one day one of them said to me: “thank your mam, for your guidance and help…. I think I am now ready to be an HOD… I am just waiting for post to be advertised…. I cannot wait any longer…

Educators in this school are not used to being delegated tasks to perform…many times when given the tasks to do they were not willing to do. Until one day I had to tell them my story. Some teachers thought I was boastful, but I was not, only God could tell that my intentions were good. In telling my story I wanted to motivate them to learn how to do administrative duties, to prepare them for their future leadership. I told them that I was appointed a school principal without having served as a deputy – principal before. When you do assigned duties for HOD you learn a lot such that you can lead the school, when I assign you tasks it’s not that I cannot do the task myself, but I want to empower you. I became a School Management Team member within six months of my teaching career. My former principal motivated me, when he said “you must not spend more than five years as a level one teacher because you are destined to be a school principal and a circuit manager”. I also used the same words to motivate others. These words created a burning sensation for me to make my dream come true, at the end here I am a school principal today. I also told my colleagues that by the time I leave the school, they should be ready to take over and run the school or rather
have their own schools to run somewhere. Since then, most teachers are willing to step in and assist with examinations, sports, and time- tabling. I helped teachers to see the leadership potential in themselves that they were not aware of. I am very happy that some of my colleagues work hard on their potentials. It feels good to have unleashed leadership potentials in both learners and teachers, and I am very proud.

5.3.3.6. Establishing working relationships

When I came here, I knew that not everybody will support me, for various reasons. I am a woman, and I am new to the school. Sometimes people are scared of changes. Having a new principal or senior can instill fear in some people. All I wanted from my colleagues was a good working relationship, and nothing more. I am not here to make friends… NO... we are co-workers… I mean the main reason we are here is the learners. So, building good working relationships was key aspect if I am to succeed as a principal. I wanted to win them to my side. I respect my colleagues; I don’t gossip about any teacher. I listen to all teachers’, even those who did not like me, the bible says we must also love our enemies. I do not have a favourite teacher, because I have learnt a lot from mentor that if you want to lead and manage the school effectively and efficiently one must be consistent and fair; having favourite teachers can actually make you lose control of the school. Some people are observant, you can simply lose the respect and trust of all stakeholder in the school community if you are bias. Again, as a leader you must be patient with everyone, from learner, teacher, parent and support staff. Just be patient. I think these also helped me build good relationship with some of the teachers., especially those who are problematic.

5.3.3.7. Providing Learning, Teaching and Support Material (LTSM)

Learner performance at this school was very poor when I join the school, it was in February. It was a worrying factor for me. At first, I individually called grade 12 subject teachers to my office together with their seniors, not to account but to support and listen to the challenges they encounter in their subject. I joined the school in February and was not interested in making teachers account for previous year results. All I needed was to establish what challenges they encountered, and how best the school can help in addressing those challenges.

It didn’t feel right to make teachers account for poor results, it wouldn’t be fair to them and myself. Teachers are creative when it comes to defending themselves. I didn’t want that… I was not there,
so why worry about the past. All I needed was all of us to start working on a clean slate. I strategize well in my planning, and made sure all problems were eradicated, for example if learners were short of textbooks, stationery for teacher and everything the teachers demanded; I requested the SGB to purchase every item that teachers needed and the SGB delivered on this matter. I knew it in my heart that when their demands are all met, they would have no reason whatsoever not to produce good results. The whole process of individual meeting with teachers was my plan to put pressure and instill a sense of accountability in what they do. The mood in the school changed, because from the meetings held teachers understood that I meant business. I think they knew that if they do not produce good results they will have to account, and many of them did not want that. Teachers were serious about their work, everyone wanted good results from their learners…. honestly, I do not have problems of teachers who want to be pushed, except for the accounting teacher. (Will tell you about him later).

5.3.3.8. Patience

I had problems with an accounting male teacher who was on regular basis absent from work, even when present he will not attend learners. This teacher was teaching grade 10 to 12. Commerce learners were fewer than those in both science and humanities. I still don’t understand how I developed some patience towards him. Maybe, it was because I know that he was a good teacher, I observed him teaching, shooh! you’ll love what he is doing, and even leaners confirmed this. So, I call him to my office on regular basis, sit him down and show him his accounting results in comparison to other subjects. I did thievery term after results were analysed, until the teacher changed, he was seldom absent, and more committed to his work. As I speak right now accounting results are the best in the school; last year four accounting learners from this school were awarded best learners in the province. I am very proud of this, and how he made a turnaround…. very proud of him. When I join the school everyone in the school badmouths him to me, they wrote him off; saying he is liability to the school, and I must get rid of him because he is the one pulling the school down with his poor accounting result. I am happy that I did not take their advice, I believe in second chance. It worked out well and I am very proud of myself and the accounting teacher.

5.3.3.9. Motivating others

As part of the school culture, learners in this school are motivated throughout the year for excellent performance academically and for extra-mural activities. Learners are motivated and awarded
prizes for outstanding behaviour, discipline, leadership and excellent participation in different sporting codes. 2020 was a difficult year ever in the country and in the world, because of the Covid-19 pandemic. This has brought so much confusion even to the leaners. Grade 12 learners here started panicking especially because of the cancellation of term two activities such as June examinations. As learners were busy preparing for trial examinations, I could sense that the learners were not confident enough as compared to those of the previous years. So, I organized the district director to come and address them. I know that the school is planning a farewell celebration for them following covid-19 ground rules, just after their trial examinations. But I felt it in my heart that they needed some motivation, maybe from an LDOE official just for reassurance. This was done before they sit for preparatory examinations in August.

5.3.3.10. Leading by example

I always lead the way, so that others may see how things are done, and that things are possible. If you want teachers commit to their work, and honour their lessons, monitor extra-curricular, you must lead the way. I offer support throughout the year, monitor afternoon and weekends studies. I compromise my time and family time in most cases just to step in, and monitor grade 12 prep time. I did not go home this weekend because most teachers are committed. I will see my daughter on Monday afternoon. I am always the first person to arrive at school, and the last to leave the school premises. I am never late for work or for any departmental activities. I also encourage my colleagues to be earlier than expected when they are scheduled to attend departmental meetings and workshops. Yes, they must be there earlier so that they can relax and get themselves ready for the meeting, because when they come back, they must report to me in writing and also to their colleagues in their various department. At first, they did not like it. I mean reporting to me and their colleagues, but now it's no longer an issue. It is part of our culture… My colleagues know that when I am not around due to departmental commitments, the next day I report to them unless if it was for personal commitments.

I don’t think gender affect my working life as a woman principal. I have been a principal before and I know that there is nothing scary in leadership. I never doubted myself in life. Never…. I know that I am a capable leader and I can meet stakeholders’ expectations, I prepare well in advance for all my meetings, and will always use departmental policies as my instrument to succeed; so, I am not afraid to take risks and use my imagination where possible. I never attended
any meeting empty-headed and empty -handed; because I know exactly what I want for this school.

5.3.3.11. Learning from others

The other thing that helped me to succeed is reading what other successful leaders do in their school, so I copy from others and see if it can also work for our school. Most of the practices these leaders apply in their schools have helped me to take this school where it is today. I have participated in many research on school leadership, and at the end I always request the researchers to send me a copy of their final dissertation/thesis. [She laughs] My colleagues do not like taking part in research project, because they it consumes a lot of their time. I like being a participant, for one reason, I know that some school managers can benefit from my experiences… I have benefitted from other women’s lived experiences, and I also believe that as a person you never stop learning new things. Even if the school is successful, there could other areas that I would still need some improvement on…. You know just listening to other colleagues relating their experiences is nice… and…. New ideas and leadership styles and strategies they adopt fascinate me. It also keeps me updated as to what is happening in other secondary school, and to be in a better position to evaluate my leadership and management styles and improve where possible.

5.3.3.12. Passion for leadership

I have passion for leadership and management… I desire to succeed in my calling, and this is what drives me… the desire to succeed. I am successful. I now know how to improve my success as a school manager. …because you can excel in one or two areas and still find that in other areas the school lags behind. The more you taste success the more you want more of it….in my language there is an idiom which goes like; sake la pelo ga le tlale” … just like rich people…they never say they are satisfied with their wealth; they accumulate more, but still want some more.

I wanted this desire in me to succeed not only as secondary school principal, but also as a woman principal…. There are few women leading secondary schools, even though is better than in past, we want more of them. I believe that if I succeed as a woman principal, young women teachers will look up to me as their role model, you know they would see me as their source of inspiration. Moreover, when you are appointed the principal of school and a secondary school for that matter…ehhh... there are certain expectations that you are required to meet… for example parents
and the community expect you to make their children pass, I also have expectations that I want other stakeholders to meet… when you are appointed you are seen as the hope for the community you will be serving. So, if I fail … it means everyone fails … even the community. I cannot afford to fail, especially failing learners. One reason I am appointed to this school is to make a difference in these learners, that my core business as a school principal … if cannot do that … I must resign … [laughter].

5.3.3.13. Common sense and wisdom

Sometimes as a leader, I use practical ideas and common sense to succeed in my roles and duties. To take actions, I don’t have to rely only on legislations and policies…. When resolutions were taken in a meeting, I do not wait, I act immediately and some decisions I take on spot … and I will explain to whoever at a later stage. As long as I could handle the situation before turning into a major problem. … as long as I know I am not contravening any act or legislation. There are many leadership styles that I know. what I can say is that some of them are outdated, because schools are changing, school change with time. I have used autocratic when I was new in the school, I had to show and make people work, but now… its different. Stakeholders know what they do, value their responsibilities and everyone is a team player…. Honestly. Now I can safely say I do let staff members do their work because there is trust, accountability and team work…. Yes, there are times when I do not lead, I sit back just to empower my colleagues, all I do is to listen to their demands and then provide the resources, to ensure effective teaching and learning take place. Teachers shout… mam… I would do this job better if I can have this, and that… as the manager I run around use whatever resources I have to make sure they get what they want, and in some cases, I must first consult with the finance committee for authorization… for example… in one of our staff meeting teachers recommended and requested that at least 3 smart board/interactive be purchased to cover content as fast as possible. I invited the facilitator to make a presentation to the entire SGB, and they made a deal on spot… instead of three they purchased 4 smartboards. One of my duties is just to serve others, provide so that the engine keeps running.

5.3.3.14. Courage and faith

As women leaders, we must be courageous and brave. Sometimes I feel as if you are under attack, stay calm especially when things are not going your way. When I am home alone in my bedroom, I feel like crying. I told myself that no teacher will ever see my tears…some experiences are
painful. When I am under attack, I always stay calm and put on a brave face. I am a Christian by
religion, and I believe that God has carried me throughout my life and career journey. Yooh, my
faith gives me strength especially in difficult times. When I was finally appointed principal of this
secondary school. I still recall people asked me if I will make it. I think most people were not just
asking me this question; “will you manage to lead the school?” I could sense that they doubted
me, maybe for some reasons that were unknown to me. Well … the school is in my village, where
I come from what most people say about it…. There were also many stories that I was not
interested in. It seems that people doubted if I was the right person to lead and manage the school.
I always have a simple answer for them; that whoever sent me there will make me succeed, there
is someone above who has sent me here for a purpose. Indeed, I just see things happening, I don’t
sweat… I just work smart… I thank God for this.

5.3.3.15. Taking my position as a school principal

I am a kind of a person who does not rush into making decision or actions. I always take my time
to observe how things are done especially when I came here as the principal. I was so relaxed, and
most teachers could not spot me. I think at some point they wanted to undermine me. Until one
day I call a staff meeting and tell them that I really appreciate their help in telling me the history
of the school, and the challenges we are facing as school, as well the solutions they suggested. I
told them I still need to investigate some of them and have facts before dealing with such
challenges. In the next meeting I reported my findings to all of them…. On that day I told them
this; it’s time to change, I know that change sometimes can be difficult, let’s start on new page so
that we can move to the next level. I also realized that they were so much cling to the old ways of
doing things, that was … at least according to me why the school was stuck in same level. I told
them, but humbly appealing to everyone to be ready to try some new systems. I could see that
many were happy and looking forward to new things, while some looked unimpressed. I was not
much worried, because some people are scared of change. Until you exercise your confidence
some people will take you advantage of you, undermine your decision and authority as a leader.
All I did was to take my position and also requested everyone to know their place. It does not
sound nice, but if you want to succeed, let everyone be aware of their roles and duties, in order to
avoid confusing roles.
This is how Norah says she succeed in her leadership and management roles; she has explained both internal and external factors that contribute to her being a successful leader.

5.3.4. Perception of successful school leadership?

According to Norah, successful school leadership entails the following:

5.3.4.1. Shared responsibility and decision making

Looking at the previous grade 12 results, everyone can see that these were not satisfactory. I asked my colleagues: What do you think can be done? This situation cannot remain like this. Immediately teachers started discussing and throwing in some suggestions. I wanted them to feel that they are part of the decision making in the school. At the end, they decided that extra time in the afternoon and during the weekends will benefit both the learners and teachers. Teachers will have ample time to complete the syllabus and learners more time to study on their own. That was what I wanted from my colleagues, I wanted them to spell it out for themselves. I believe that’s the way I won them on my side. If it’s their decision, and it was not imposed on them, they become fully committed to the decision taken. Whenever I have something in my mind, I always post it on our WhatsApp group, not because I do not have solutions to these challenges, but simply out of courtesy, to make them feel that they are part of the decision making in the school. They are valuable to the school because they also contribute to the success of the school. Teachers sometimes do not comply to any decision imposed on them; they can be against any form of authority. I was once a teacher, so I know exactly how they can behave. So, I engage them especially in matters that concern them and learners.

5.3.4.2. Team work

Hmmm- when I was appointed at this school, I always wanted to do get things done. I guess it was more about proving a point … that I can lead…. That I can actually make things happen. At first, I worried that all eyes were on me…and everyone is out there to check up on me, as to how I handle management issues and other leadership matters in general. So, I felt the pressure to perform, and not disappoint myself. Later, when I become more experienced, and have learned many things about leadership and management; I slowed down a bit. I used to instruct my
colleagues, but now I delegate more, I coach more and mentor others. That’s what I do now. The other thing that I wanted to do as a new leader was to be perfect, and sometimes it’s impossible when you work with others. I wanted to see some difference in the school within short space of time… that was so exhausting for me…. but now I have learned to relax and let things go, because I have people that are willing to work together. Over the year I have managed to build a strong team in this school, and this made my life a lot easier than before when I was still new. When you work as a team you, you learn to understand each other better, for example… I know that teacher x is good in presentation while teacher Y is hands-on…, and makes things happen… good in organizing…yes, it’s good because it makes me delegate well, and this makes me happy… I know that the assigned tasks will be well executed. Teamwork also gives members a chance to connect with each other, [She laughs] ….as team members we learn to feel for others, empathy automatically comes naturally, it develops faster and this enables us to work together and better as a team.

5.3.4.3. Consistency and listening to others

I am approachable… people don’t hesitate to open up to me with personal stuff, … they know that they can talk to me about anything… anything. I give myself sometime to listen to my colleagues, even if I cannot change their circumstances but I do listen… it means a lot to them…. it makes me happy because when people open up to me… it says something to me…, that they trust me as their leader. I am comfortable in my character… I believe in myself, and one of my strengths is that [laughing], I am not intimidated easily… not me…you know even where I have messed up. I prepared myself to account, where necessary I apologize… it does matter who it is… leaners, teachers or parents. I admit my mistake, apologize and move on…but I don’t allow anyone to do as they wish because I committed a mistake… not me, no one can just walk all over me. Sometimes teachers want to take advantage when a leader is wrong, they think that they can do as they wish. When I see something wrong done by anyone, I correct that immediately… I don’t wait for another day or any other time… because if I don’t address it on spot, others may do the same thing …. I address the problem on spot, to show others that the behavior is not accepted. I also demonstrate and show consistency at all times; I treat everyone the same, whether HOD, teacher or Deputy-principal… I treat them equally. I don’t want staff members to think that I practice favoritism.

5.3.4.4. Role modelling
Yes, I think I am modelling roles… when women hear about or see other women succeeding in their leadership roles, they get motivated and admire them. Some call me, especially those who aspire to lead…. just to share my story with them, I guess the question is what makes me successful in my leadership role? Well… I have served on various interview panel committee, and many times women have requested me to coach them on how to answer interview questions. I have been invited to many women’s leadership forums, conferences and workshops as a guest speaker. I have mentored many women principals and I still do. Many women are still scarred … joo… [facial expression getting serious], they are scarred even to apply for principal ship posts. They do have qualifications; and also meet application requirements, but have fear of failure. That’s what most women told me when I asked why don’t they apply for promotional positions. I always tell them that there is nothing wrong with failure, you fail… you learn from failure and then succeed. What I have observed is that those women do apply for promotional posts, and attend interviews but fail to meet the expectations of the interview panel. Some do exceptionally good. I think most women are not exposed to interviews. I always tell them not to be discouraged, because failing an interview does not mean that one cannot lead and manage a school…. NO… some people are just good in expressing themselves than others, but in a reality… [dololo … laughter].

OH…. one more thing that excites me is that women are now applying in numbers as compared to the previous years… but many of those applicants are in their early or mid-50’s…I have seen that during shortlisting processes… yaah, young women in their 40’ and 30s must apply and enjoy leadership positions while still energetic… as soon as they start working they must volunteer their services in all departments in the workplaces… , gain leadership experiences that are needed….there is no need to reach 50 to be a school principal.

5.3.4.5. Self-confidence

Leadership without confidence cannot be successful, you will resign in your first year. I repeat, you have got to lead with passion coupled with confidence, heh! Believe in yourself, in your decisions and plans as well. If you don’t believe in yourself, who do you expect to believe in you? No one… so it starts with the inner self. I thank God because I am an outspoken person. When there is a need to shout, I do so. When is time to explode I also do that, if this is what will make people listen or understand me, then be it? You know, I told you earlier on that when I got here everyone used to refer me to how the former principal performed his duties. I don’t know, but I
feel that it may be because I was new to the school, and was externally appointed. I did not like it… I took some time to act and make everyone to feel that I am here, you know… the principal is here and is in charge. It helped me a lot, because I was able to read everyone well…. Okay, maybe they wanted to help, because they think I did not know where to start. It was my plan, people coming into my office to tell me about teacher so and so…jooh all I did was to capture everything that was reported to me. [she laughs]

5.3.4.6. Learning from my mistakes

Successful school leadership according to me entails many things, it does not come easy, because along my leadership journey I have committed some mistakes, and I have also failed in some of plans and actions. However, I have learned a lot from my leadership experiences, every time I fail…. it’s a wakeup call for me. So, I grow from level 1 to level 2 and then get stuck at level 2, then move to level 3. I grow from my failures and other challenges; I do not give up… no! I have learned that, for one to lead successfully as a leader, one must come down to their level so that you can be on the same page with them. Doing the job itself is the most difficult part of leadership and management than most people think. It so challenging especially when dealing with human resources… people…can make leadership so challenging, and they can even make it difficult for you to achieve your goal.

5.3.4.7. Committed and dedicated staff

There is competition in this school; various departments and committees in this school compete for excellent results because I have introduced a special award for the best HOD, best teacher in the Department, and best department of the year. As a school we have secured a reliable sponsor, who donates a laptop, printer and smartphone to the recipients of these award every year. What a blessing this is to our school, this serves as motivation to all teachers. Teachers also held each other accountable in their departments. This system has encouraged subject teachers to assist each with topics they find challenging, hence they resort to team teaching especially in senior classes where subjects are divided into papers according to different topics. They also agree on the number of tasks to give to learners per week, class visit and submission dates for moderation of tests and marks. This is good for HODs because what she or he does is just to send teachers a reminder well in advance. Every teacher knows exactly what is expected from them. Roles and responsibilities are clearly explained; all is left is for teachers to work hard so that they achieve set
goals. It starts with HODs, then to teachers and then down to the learners. Learners are also encouraged to work hard and commit themselves to their studies in every way possible. I also encourage HODs and subject leaders to be consistent when carrying their duties and never compromised the standards set. Teachers know what to expect from their own colleagues, and support each instead of pointing fingers …. Teachers also do the same, display the same level of consistency to show how serious the school is in working towards achieving its vision and mission.

At this school there is no free time, teachers here work even during their break time, they offer assistance to learners in various ways, during afternoon and morning study as well as on weekends. Our school starts at 7h30 in Spring and Summer and finishes at 14h30, then 30 minutes break and then study time from 15h00 to 16h30. In autumn and winter, the school starts at 8h00 and finishes at 15h00. In summer, some teachers opt for morning lessons especially with senior classes, just to support learners in areas they find challenging to comprehend. Successful school is all about the educators who are highly committed and dedicated to their work. Teachers here know how to work from nothing, they know how to utilize the little resources at hand to produce good results. I am grateful for that.

5.3.4.8. A positive climate

I also think that a positive environment that we have created here is of great assistance, it helps in elevating or uplifting the morale of the school. When there is order in the school, stakeholders feel safe, learners also have no chance of misbehaving because they know that everyone in the school is vigilant and concerned about the repetition of the school. The culture here is that we care a lot about each other, because unaccepted behaviour will bring our school into shame. I believe that as a leader, I set the tone for the school and others will follow. Sometimes you don’t have to instruct people to do other things, such as respect. I respect everyone from learners to parents and teachers to support staff. I only teach learners how to respect each other, how to respect the school ‘s property and each other’s belongings. The learner leadership (RCL) practice what they preach and this helped me a lot, because they preach the school code of conduct to other learners. I am very proud of the RCL because, I no longer deal with many cases of theft, fighting and swearing at each other. When you enter this campus now you can see mutual respect from all stakeholders. The school is more welcoming, because there is order and safety. This makes teaching and learning
more effective and successful. I know that the school is successful when you see learners demanding more from their teachers.

5.3.4.9. Collaborative leadership style

I will say that 90% of my leadership style is collaborative, and 10% could be autocratic. I believe that the level of challenges determines my leadership style. When the going gets tough, I also get tougher, otherwise all hell will break lose. According to me, attitude also plays an important role in leadership especially when you are a woman leader. Women have their own character, they sometimes like showing off, imposing ideas on their subordinates and acting bossy. This will never work if you want to succeed as a woman leader.

5.3.4.10. Strategic planning

Teachers are here to teach and curriculum is the core business of the school. So, I engage all my colleagues in curriculum matters; we plan together and implement all decisions taken. The school that I am leading used to be a brand in the Limpopo province. My target is to restore the school and bring excellence back. I am very much aware that I cannot achieve this on my own. I need the SMT by my side and all other stakeholder to be on board. I believe that if we work as a team we are bound to succeed. We plan well in advance and set goals at the end of the year for the next academic year. It was not easy to engage them in curriculum planning, because teachers were not used to plan their lessons, they had no files. I had to tell them that if we are to succeed as a school, we cannot take shortcuts. I prepare the management plan and make sure that we honour it.

In her narratives, Norah’s successful school leadership is about shared responsibility and decision making, leadership style she uses, commitment and dedication of staff, teamwork, role modelling, listening and treating other fairly, curriculum planning and learning from your failures.

5.3.5. Leadership and management challenges

Leadership is never without challenges, just like any other leader Norah also encounter some leadership and management challenges. She explains the challenges in this manner:
5.3.5.1. First years of leadership

Sometimes when I assign teachers tasks they become slow in performing the tasks. If I see them delaying and moving slowly, I always step in and do the tasks myself. I remind them that I do know how to perform the assigned tasks, but I wanted to give them a chance to learn and acquired more skills. I want them to also learn, just like I learnt a lot from performing some delegated tasks. You learn best when you do new things, find ways to do tasks better on your own. That’s how we learn… not just to be teachers and leave the school without gaining anything from the school. I realized at a later stage that staff members here, are not used to being delegated some work. They are not used to it at all…

You know… during my first year of leadership I never had a peaceful staff meeting… there will a lot of interruptions from some teachers, while others are asking many irrelevant questions but the very same people do not offer solutions, but they act as opposition… There will be long discussions without resolutions… I think most of them did not know what else to do to vent their frustrations, staff meeting was their only place. There were some positives… even though some teachers were negative and sometimes had shown that… they never stopped doing their duties and responsibilities. I make sure that teaching and learning take place and without any interruptions. I also requested the class representatives to notify me if teachers miss their lessons.

It was not easy … lead and manage in the first years…. not easy at all…. At the end of the year three teachers left the school due to promotional post, two maths teachers and geography teacher, and these were good teachers. Some parents also withdrew their children from the school…. so many things happened within a short period of time. This was my situation for the first year, all I can do about other issues was just to pray about them. I knew that God is my strength in my weakness… but my husband was always there to comfort me in difficult times… he assured me that with time all will be well… I must just be patient. He used to say to me the dust and storm will settle…it can be storming for the whole season.

5.3.5.2. Uncooperative deputy principal

My relationship with my deputy- principal is not good at all. When principalship posts were advertised, he also applied for principalship post at this school since he was the acting principal. He acted as school principal in the same school but was not appointed the principal. So, we both
contested for the principal ship post in the interview, and I won the post and he lost. I think that he
is not healed from losing the post especially to a woman, and also because I was externally
appointed to the post.

The deputy-principal here is supposed to deputize me, but he is slow in doing assigned tasks.
Whenever I delegate him work to do, he always dragged his feet. He never says no to me, but I
could see with actions that he does not want to carry the duties assigned to him willingly. He waits
for me to demand the work first, and after some time he will submit the work done. I am very
worried that some staff members have noticed his actions. However, I am so thankful because they
are supportive, except for my deputy principal waits for me to push him which is not good. I always
say to staff; I want all of us to work amicably, including him. I told him I just want to recognize
him as my deputy, …. I do not delegate tasks to you because I do not know how to perform the
tasks. Anyway, I am happy that staff members are supportive, and the school is moving in the right
direction.

5.3.5.3. Dealing with the accounting teacher

I had problems with an accounting male teacher who was on regular basis absent from work.
Sometimes, even when he is present, he will not attend learners. The teacher was teaching grade10
to 12 classes. Commerce learners are always fewer that those in the science streams and
humanities. The way he was behaving, was so frustrating for me and the learners were behind. He
was good in his subject, so I developed patience towards him because I did not want to lose him.
When I joined the school, everyone told me about him saying that he was a liability to the school,
and therefore I must get rid of him because he is the reason the school is not performing. That was
not true, all subject teachers were under performing when I came here. However, when I checked
his performance from the previous years, I sensed that something serious could be bothering him,
because his accounting results were excellent. Then one day I decided to visit his class, and I was
so impressed, he was good with his subjects. Learners wanted to be taught by him. I called him to
my office the very same day, sit him and appreciated the best lesson I have observed in the entire
school. I was being honest. Then the teacher started coming to work every day. If he is absent, he
will notify me, and I was happy that things were coming together. At the end of the term,
accounting results were bad and SMT members were concerned, but I was not surprisingly. I
believed in the accounting teacher; I don’t know why. Then after the SMT meeting, I wanted to
call him as suggested by SMT members. I decided not to call him to my office. I wanted to give him a chance to catch up with his programme, and I knew that if I call him, he may feel too much pressure. Later, during the second term, I called him to my office not to make him account for poor results in term one, but to congratulate him for offering extra lessons to his classes, and already I could see that he was rectifying his wrongs. Some SMT members were not happy with me, saying that I am too lenient with him; of course, I was, because I believe in giving others a second chance. As I speak right now, the best accounting results in this district and province is from this school, yes, this school and from the very same teacher. I am very proud of him. Yes, patience helped me a lot in case. I nearly lost the best accounting teacher in the province. Thanks to me for being patient.

5.3.5.4. Role conflict

I had to admit that balancing the two is nightmare, because for one to run a school of this magnitude, I had to compromise myself and family. I have four kids, one is working, two at tertiary and the last-born doing grade 10 and staying with me. Now due to covid-19 lockdown restrictions all my children are home and I hardly see them. My last-born daughter who is in grade 10, said to me; “mommy, do you know that I don’t know you, when I woke up you are gone, when you arrive home, I am asleep”. You can just imagine how painful this was to me, … it was the truth; I am never there for my kids. To some extent I sometimes try to substitute my presence with material things and it not healthy for my children. Honestly speaking, I am never home with my family, this year it’s even worse because of covid-19.

She said that it is better because her husband is late, and therefore does not owe anyone an explanation. She doubted if she would have been this successful in her career if her husband was still alive. This what she says; “when I arrive home late, I don’t have to explain myself to anyone because my husband is not there” hey… men can be jealous sometimes. I do miss him, but it was going to be more difficult than it is now.

5.3.5.5. Unfilled HoD posts

I have been running the school for three years with acting HODs for maths and humanities. It was never easy for me because sometimes when teachers go an extra mile in their work they must be appreciated, words only are not enough they want some incentives especially in a school like this.
Sometimes these acting HODs will complain to me saying that they are not getting paid for doing extra work and saying they are tired. I always try by all means to encourage them not get tired because they are not doing it for me but for themselves. You know when one is acting in a post, it happens that sometimes people don’t take you seriously. One of them admitted to me that the work is too much and I had to help him where possible.

5.3.5.6. Leadership is too complex

To become a school principal is not an easy job; especially of a secondary school. The Department of Basic Education gives more attention to secondary schools than primary schools, because you know matric results count. The pressure is too much for secondary school principals than for primary. I was excited when appointed the principal here, but to get the job done in the first years was a nightmare for me. At one stage I wanted to quit; then I asked myself why in the first place I wanted to become a secondary school principal.

Furthermore, I listened to the inner voice within me and the answer was, to find a new meaning in my life. This is what keeps me going even under difficult situations, I told myself that I made a choice to become a school principal, no one recruited me, it was my sole decision and I must stick to my decision no matter. I have learnt that success does not come cheap. There is also an idiom in my language which goes like; “kodumela moepathutse, gobane ga go lehumo le le tšwago kgaufsi” meaning you must work hard and sweat before you can enjoy the benefits of your work. Yes… [laughter] yes… nothing comes cheap… the other thing that kept me going was that as years went by, the challenges were less and when I assessed the situation, the good outweighs the bad…. It was like [whooh!!!] there is light at the end of the tunnel. So, I must keep on working hard and removing all obstacles until this light is all over the tunnel, and everyone can see the road clearly from a distance…. This is not easy mam.

As a leader, you are not able to predict how your day will turn up, good or bad. Besides, hours are longer than I thought, because I come here early and leave late after everyone has left the school yard. Sometimes, when I sit down alone, I can see that the hours I spent at work as well as the sacrifices I make, do not match they salary I get monthly. Yes, it’s tough. Teaching is a calling and I love it… anyway.
Yes, the issue of gender does affect me... I can see how people treat me, they treat me as a woman principal and not as a school principal. The way they think about me, how they treat me, I some time feel that if I were a man, they would have treated me differently. The way they even challenge me, when I first came here, you’ll feel that it was intended to make me feel worthless. They doubted my leadership until you prove to everyone that you can lead, no one trust and believe in you as a leader. I believe that this is how we were brought up to think only men can lead, and women must be followers. This is wrong and unfair to the female population. I think that it will take years to change people’s mindset about women and their leadership capabilities. Its better now, women are in leadership positions, but it’s not enough. I always continue with my work and listen to what people say…. bad and good things if there are any. So, the issue of gender does not prevent me from doing my work. The worst part is that sometimes people do not want to take instructions from a woman, to my surprise even women teachers are sometimes insubordinate. All these have changed, when the school produce good and excellent results people start changing the tune, they comply, support and respect you as a leader. As I have said earlier on it does come cheap.....it would have cost you the energy and time.

5.3.5.7. Complaining parents

Successful leadership is all about being deeply committed to fulfilling the school vision and mission, it’s about teachers who are willing to go extra mile for the school, how teachers show their love towards the school and learners in different ways such as coaching learners, disciplining them when they go astray, and hold them accountable. Sometimes when I look at teachers, I could tell they mean business, and are serious about their work. Some parents, especially parents of learners who are struggling academically, always complain about this one teacher that he is incompetent. When you investigate you find out that sometimes learners are at fault. Some parents cannot discipline their children, and when they see that they fail to do their part; all they do now is to shift the blame.... So and so hates my child, etc. When a parent complains about a teacher, I tell the parent to come and see me in a week’s time. I know that I would have had enough time to investigate the matter, and collect the relevant data such as checking on the teacher’s work, checking progress, learners’ work book and interview some learners in the same class, just to get my facts right as well as talking to the teacher about the allegations. I am parent, and I know that parents sometimes can be over protective. When the parent come back, I tell him or her my
findings…. In most cases, it is the learner who is at fault, in a sense that they do not write their work, come late for classes, not attending extra lessons, etc. In this way parents learn to be objective and to think twice before coming to school to complain about teachers. I have also appealed to all parents during parents meeting to help and support the school in helping their children do well. Some complaints are not worth reporting.

Parents sometimes want to show off that they know the higher level of structure in the education department. When I decided to change the code of conduct for learners, I knew that it was not going to be easy but I never suspected that parents will report me to provincial education legislature. It took me by surprise that I was called to a meeting to explain why I violated learners right to express themselves in doing hairstyles they want. Nothing was going to make me change the decision I made …nothing … I banked on the support of the majority of parents. However, I won the case against a group of parents who were not in favor of some changes I made in the learners’ code of conduct.

5.3.6. How do I know I am a successful leader?

The question posed to Nora was, how do you know that you are successful leader? This is her response:

5.3.6.1. Excellent academic results

I believe that when learners’ academic performance improve, is an indication that the school is effective. This according to me, is the number one indicator that a school is successful. Matric results had greatly improved over the years. Again, you know when learners fail, it means I am failing them, I am failing the whole community. I try by all means to prove to myself and the community out there, that I can do it, and it happened. 100 % pass rate and 80 % bachelors, who can complain? This is what makes me the happiest principal, making learners pass well. It’s now five years the school has been obtaining 100 % pass rate not only for grade twelve but also for other grades. All stakeholders are all happy and now everyone in the school understands why classification is important. Last year, 2019 the school got 98 bachelor pass and 98% pass rate in grade 12 results. At the end of the year, we set goals for the coming year; we use the checklist to assess or evaluate our progress, thus if goals set were attained. Learners and teachers are reminded at the beginning of the year to carry the school vision and mission in their hearts throughout the
year. Everything we do throughout the year will be striving towards the set goals. This year we aimed at 100% pass rate and at least 90% bachelor pass. At the end of each year, I call staff members to a curriculum meeting to verify if the set goals were attained. We use the checklist drawn collectively at the beginning of the year; to check every aspect of the curriculum, governance, extra-curricular etc., and also do planning in the last quarter of the academic year for the next year. I make sure that we do this in advance, this will assist greatly when we do School Improvement Plan for the following year. Every department in the school is expected to compile a full report.

5.3.6.2. Disciplined learners

When I see learners disciplined, I become positive because I know that they know what we as a school expect from them; this will lead to better, … then good and the end, excellent performance. Honestly speaking, I am very grateful for the improvement here. I mean not all learners are performing excellently but at least they are all on board, and the comply and adhere to the school’s code of conduct at all costs. I have said to the leaners when I arrived here, and I will continue to say to them that one’s appearance determines one’s behaviour, I am so happy that the learners are singing this as a slogan when entering the school premises; they carry it within their hearts and I also believes that they do the same even outside the school yard. I always encourage teachers here to teach our learners in totality, prepare them for the outside world… that what’s we aim for.

5.3.6.3. Recognition and respect

The circuit managed has officially thanked me for stabilizing the school. The school’s condition was not conducive for effective teaching and learning before my arrival at the school. The circuit manager had to work from the school just to oversee how things were heading. She said to me; Mam, thank you for instilling order in this school, how you manage that I really don’t know”, but thanks for all your efforts”. Ever since I came to this school some parents confirmed that their children have changed in their behavior, and I am very proud of that. Some mentioned that they now can see the difference between learners of this school and those in our neighbourhood. This is what I have always believed in that when learners become self-disciplined, then you know that the school has law and order. I am happy about that, because from a distance everyone can see that our learners are disciplined; not only here at school but they also take it home. Sometimes, I could see the way parents talk to me, I feel respected. I feel honoured to work here.
Moreover, parents are very impressed with how the school yard has been changed. The school environment also looks pretty because the SGB installed a welcome signage board, car ports for the staff and visitors, as well as renovated the reception area in the administration block. The whole area is now welcoming.

5.3.6.4. Support from stakeholders

Why I became a principal, there were many reasons for me to become a principal. The major one was to make a difference in the lives of learners and the communities from which they come from. I do not regret becoming a teacher, and a school principal at the end., because teaching is meaningful to me… every day when I go to work, I get a new meaning in my job. I am grateful for that. I know that I had impacted positively on the learners in this school, it may not be seen immediately because it is a life time process…. It may take time I know that the results are good. You know when young boy and girls are now professionals, they come to plough back in the community ... it is such a great feeling. Some bring donations to the school and also motivate current learners… telling them about their professions, and it is wonderful. They come together for reunion celebrations…it is a good sign that they cherish some of the good memories about the school. This also shows that they are also proud about it, and still want to be associated with the school. People want to be part of success stories and not failure. This makes me happy when former learners sometimes call me and other teachers to render their services in various ways. You know that the school is on the right track when you start seeing all stakeholders frequently visiting the school, and asking; mam how can we assist, please shout when you need anything. The circuit manager, district director, business sectors and parents demanding admission for their children at this school is an indication that the school is successful.

Norah says that when learners are self-disciplined, they pass well; and stakeholder supportive; its indication that the school is doing well and succeeding in achieving its goals.

5.3.7. Advice to other women leaders

Below is how Norah advise other women principals and those who aspire leadership.

As a woman and a secondary school principal of a successful, I feel proud and happy. I am one of the first women in the district to lead a secondary school, I was the first woman in my circuit. So yaah [with a huge smile] … it feels nice. Well, it has some negatives and positives…. okay let me
start with the positives of when you succeed as a woman principal, but when you fail it means all women fail, and worse part is that other women who aspire for leadership positions may be discouraged of frightened. If I succeed, then I can serve as a role model for others. There is one thing that I have seen, which is that even when you do good as a woman leader, you’ll never run away from gender stereotypes…sometimes I don’t feel negative stereotypes…..especially when things are under control… but one mistake, it’s like people are waiting for you to fail… then you hear some disturbing talks such as …. “Women are like that… they can’t lead…. not competent… it’s not surprising she has done that, she is a woman, what were you thinking? I sometimes feel that some people do things intentionally just to test me how knowledgeable I am, and just to see how I will react.

The advice I would give to women out there is that as women and especially women leaders we must watch each other’s’ back instead pulling each other down. Some women fail in their leadership roles simply because they lack support, women support means a lot to those in leadership positions. Another thing, for women who aspire for leadership positions must also attend as many women leadership forums, conferences and workshop as possible. I believe that through these programs women can get opportunities to network and also learn a few skills, etc. These will be of great help to them. When they do this, they stand a good chance of becoming better candidates in future for leadership positions. So as a woman principal, I am very proud to be paving the way for young women so that they can follow in my steps…

I have been a principal before and I know that there is nothing scary in leadership. I never doubted myself in life. I know that I am a capable leader and I can meet stakeholders’ expectations, I prepare well in advance for all my meetings, and will always uses departmental policies as my instrument to succeed; so, I am not afraid to take risks and use my imagination where possible. I never attended any meeting empty-headed and empty handed; because I know exactly what I want for this school. Gender stereotypes do exist, just be aware, but don’t focus on those otherwise you will lose focus.

I told myself that no teacher will ever see my tears…some experiences are painful. When I am under attack, I always stay calm but still put on a brave face. I am a Christian by religion, and I believe that God has carried me throughout my life and career journey. Yooh, my faith gives me strength especially in difficult times.
When I was finally appointed principal of this secondary school. I still recall people asked me if I will make it. I think most people were not just asking me this question; will you manage to lead the school? I could sense that they doubted me, maybe for some reasons that were unknown to me. Well … the school is in my village, where I was born so heard what most people say about it…. There were also many stories that I was not interested in. It seems that people doubted if I was the right person to lead and manage the school. I always have a simple answer for them; that whoever sent me here will make me succeed, there is someone above me who has sent me here for a purpose, my God. Indeed, I just see things happening, I don’t sweat, I just work smart.

The other advice I would like to give my fellow women principals is to acknowledge their shortfalls, if they want to be successful. No one is perfect, the minute you do this, people around you will embrace you. The other problem I find with women principals is that they always want to show off, be loud unnecessary. Leadership is about sacrifices, for the learners. Women principals must take leadership as a calling.

I am successful school principal today, because of my mentor. Mentors are very important, because I have learnt so many things about leadership from them., such as strategies to deal with challenges; and unwritten rules of schools. So, as women leaders we cannot survive without mentorship.

According to Norah, women principals must have self-confidence, acknowledge their weaknesses, seek mentors, have a sense of purpose, be brave and courageous, and however be aware of gender stereotypes because they still exist.

5.3.8. Summary

Women principals in study have spoken, they narrated their experiences from childhood years to adulthood; from being teachers to HOD until they were appointed school principals of secondary schools. The narratives presented in this chapter have successfully responded to the research sub-question which are as follows:

(a) What are the contributing factors to women principals’ successful leadership?
(b) What is the perception of women secondary school principals of successful school leadership?
(c) What are the challenges of successful women principals?
(d) How do women principals overcome the challenges they encounter?
(e) How do women principals know that they are successful?
(f) What can be done to assist women to succeed?

In the next chapter the narratives of women principals will be analysed and interpreted through the use of theoretical framework; Capability Approach of Sen (1999), Nussbaum (2000) and Walker et al (2010). This will assist me in exploring and understanding how women principals have developed into successful secondary principals in rural schools.
CHAPTER 6
ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF NARRATIVES

6.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of data collected through the narratives of the participants. I used the theory of Capability Approach (CA) as a lens for this study because the CA focuses on people’s capabilities on what they are able to do, and to be on the quality of life; and removing the obstacles in their lives so they have more freedom to live the kind of life that, upon reflection, they have a reason to value. This section interprets data presented in chapter five, and shows how women principals developed their capabilities throughout their lives. Sen (1999:45) defines a basic capability as the “ability to satisfy certain elementary and crucially important functionings up to a certain level”. This also refers to the freedom to do some things considered necessary for survival and to avoid any serious deprivation. Nussbaum (2000a) maintains that the basic capabilities acquired during childhood serve as a foundation for the development of capabilities in adulthood. The emerged themes in this study are as follow: development of human capabilities, agency, resources, conversion factors, capability set for leadership and management, constraints and strategies of women principals.

6.2. Development of the capabilities of the women principals: from childhood to early adulthood

This section is based on the assumption that capabilities developed early during early childhood and schooling serve as a foundation for in later stage of one’s professional life. According to Sen (1999:18), development is “the expansion of the capabilities of people to lead the kind of lives they value and have reason to value”. Nussbaum (2000a) posits basic capabilities acquired during childhood are fundamental and needed for more complex capabilities in adulthood. This section discusses both the social and educational paths of the lives of two women secondary school principals in South African rural schools, as participants to discover how they developed their capabilities during their childhood and school periods, which in turn influenced how they function in their leadership and management roles.
The section also interprets data presented in chapter five and shows how women principals developed their capabilities throughout their lives. It is important to understand how the participants in this study were able to develop as human being, because human development is central to CA. The interpretation is guided by Nussbaum’s (2000a) central list of basic capabilities which are emotions, practical reason, affiliation and senses, knowledge, imagination and thought, and bodily integrity. This chapter elaborate how women principals were able to develop their capabilities, especially from their early childhood until their adulthood years. A capability set that was formed in early childhood years, can underpin a woman’s future functioning as woman principal in this study include being able to form affiliations, being able to control one’s emotions, being able to reason and having basic educational skills.

6.2.1. The development of affiliations

According to Nussbaum (2000a), the basic capability of affiliation plays an important role in promoting freedoms. Even though Sen’s CA is criticized for concentrating more on individuals than on groups and aspects that bind people together. Sen explains that his CA regards individuals as “quintessentially social creatures” (Sen, 2002:81). In other words, the way individual human beings think, make choices and act cannot be separated from the society in which they live. Individual human being’s freedoms are strongly influenced by the social arrangements as per society, and therefore freedom is also “quintessentially a social product” (P.81). The context in which individual human beings are brought up in play a vital role in how they think and make their decisions regarding life choices.

Sen’s (1999) CA emphasises that our relationship with others determines our identity. He further highlights that, “while our sense of identity depends on the inescapable relatedness to others, there is still room for individual choice and freedom. “The point at issue is not whether any identity can be chosen, but whether we do have choices over alternative identities or a combination of identities, and perhaps more importantly substantial freedom on what priority to give to the various identities they may simultaneously have” (Sen, 2000:327). This section highlights how women principals interacted with those close to them, in their family or various backgrounds, such as mentors and role models, and further discusses how these interactions had played a role in who they have become successful women principals. The first affiliations revealed in the narratives of
women principals is that they were able to “live with and live towards others”, is shown with how they interacted with family members.

The following extracts from narratives highlight ways in which women principals experienced their affiliations in their formative years.

I was raised by both parents…. I remember that I used to play with my siblings because my dad never wanted his children to play in the street. My dad believed that he had enough children who can play together, therefore we had no reason to go outside the home yard (Norah).

I grew up in a religious family, whereby prayer, praise and worship were practised and not compromised. I remember that as a family we would sing and dance together… it would be my dad who would always lead us in singing even though he would not dance but he encouraged us to dance for the Lord. As a family we prayed together before we went to bed on a daily basis, and every Sunday we would attend church together… no compromise on these two issues. I mean if you wanted to be in good terms with my dad…. attending church was a must, not an option. [and then laughter] (Norah).

I grew up seeing my mother working tirelessly with no one to help her take care of her four children. So, I had to help her with some of the duties, sometimes cooking and doing laundry. When my mom went to fetch some wood, it meant that I had to cook and wash the dishes. If time allowed, I would go to fetch some water, especially on weekends when my dad was always away, and she was just on her own…. (Violetta).

As the oldest child of the four children at home, I was also responsible for taking charge of some duties at home such as making sure that dishes were washed and that my siblings ate when they came back from school and changed the school uniform into casual clothes, just helping my mother because she was a full-time primary school teacher, and my dad was always busy doing farming, especially during raining seasons.

My mom was a hard worker, she would come home late from work, helped us with our homework, and sometimes on Fridays I knew that I had to help her carry learners’ books home… she marked even on weekends…. she never rested… if it was not work, it was family… us

When they came back, they expected food to be ready, and that is how I helped at home…. that my dad would say that I had to remain at home and take care of her while other family members went to church (Norah).

Women principals in their childhood “played with siblings”, “prayed, sang and danced together”, and attended church together. Norah learned to do things with others from her childhood experiences. This serves as a foundation for her to know that when she functions as a school principal she would know better, thus, working with others to achieve desired goals. Norah was also raised by both parents who taught her family values such as working together and respecting family values. Thus, honouring family prayer meetings and attending church were crucial forms of affiliation for Norah. She was able to learn that social interactions meant discipline, and that sometimes as a person she would not do as pleased, but to do the right things that her family,
especially for her parents wanted. It was through the social affiliation in her family that she learnt that there were values and rules that govern how one had to lead their lives. Norah was able to live with her family members, both her parents and siblings, and obeyed the family rules set by her parents.

Narratives of women participants also show that women principals were able to “live towards others and show concern for others”. Narratives show that through family interaction they were able to take some leadership responsibilities in their childhood years. They learned so much from the roles they played in their families as young girls, which has influenced their leadership capabilities as successful secondary school leaders. Their roles have served as a good foundation for increasing their leadership skills. Their roles as first-born daughters in their families, according to their culture they were taught to be responsible in a sense that they were expected to do house chores just like their mothers did. They grew up being socialised into their gender roles of taking care of others, as well as doing household chores such as cleaning, cooking, as well as looking after their younger siblings.

This is in agreement with Sen when explaining that his CA regards individuals as “quintessentially social creatures” (Sen, 2002:81). In other words, the way individual human beings think, make choices and act cannot be separated from the society in which they live. An individual human being’s freedoms are strongly influenced by the social arrangements as per society, and therefore, freedom is also “quintessentially a social product”. The context in which individual human beings are brought up in play a vital role in how they think and make their decisions regarding life choices.

Both Norah and Violetta learnt to work hard and be responsible not only for themselves, but for other members of their families. It was though their affiliation within their families that they learnt to interact and become responsible members too. They both helped their mothers, and in this way, they were equipped with nurturing and hard work experiences in their childhood. The extracts also show that women principals were concerned about their mothers who worked very hard with no one to help them. This shows concern for others, in this case their mothers. Words such as “take care and help” are an indication that that they were there for others. Women principals were also entrusted with some family responsibilities, such as “taking care” and “taking charge”. This taught them what to do on behalf of someone, learning and acquiring certain capabilities in the process.
In addition, it is evident from the narratives that women principals in this study learned work ethics from their parents. In the case of Norah, she learned that sometimes her mom would come home late because of work commitments and her dad, though not working, was also committed to his farming activities. So, she grew up observing her mom’s work ethics as a teacher, for example, that sometimes if one could not finish her work, they take them home to complete. This played a huge role in her leadership development. Though Violett'a’s mom was not educated, she grew up seeing her working very hard for her family.

Furthermore, both participants also learned how to be there for each other, through seeing their mothers stepping up in order to support their families financially. This taught them strong qualities. I argue that the women participants in this study have also learned “to be able to do and be” from their mothers. Sen (1990) insisted on the importance of capabilities, what people are able to do and to be. Sen argues for the shift in thinking that deals with issues of gender. He further argues, “if we ask the question, what people are able to do and be, we well be able to understand the barriers societies have erected against full justice for women” (P112). He continues to highlight that frequently women exhibit “adaptive preferences”, preferences that have adjusted to their second-class status. Agency and freedom are particularly important goals for women, who have so often been treated as “passive dependents” (P112). I also find that the mother parents of the study participants had become active agents for their own lives and as well as for their family, by being able to do and to be. This served as an inspiration for women principals in this study.

My dad took her to tertiary to further her studies at teachers’ college. My mom holds a Primary Teachers’ Certificate (PTC). It was not easy for my dad, because family members started talking, how can he take his wife to school while he is not educated. I was young at that time, but I could hear what relatives say. Most of them were not happy... saying what if my mom leaves my dad after getting her qualification. I don’t how my mother convinces my dad to pursue her studies (Norah).

My father’s wage was not enough to cater for all our needs. So, my family received some financial support from my rich maternal grandfather until his death in 1976. The situation at home changed, and my mother started making and selling traditional beer and other items such fruits and making scones to augment my dad ‘s wage (Violetta).

The extracts above show how supportive family members were towards each other, the sacrifices they made for their families. Violett’a’s mother was able to do something, for example brewing and selling traditional beer, in order to put an end to “passive dependent”. On the other hand, Nora’s mother was able to study and become a primary school teacher. Thus, women participants learned
from an early age that “they had to able to do and become” something in their lives. This is what they have learned from living with their family members. They have learned how to overcome challenges because they have seen their families surviving from working together, and going an extra mile for one another. Being able to live with, work with, and show concern by helping and taking some responsibilities as family members; while as women not to be “passive dependents” has prepared women participants to be able to function successfully as leaders and managers in their schools.

According to Norah’s narratives, the relatives wanted her mom to stay at home. Traditionally women were expected to be at home, do housework, take care of children and in-laws; that’s what African societies expected from married women. She said that in those times it was not common for a man to take his wife to school, because he was not educated. Even though Norah grew up in a loving family that provided love, care, respect, unity, and support, for everyone in the family, she also learnt that women and men were treated differently because of gender stereotypes emanating from cultural beliefs and norms. She learnt at an early age that disagreements are part of family life, especially from her extended family when not supporting her dad to take her mom to further her studies. Both women participants grew up seeing their mothers planning and running their families.

Findings in this study show that participants were able to live with others and to engage in various forms of social interactions. My assumption is that they were also able to interact with other children and teachers in their primary, secondary, and even tertiary level apart from their own families. According to Nussbaum, this is the basic capability for affiliation. This also led to the women principals being able to develop their educational capabilities. Walker and Unterhalter (2007) maintain that through education, people can develop as a human being because education is vital in enhancing other capabilities such emotional well-being.

6.2.2. The development of emotional well-being

The capability of emotions and affiliations are interdependent, in a sense that how one experiences family relationships may have positive or negative impact on women principals. Women participants were both raised by strict parents and had experienced their childhood differently from each other. Norah did not write much about her childhood, but the little information she wrote was more about the role her parents played in her life. Women secondary school principals in this study
were able to establish their emotions during their early childhood as they interact with family members and those around them. According to Nussbaum (2000a: 79) emotions means “being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justify anger. Not having one’s emotions blighted by overwhelming fear and anxiety, or by traumatic events of abuse or neglect”. The narratives of women participants show that family relations and interactions can promote the emotional well-being. This is noted in following extracts:

my dad never wanted his children to play in the street. My dad believed that he had enough children …he was very strict especially with her daughters. I think he was trying to protect us from boys, it didn’t feel right because we never had a chance to play with other kids except at school. He was a quiet and loving, very strict and very protective of his girl children (Norah).

My dad was a hawker selling clothes and other items to support his family. He was not educated, he left school when doing standard two (grade 4). My father was … [pause]… he was a man of his own character I don’t how my mother convinces my dad to pursue her studies. I do not know how she managed that, but she did. For this, I will always cherish my dad for not being selfish. My mom completed her qualification and came back as a qualified teacher. She worked hard as a teacher to provide for all us. I love my mom because she has always respected my dad (Norah).

My dad is my hero, he was not educated, never attended any school, but he taught himself how to read and write. He worked hard and provided for us especially in matters of our education. When I graduated from Teachers’ college, he was very proud of me, hence I am proud of him too… He never gave up on me… he supported me throughout. he would buy us textbooks, uniforms, school shoes, school bags and stationery for new academic year. This made me sad because when other kids are in their new clothes, me and my siblings will be in our new school uniform… (Violetta).

The accounts above show that women participants were able to form a strong emotional capability because of the family relations and interactions they had. Though raised in strict families but they experience ‘love, support and were provided for, and they grew up in stable families. Norah had pleasant childhood experiences as compared to Violetta. Norah was very much attached to both her parents, first her dad because she said that her dad took her mother to further her studies and allowed her to become a teacher in the process. She loves her dad for not being selfish. When talking about her family, Norah uses words like cherish, love, proud, protect not selfish. These words show attachments Norah had developed towards her family especially her parents. Moreover, the environment for her upbringing was positive for her emotional being, because she feels good about her family. Violetta’s description of her dad includes word such as “hero, worked hard, provided for us, never gave up on me, and proud. These are words filled with assurance, security, love, and confidence; and therefore, has strong emotional capability. She realized late in
her life that her dad prioritized her education and future over fancy lifestyle he could not afford. She became the happiest child in the school especially when schools reopen because she had new of everything, uniform, school bag, textbooks and stationery. Part of her was full filled with love and joy towards her dad. This boosted her self-confidence because she lacked nothing as far as schooling was concerned. Both participants were supported and provided for by the parents which in return made them felt happier and secured in most cases.

However, growing up in strict families also denied them opportunity to socialize with other children. Nussbaum (2000b:220) asserts, “capabilities are freedoms to engage in valued social activities and roles; what people can do and be given both their capacities, and environmental opportunities and constraints.” It is evident from the narratives that women secondary school principals were able to have attachments with people besides themselves, they loved and cared for those who loved and care for them too. Moreover, they were able to show and confront their feelings that contributed to their sadness. LeBmann (2009:451) posit that the wellbeing depends on the level of functioning, the narratives of women participants in this case indicate a strong emotional security and stability which also reflect strong levels of functionings as well as strong capability sets. However, narratives also indicate that family relations and interactions can contribute to barriers towards the emotional wellbeing. Narratives reveal that Violetta encountered emotional insecurity during early childhood and schooling years. This is noted in following extracts:

as a young girl I grew up bitter towards my dad because he never bought us Christmas clothes or gifts. Instead, was worried about the way my dad treated us. I mean we never had clothes or any items girls of my age in the village had. I still remember when I decided to go back to school to complete my matric… well he seemed not interested because he was still angry with me… I think part of him was… thinking ‘what is she up to now?’ … and maybe he was scarred that I will misbehave, and then bring the family into shame again

So, I failed grade 10, … The situation was worsened by me falling pregnant which made things more complicated for me to study. When doing grade 12 I fell pregnant again. I was disappointed, scared, and ashamed of myself…. In my mind I was thinking about my parents, especially my dad. This was the most difficult time for me and my family. Both my mom and sister were scared for me. When my dad came back from work, I had to tell him the bad news. On spot, he slapped me on my face and I fell far away from him, and he said to me, “I am tired of you not taking your school serious, pack your things, and go stay with your boyfriend’s family.” In the morning I was woken up by my dad, chasing me out of the house, left my home crying the situation at my boyfriend’s home was not nice, too stressful for me…. Because I felt so humiliated, and I mean staying with these people (my boyfriend’s family) made me think deeper about life. People were talking badly about me, and everyone laughing at me and my family. With no one to share my problems, I felt so bad and frustrated (Violetta).
Unlike Norah, Violetta had troubled childhood especially with those she interacted with in her close space, her family. Her “troubled childhood” is described by words such as “bitter, worried, not interested, angry, scarred, disappointed, ashamed, humiliated, felt bad, frustrated, falling pregnant twice, chased from home, slapped on the face, and with no one to share her problems”. Narratives show that Violetta experienced negative emotions around her family. This suggests that the capability sets of emotions were obstructed, and her capability of affiliations constrained. In the first extract, Violetta feels that she was deprived of Christmas joy and happiness which made her developed feelings of sadness. The environment in which she grew up was not supportive for her emotional wellbeing; failing the grade and had to repeat lowered her self-esteem and put more pressure on her. Secondly, falling pregnant twice brought self-doubt and hopelessness, and can lead to her feeling less worth especially among her siblings, as well as instability into her schooling because she has to stay a home for a while; thus, her academic life was interrupted. Being kicked out of home brought humiliation and frustrations and rejection by her family pushed her to stay with her boyfriend’s family at her age. Violetta’s account also indicate that she was physical and emotional abused by her dad. According to Subrahmanian (2007:117), “violence is used as a marker of authority and it also reminds the women of the power structures within society”. Violetta’s dad used his authority to instill fear, anxiety as well as submission in her daughter. To slap Violetta in her face, falling away from her dad is an act of violence. This leaves her vulnerable and powerless. The authority portrayed by her dad also reminded the power structures; that her dad as male figure at home and in society has an upper hand over her by showing his aggression towards her in order to make her submit and obey him. This suggests that the capability of freedom from bodily harm and bodily integrity had been violated. Her dad in this case being the male perpetrator; being stronger and tougher than her because of her male-built. So, in this case Violetta was not resilient. The abuse formers a barrier towards her emotional well-being. Furthermore, Violetta’s capability of affiliation and emotional wellbeing were violated; Violetta was not treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others (Nussbaum, 2003:41). However, narratives do not reveal the participant’s resilience to the physical abuse and humiliation exercised by her dad.
6.2.3. The development Educational capabilities

Sen (1999:18)’s basic capabilities also include “the capability to be educated”. According to him, what makes a capability “basic” is when it corresponds to certain elementary and very crucial functionings. Sen (1999) argues that such capabilities are therefore the ones that all people have reason to value and will likely demand attention in any theory of justice and more generally in social assessment.” According to Terzi (2007:30), the capability to be educated is basic capability in two interrelated respects. First, in that the absence or lack of opportunities to be educated would essentially harm or substantially disadvantage the individual. In other words, education is seen as a capability to provide for basic needs such as being nourished and sheltered. To an extent if one is deprived of such a basic need, one may find him or herself disadvantaged in future.

Secondly, Terzi (2007:30) further asserts that “the capability to be educated as basic capability plays a crucial part in expanding other capabilities as well as future ones, it can be considered fundamental and foundational to different capabilities, and hence inherent to the possibility of leading a good life”. In other words, the capability to be educated multiplies future freedoms or opportunities that people have. It also implies “to have one’s present and future capability set; the range of capabilities one enjoys, if restricted, thus create a disadvantage” (Terzi, 2007:30). Participants in this study were afforded the basic capability, the capability to be educated by their families. This is evident from narratives of women principals; that their education was paid for by their parents. Norah’s mother who was a school primary teacher ensure that her daughter gets both formal and informal education. Violetta’s dad, though not educated as Norah’s mother, he also financially supported her daughter’s education to an extent that he was able to save money and pay for her tertiary education. Terzi (2007:30) also composed a formal list of basic education functionings which are: literacy, numeracy, sociality, and participation, learning dispositions, physical activities, sciences and technology and practical reason (P.37). She also suggests that “some functionings develop by education appear to be truly foundational, and essential for other, more complex ones, and might be considered as constitutive of a basic education. The narratives of women participants in this study show that by getting educate, the women principals achieve an essential capabilities of a person’s basic needs and to the expansion of other and future capabilities, educational capability.
Narratives of women principals in this study reveal that even though they were faced with barriers and unfreedoms to the development of their educational capabilities, they still managed to come out and practice their agency and achieve their desired goals. Women principals in this study though educational leaders, they experienced their childhood and adulthood differently from each other; simply due to contextual background, they experienced their education as well as economic situation differently. Sen (1992, 1999) maintains that a person’s well-being should be judged by the possessions or resources she or he holds, rather, a person should not be judged by what she is able to do or to be within her society. Both participants were in their fifties at the time of interviews. They both attended their schools during the Apartheid era, when educational opportunities were not equal. Though Norah was raised from a middle-class family, she also suffered the same educational and economic inequalities that is being shared in Violetta’s narrative. Violetta was raised from a low working-class family with her dad being the only working, and therefore suffered from the social ills of apartheid. She suffered from the unfreedoms of poverty in her childhood.; which in turn had a negative impact in her primary and high school education.

According to Sen (1999: 4-15), people’s lack of capabilities may be directly linked to economic poverty, which affects their ability to achieve sufficient nutrition to satisfy hunger, to secure remedies for treatable diseases, to be adequately clothed and sheltered, to enjoy clean water or to enjoy decent sanitary facilities. The lack of people’s capabilities may be directly linked to the denial of political liberty and basic civil rights by dictatorial regimes, as well as the forced restrictions on the freedom to participate in the social, political and economic life of the community (Sen, 1999:15).

Vaughan (2007) asserts, education should therefore be targeted towards expanding people’s capabilities in two ways; in how they are capable of accessing education as well as, which capabilities are developed in the process of accessing education. Walker and Unterhalter (2003) argues that formal education structures can negatively or positively impact one’s capabilities.

Violetta has confirmed in her story that both her primary and secondary schooling were difficult years. Narratives show that as a young girl she lacked resources and opportunities that allowed her to make their choices in the type of education she would receive. However, the CA encourages us to not point at the resources they have, rather what women principals were able to do and be with
the resources at their disposal. Women principal had many challenges in her educational journey, and thus was deprived of “opportunities and liberties” (Nussbaum, 2000a:71).

The following are examples of extract which put a constrain for women to access education:

I grew up in a big rural area, in a village where most of the people were very poor. Many people in my village were not working, or let me say that the majority of people working then were male … our fathers and brothers who worked in cities for mining companies and factories for example my dad worked for a steel company somewhere in Benoni. Many families relied on farming for survival… and few had livestock. Most women remained at home as house wives and looking after their children while their husbands and sons were working far away from their families. It was so depressing to live in such conditions, it was not easy to go to town, with gravel roads and only buses operating with a schedule. (Violetta)

Both my parents were not educated, my dad worked in a steel company somewhere in Benoni, and my mother was a house wife. My father’s wage was not enough to cater for all our needs. So, my family received some financial support from my rich maternal grandfather until his death in 1976. The situation at home changed, and my mother started brewing and selling traditional beer and other items such fruits and making scones to augment my dad’s wage. my dad because he never bought us Christmas clothes or gifts. This made me sad because when other kids are in their new clothes, me and my siblings will be in our new school uniform.

I was worried…. I mean we never had clothes or any items girls of my age in the village had. I had so many questions (Violetta)

The extracts above indicate the socio-economic status of many people residing in rural areas of South Africa during the Apartheid era. Violetta’s narrative exposes some of the challenges in her way to receive formal education. Education is considered important because it makes people employable by equipping them with competencies and skills that underpin economic production which is necessary for a healthy economy. Stiglitz (2012: 68) argue, “better-educated individuals tend to have better health status, lower unemployment, more social connections, and greater engagement in civic and political life”. The nature of people’s personal activities and the manner in which they spend their time irrespective of the amounts of income generated are important considerations for quality-of-life assessment, thus will have effects on their subjective well-being. Personal insecurity comprises external factors that place the physical integrity of each person at risk, and in extreme cases, result in death of the person involved. Women principals in this study were able to access their formal education, and get educated regardless. This is noted in the following extracts:
The village where I grew up in had only three schools, primary, higher primary and secondary... no preschool or crèche [day care Centre]. Both primary and higher primary schools were located right in the heartland of the village; and all near my home.... {pause}, jooh!!!! but the secondary school was situated on the outskirt of the village, and during my time there was no scholar transport... so all secondary learners had to walk to school every day.

The higher primary school though not far from the village, it was built between mountains and scary bushes. Parents were not comfortable with this...I mean this situation... to an extent that they had to come up with a plan to safeguard their children to and from school. So, our mothers had to accompany their children to school in the morning, and also collect them in the afternoon; they had a roaster for doing this.

there were only three schools to cater for all children in my community. Classrooms were not enough. Churches and community halls were used to accommodate some grade. Classrooms were overcrowded.... The schools used rotational time-table ... just like now during lockdown restrictions.... There was nothing school principal could do about the situation. There was shortage of infrastructure and furniture as well to cater for all the children in those three schools.

I still remember while in higher primary, attending in a church... we were many and church furniture was not enough for the learners. So, our teachers drew a schedule for groups that sit on chairs for one week, and then the next week they sit on the floor... winter or summer it was the same....

I attended all grade 8 and 9(form 1 and 2 then) classes at community hall... not recreation hall as such but a royalty hall (chiefs’ kraal), a big hall where the chief and his assistants hold meeting every Wednesday, so we did not go to school because meetings started at 9h00 am. The hall was too big, partitioned into four sections to accommodate four grade 8 classes. …heh... It was not easy to learn and concentrate.....

(Sen, 1999:4) asserts, people’ lack of capabilities may be directly linked to the lack of public facilities, social care, and effective institutions, which may result in the lack of basic opportunities with regard to healthcare, education, gainful employment or economic and social security. The apartheid government introduced segregation policy such as the Population Registration of 1950 and Bantu Education Acts in 1953. These acts were aimed at separation of populations in order to allocate resources unequally, resources such land, infrastructures, services, etc. As a young Black girl she had to live in rural as planned by the apartheid government.

My assumption is that this situation above could be a cause for Violetta to struggle with her schooling, she never attended a preschool, and was attending school every day due to lack of resources, furniture and enough schools. Some centres which were used to supplement schools were not conducive for learning. The narratives also indicate formal education for Violetta had many interruptions especially in rural school where she grew up and attended her primary and secondary schooling. This could suggest that effective teaching and learning were not always possible. Rural schools were not enough, no preschools, furniture not enough and classroom, some
school far away from households, overcrowded classrooms, no transport to and from school, learners had to walk long distances, and rotational time-table.

The extracts below are examples:

I mean you in class A, and in class B the teacher is shouting or making jokes while you are trying to concentrate … any way it was how things were done….. sometimes, sometimes some teachers took us out of the hall to avoid disturbances… especially if it was time for dictation test.

Primary school… those were difficult years for me, because I was in the dark, I didn’t know what was going on, but in any way, I passed all my standards.

Furthermore, the external constraints also contributed to Violetta academics problems, which were only noticeable later in her secondary schooling., when she fails grade 10. Violetta’s primary school experiences were difficult. The extract further suggest that lessons were often disrupted, leaners unable to concentrate in those circumstances. The system of rotational time-table makes learner to attend on scheduled days, coupled with lessons disruptions could have contributed to her being confused about schooling. Even though she passed her primary education, but she did not have primary foundation which is key for one to do better at secondary schooling.

Moreover, Nussbaum (2001) argues that the importance of the surrounding environment for development of internal capabilities is also a way of differentiating them from basic capabilities. She highlights that “even sight, hearing, and language require the support of the surrounding environment. Children require only the support of immediate environment, typically shaped by the mother, rather than the larger family and social environment, which play an important role in determining internal capabilities. I argue that Violetta’s schooling challenges could have been worsened by the fact that her mother was not educated, which is not an issue…., the problem could be that she had no one to encourage, help and guide in her school work. Her mother, apart from being illiterate, she was a busy woman selling traditional beer to augment the husband’s income. This is in contrast with Norah who her mother was a primary teacher; hence Norah spoke less of her schooling experiences. Violetta’s mother was there but not available for her as an immediate surrounding to shape the development of Violetta’s internal capabilities.

The Capabilities approach draws attention to freedom, which is the extent to which individual have the capability to choose between different functionings, which people would like to do or be. Desmon, Swartz and Van Rooyen (2017) assert that oppressive environment limit the availability
of options, arguing that external constraints are one of the ways in which oppressive environment limit capabilities. This implies that the internal capabilities of an individual which are abilities to developed overtime which allow an individual to take advantage of the opportunities available to them are shaped by the environment, therefore the continues oppressive environment shapes or hinders their development on women principal’s ability to live a life they have a reason to value. In her narrative, Violette wished her childhood schooling experiences could have been different, the way she narrates her story in comparison. This is what she says:

It was so depressing to live in such conditions, it was not easy to go to town, with gravel roads and only buses operating with a schedule. There has been so much development in this village, because now there are shopping centres with grocery store, clothing shops, banks etc. Houses are electrified, and people have running water and are no longer fetching some wood and water, but some still do. Life is much better now as compared to then, in my days…. I only started going to town while at tertiary. There were no resources to do that, besides when my dad comes home, he bought everything the family will need, basic needs.

The above extract shows how limiting oppressive environment could be, “dehumanizing treatment dehumanizes” (Nussbaum, 2000b:224). According to Capabilities Approach Violette’s well-being was also affected. It is clear from this extract that Violette knows what a good life looks like. This also implies that she could easily list aspects of her life which need improvement if she had greater freedom to do and be during her childhood. Nussbaum, 2000b: 224) argues “many people living in oppressive environments are angry at the treatment they receive, but they feel powerless to fightback against such treatment. The anger and powerlessness can lead to apathy and for some self-destructive or anti-social behaviour”.

Adaptive preferences refer to “situations where rights violation of poor treatment is not seen as such by the individual who experience them (Nussbaum 2001, 2003; Sen 1995). Sometimes oppressed people can come to believe that this is their lot in life, they cannot get more. This does not mean they are happy about their situation but rather there is a “quiet acceptance”. People may report high level of life satisfaction despite objectively harsh circumstances. Sen (2001) gives an example of a happy slave which is similar to Violette’s case. This is noted in following extract:

I think it was due to the apartheid system that as in place. [getting emotional]; I guess the separate education for blacks and whites ...... how can a big village like that have only three school? but when you go in town there are many schools, and few people living there. There was nothing our parents could do about it, I guess they did not complain about it. I think the people in my community were just happy that their children
were able to attend schools. When I went to high school it was better because furniture was enough for all learners (Violetta).

The extracts above also show that Violetta’s community, especially parents displayed characteristic of “adaptive preferences”; in a sense that parents and community had “quiet acceptance” due to being powerless as African people; and could not fight back the apartheid government at that time. The extracts also point to the “high level of life satisfaction”, in a sense they were happy because their children were attending schools” despite the fact that their children had to travel some distance to school, because there was no scholar transport; schools being far away from the village; their children had to pass dangerous forest and mountain which led to their mothers or women in the village to come up with a roster to safe guard the well-being of their children. This was adaptive preferences. In evaluating quality of life, one should ask how well people are able to function with the resources they have at disposal. It is therefore, crucial to consider both the social and economic inequalities which stand in the way of people and their opportunity to function. According to Sen (1999), education is a basic capability that may be used to expand other capabilities. Narratives revealed that women principals were able to navigate through their hardships, especially in the case of Violetta. Norah and Violetta were able to develop their agency capability set through perseverance. Women principals have proved to become resilient leaders in the various ways. A capability set that was gained out of the misery or life struggles or childhood.

6.2.4. Career choices

Capability refers to “a person’s freedoms to promote or achieve valuable functionings (Sen: 1999:19)”. Sen argues that such freedoms have both intrinsic and instrumental value. The good life is a genuine choice and not in which the person is forced into a particular life”. In other words, a good life reflects the person’s freedom to lead and choose from possible livings”. In addition, Bandura, Barbanelli, Caprara an Pastorelli (2001;187) maintain that “the choices made during formative years of development, help to shape the course of lives. The choices made determine the aspects of their potential that people cultivate, and which remain undeveloped”. This suggests that by choosing careers, women principals in this study were able to reinforce roles as agents as well as their self-efficacy. People will only act or preserve to act if they believe they can produce desired outcomes by their actions; which is self-efficacy (Bandura et.al, 2001;187)
Narratives of women participants show that both participants pursue careers in education which represents practical reason in the list of human basic capabilities. The narratives also indicate that the women participants’ career choices were prompted by various factors within their social context such as the kind of freedom or opportunity they have been exposed to. By being able to choose their careers it shows that women principals show their agency to act in changing and improving their lives for good. Women participants in this study were able to choose their path of careers based on various social factors in their environment. The following extracts indicate:

I never struggled with career choice, when I got pregnant with my second child, I was overwhelmed; how am I going to take care of my kids? I was very scared… I don't want to lie. There were only three careers I know: teaching, policing, and nursing. Teachers at my school were only talking about those three. I fell in love with teaching… [laughter] for various reasons. One being that teachers ‘college was not far away from home, so I will come home to see my kids at least once a month depending on my schedule… that’s’ when I started feeling the pressure of becoming a teenage mother and I was terrified.

A teaching diploma was only three years to complete, so I can finish and then start working as soon as possible. I also thought that by becoming a teacher I will also be appreciating the good work my teachers did on me and others. This also motivated me to become a teacher…. Making a difference in the lives of the children especially in rural areas. Teachers played a huge role in my life even though I cannot single out. I wanted to become a secondary school teacher and teach mathematics which I was good at. Maths teachers at that were in high demand. I completed teacher’s diploma in three years, and I become at teacher… I was never recruited into teaching. (Violetta)

My mom is my role model and my inspiration. My mom holds a Primary Teachers’ Certificate (PTC). It was not easy for my dad, because family members started talking, how he takes his wife to school while he is not educated. My mom completed her qualification and came back as a qualified teacher. She worked hard as a teacher to provide for us all. My family was well respected, and many people in the neighborhood thought that we were rich. I think that was because my mom was a teacher. We were not rich, but we lacked nothing as compared to other families, because my mom could afford to buy basics things for the family, and to take us to college. She managed all these things with her salary. So, when I grew up, I wanted to be a teacher, but a secondary school teacher (Norah). Something that dominated my mind was; you can do better than your parents!

My parents were not educated, but they provided for us… I kept telling myself that my dad took care his children with a wage from a factory, so I become a professional I can be in a much better position to provide for my kids and also help my parents (Violetta).

Norah admired her mom who was a teacher, which was different with Violetta who state that both her parents were not educated but it seemed that they inspired her not to become a teacher but to work harder than them, be educated and provide for her children. Violetta spoke of three careers that she was exposed to during her secondary schooling: teaching, nursing, and policing. Her reasons for choosing teaching as her career were; to support her kids and family financially, to
make a difference in the lives of the children she will be teaching, she was also inspired by her teachers, and teaching had employment opportunities so she will be employed as soon as she completed her teaching diploma. On the other hand, Norah wanted to emulate her mother and become a secondary school teacher based on the reason that she will be able to take care of her kids and family just like her mom did. She saw her mom caring for her family to an extent that people in her village thought that they were rich, while not.

The participants in this study chose their teaching careers which is considered “traditional and stereotypically feminine” because it involved the roles such as caring and nurturing (Bandura, et al, 2001:187). In addition, “women base their occupational preferences more strongly on their self-efficacy, than on the benefits that career may provide (Bandura et.al., 2001:188)”. The narratives of both participants highlight the perception that teaching was a suitable career for both, because this will give them time to take of their children as well families. Therefore, the self-efficacy of women participant in this study demonstrates that women’s agency in making the career choices they made, which at the end will give them a sense of well-being. They have reflected positively on the choices they made.

Participants in this study have shown through their narratives the freedom to choose the career they want to follow; what they want to do and become in their lives, thus by becoming teachers and teach learners in South African public schools. They were free to choose the career they value, and this shows their agency when the attended Teachers’ college and finally appointed as teachers. Huberman (1993: 17) asserts that in many countries, “teaching offers relatively easy access to tertiary education for those who could otherwise not afford it, and a chance to escape from rural or urban poverty into middle class”. This is true with South African women who have until recently had fewer career choices beyond nursing, teaching, or becoming a homemaker. Women principals’ narratives show that they were interested in teaching as a profession for various reasons. For example, Norah was influenced by her mother who was a teacher, but never really mentioned real reasons beyond her mother’s influence. I can argue that when women participants in this study decided to take teaching as a career, according to Nussbaum (2000a), they continue to strengthen their capability of affiliation, because teaching as a profession is defined as a crucial social function.
Practical reasoning depends on features of external environment, requiring at least “protection for liberty of conscience and religious observance (Nussbaum; 2000a:79).” There is often a special focus on injustices involving the constraining of capabilities by external forces beyond the control of the individual (Nussbaum, 2001 & Sen, 1999). The act of choice “determines which objective opportunities are “visible to the person that which are considered to be consistent with her conception of value and practical reasoning (Austin, 2016: 24).

Burkhardt (2001: 36) says that there are two possible sources of unfreedom in the act of choice, which are “internal or conceptual barrier”. Burkhardt (2001:112) further argues, “if I have never seen or heard of piano, I am unlikely to form the goal of becoming a concert pianist, if no one in my family has never been to university, it is much unlikely that, I will set myself the objective of obtaining a degree.”

Narratives of women principals show that a conceptual barrier was experienced in the act of choice. Both Norah and Violetta have experienced conceptual barrier with regard to career choices. My analysis is based on Burkhardt (2001)’s demonstration, which maintains that women principals could have not chosen a career that they not seen in practice, and secondly, they did not speak of going to a university and get a degree certificate for themselves in their narratives. Norah talked of her mother being a primary school teacher, while Violetta confirmed that teachers in her school always talked about three professions which are teaching, nursing and policing. I also believe that they saw and heard of people in these three categories. The narratives are also silent on other careers that women principals could have been exposed to but did not choose due to the lack of exposure. I therefore suggest that the act of choice for participants in this study was limited. No one in their family has been to university, so they had no one to influence their choices. They did not choose a university “because the option does not fall within their horizon of ambition which is due to the mode of practical reasoning and practical identity consideration (Burkhardt,2009:113)”.

Norah and Violetta have achieved well in matric examination, despite the fact they are coming from different family backgrounds. They both passed well and had the required qualifications to get them enrolled for a degree at a university. For both Norah and Violetta, the option of going to university was “objectively available”, but was simply not within their “imagined horizon of possibility” (Burkhardt,2009:37). The option did fit with their practical identity and therefore fell outside of their practical reasoning about what constitutes a good and worthwhile life. The nature
of the background influences on their reasoning and reasons, and the extent to which these background influences were constraining to women principals’ act of choice.

In this case the background influences of women principals were constraining, because Austin (2016) maintains that if background influences are constraining, they contribute to one having a smaller effective capability set. Both Norah and Violetta had an option to go to university; which lies in the “objective capability set” of young people. They had the freedom available to them in principle, but realistically unavailable. “When a person’s objective capabilities are curtailed by practical reasoning, her effective capability is reduced, and becomes smaller than her objective capability”. Effective capabilities are “real freedoms that people enjoy. Sen (1992:149) argues:

If social conditioning makes a person lack the courage to choose or perhaps even to “desire” what is denied but would be valued if chosen, then it would be unfair to make the ethical assessment assuming that she does have that effective choice. It is a matter of concentrating on the real freedoms actually enjoyed, taking into consideration of all barriers, including those of “social discipline.

Social scientific evidence concerning external influences on practical reasoning confirms that the formative years are particularly vulnerable life-stage. Austin (2016) posits that social and economic crisis can lead to young people downgrading their goals and ambitions, leading to insecurity, instability and unconformity detrimental to achieving higher agency goals. This could have been the case with participants in this study. My assumption is that women principals economic and social status was not realistically an option for them to attend university, for example, Violetta ‘s dad was retrenched and maybe she assumed that university fees would be too much for her dad to pay. On the other hand, Norah, though her mom was a teacher, but she was the breadwinner, and Norah also had siblings who were also depending on their mom financially.

6.2.5. The development of professional capabilities

This study explored the usefulness of separating out specific subsets of a person’s valued goals and analysing these independently of other valued goals. This study recognizes Nussbaum (2000a, 2003) list of human capabilities to ensure social justice for all citizens. However, in this section, the study draws from Sen (2004:77) suppositions around how the Capability Approach might be applied in different contexts by focusing specifically on capabilities within teacher’s professional environment; that there is a good sense in “narrowing the coverage of capabilities for a specific
purpose. Capabilities are sometimes called into question for not what they are, but how they are
determined; without knowing the basis for women participant’s choice, the reader is unable to
probe the chosen dimensions and either trust or question them (Alkire, 2008:1).” Adendoff,
Mason, Modiba, Faragher and Kunene (2010) indicate that sometimes people opted for teaching
as a career based on their extrinsic and intrinsic reasons. They further highlighted that one of those
reasons is that one could be seen through one’s performance in her or his career. According to
Hoyle and John (1996: 104), a profession is an “occupation that performs a crucial social function”.
Moreover, a profession is associated with the qualities such as specialized knowledge and
professional responsibility, competence, autonomy, and accountability. It is also through
expanding the capabilities and functionings of students in professional education, who in turn are
able to expand the capabilities of poor and disadvantaged individuals and communities (Walker,
McLean, Dison & Vaughan al., 2010: 561).

Three functionings that make up the official capability of recognition which are; to achieve the
minimum qualification for teaching, register as a teacher, and maintain registered status. To
emphasizes that CA is more interested in the freedom to achieve functionings, as well as in the
achievement of functionings. By focusing on the values, agency and achievement, this study is
determined, and went further than the “organizational pictures” (Sen, 2009:18) of teacher’s work
to include,” the life that women participant as teachers manage or o not manage to live”. Firstly,
women participants were qualified secondary teachers because they met the minimum requirement
of the teaching profession in South Africa. Their curricula vitae also confirm that they are
registered teachers with the South African Council for Educators of 2000 (SACE). This is
confirmed by the following extract:

I hold Secondary Teachers Diploma (SPTD). I never further my studies…….(Norah) I
left for teachers’ training college, and I completed the diploma which was scheduled for
three years ……. I started working at 24 years of age (Violetta)

Both Norah and Violetta attended Teachers colleges to qualify as professional teachers. When they
started teaching, they were in possession of diploma certificate. They became teachers at a young
age, both at 24. After three years, they had acquired specialized knowledge, and both became
suitable to teach at secondary school. However, as individuals they developed their profession
differently. The early years of one ‘s profession is crucial for development or hindrance of other
professional capabilities. Narratives show that Norah ‘s level of responsibility, competence and
accountability, was spotted by her senior in her six months of her teaching career. She excelled in many areas at her work. She was bold to serve in the School Management Team with six-month experience only, and she was well equipped from working with other staff members and performing all assigned tasks. This is noted in the following extracts:

Later during the week, the principal approached me personally to join the SMT members. I didn’t want to join the team because, firstly, I didn’t know what I was getting myself into. Secondly, I thought the principal was referring to senior teachers in the school who were more experienced than me (Norah).

mam, you must not spend five years as a level one educator, you are destined to be a school principal and even a circuit manager. This made me feel as if I did not belong in the lower level of the teaching profession. This also made me aspire for leadership especially in early years of teaching. Whenever promotional posts were advertised, I made sure that I submitted my applications. I didn’t wait for someone to shift from the post like most female teachers do; they wait for internal posts. As long as I have the resources to apply, I applied, there are no boundaries for me (Norah).

This made her feel that indeed she does not belong in the lower level of the teaching profession. She said that this made her aspire for leadership especially in her early years of teaching. Moreover, her leadership aspiration made her to always apply for advertised promotional posts. She aspired to lead within six months of her teaching, and this was evident when she volunteers in the SMT, young as she was not experienced but she was prepared to learn more about school leadership. She showed interest and took action to equip herself for future leadership. Although it took her more than fifteen years to be appointed a principal, when it came, she was well prepared, hence the confidence. It was for these reasons that from HOD she was appointed school principal, she never served as deputy-principal in her career. In her first year of teaching, she did aspire to lead, even though it took her longer before her appointment as Head of Department. This suggest that Norah has the freedom to pursue all of the functionings and she is not restricted in terms of her professional support and encouragement. She was free to pursue these value goals, and chooses to do so.

Alkire (2005a:51) asserts, “focusing solely on achieved functioning “does not necessarily incorporate the freedom to bring about achievements one considers to be valuable”. The question of agency will also test if teachers understand that this is the functioning that is expected of them, if for example they are supposed to be well-versed in the national constitution (a functioning within the official capability of loyalty); it is argued that they do not have the freedom to pursue it. Buckler
(2014:167) argues, “the space between agency and achievement is where teachers’ choices are explored in an attempt to better understand the quality of education.

The extracts below show how Violetta started her career life as teacher:

I started working as a teacher at a secondary school in the same village where I grew up…… I was very lazy, and this was well observed and well known by my colleagues and seniors. I taught grade 8 and 9 maths. I was never given higher grades because I was lazy and did not commit fully to my work. I was late for classes, sometimes late to work and always the last person to submit marks. There were only three maths teachers including in myself in the maths department. The other two teachers shared grade 10 to 12 classes.

My two colleagues were annoyed by my unprofessional behaviour and sometimes complained that they are tired of receiving learners from me (grade 9) who were not well prepared. Many times, they had to remind me to go to class and attend my learners. I was also told that my learners were struggling in grade 10 to solve simple sums because they lack basic skill and knowledge. They further indicated to me that they are tired of her not doing her work. I think … they were right because I intentionally taught only sections, I considered important when setting the examination paper. It was such a mess and no one wanted to work with me, because my results were very poor.

I spent five years teaching maths in the lower grades, and this made me unhappy.as time went by, I started feeling embarrassed and felt that I was not recognized as an important teacher, and my colleagues looked down on me. I really wanted to teach maths in higher grades, but as things were I could not because I was so lazy, and not committed to my work …. I was not proud of myself…. (Violetta)

Violetta started her profession on a bad footing, in a sense she was not committed and responsible as far as her profession was concerned. She was the opposite of Norah. Her initial teaching experiences were very difficult, because she was labelled a lazy mathematics teacher, who was always late for her lessons, and sometimes not even pitching up for her lesson. She got fed up with the fact that she was looked down upon by all her colleagues, and ultimately decided to change her situation. There are elements of professional capability that she is unable to pursue. In this case, while she is free to pursue the functionings, she chooses not to. Her agency and achievement of functionings are thus restricted within her professional capability. Her capability to pursue aspects of quality of teaching was determined by her employer, and therefore the capability to pursue aspects of quality of teaching was determined personally and also by their peers.

The narratives indicate the gap between agency and achievement of official capabilities or professional. This suggests that Violetta chooses not to pursue functionings within these capabilities that she has the freedom to achieve. She decides for example not to teach some of the
topics prescribed for mathematics to her learners; thus, functioning within the official capability of relationship is constrained, because she tends to be “lazy and not comply”. This demonstrates how when a choice is made to achieve a functioning, the choice may facilitate or hinder on an individual’s values, and agency and affect their choices in terms of other capabilities. Violetta’s commitment to pursuing professional development influenced the decisions she made about pursuing other professional capabilities as well as her freedom to achieve these, a valued functioning in the teaching profession. “To be able to successfully perform their roles, teachers need to be able to pursue what they value in their practice and “make choices, take principled action and enact change, (Anderson, 2010:295). This implies that agency is an important factor of teachers’ professional capability.

Professional learning means the expansion of teachers’ freedoms to effectively perform their professional roles; thus, enhancing their professional agency. Narratives indicate that women participants in this study are in possession of Teachers Diploma qualification. However, unlike Norah, Violetta upgraded her qualifications, which shows that she values the acquisition of more knowledge in her subject. Violetta’s professional learning choices were driven by her own realization that there was aspect of her practice that required further knowledge and skills, for example to be able to teach mathematics in higher grades, she was able to reflect critically on her practices, and see that she could not remain the same, because her well-being and that of her children would be affected. Through the professional capability, and capability of practical reason, and affiliation she became motivated to change her unprofessional practices: This is noted in the following extracts:

I then decided to further my studies in mathematics for FET at University of Johannesburg in 2004. When I got there, I told them I want to do maths for higher grades, and then I got enrolled for Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) in FET maths and computer studies. The qualification was scheduled for a year, then in 2005 I came back to work again in the same school. I came back a changed person, because I was tired of people complaining about me. I started working hard, I was no longer bunking my classes, and was punctual for all my activities. I further registered for Bachelor of Education in leadership and management with the university of South Africa.

I became more committed to my work. By then I had four children who were growing up so fast and have started to demand, yah… my salary was no longer enough to cater for family demands. I wanted a promotion…. I realized that no one will promote a lazy person like me, no one. I came back with a new attitude, a positive one.
The narratives suggest her as an active agent in relation to her family, her determination is also repeated in her utterances which emphasizes her resolution to further her studies, she uses words such as “tired of being lazy”, which turned into “I decided, enrolled, changed person” demonstrate determination and agency. It was out of fear that she will never get the opportunity to teach higher grades which she values. For her to be taken seriously by her colleagues she needed to keep updated and acquire new knowledge and skills for maths, thus searching for more information. This made her angry and to change her behaviour. The first step she thinks of was to further her studies, she enrolled for Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) to learn how to teach mathematics and computer studies in senior grades. She took study leave to complete her studies., and then came back to the same school she was. She came back a changed person; committed, responsible and hard working. Upon completing her PGCE qualification, she did not stop there. She enrolled with the University of South Africa for the Bachelor of Education (Hons) in educational leadership and management for distance learning.

Furthermore, narratives also show women participants in this study were determined to lead and manage. Violetta’s desire to lead and manage the Department of maths in her school; when she decided to further her studies. She got promoted from being a level one teacher to an HOD for mathematics. Unlike Norah who took 16 years to be appointed as HOD, it took Violetta ten years to be appointed as HOD, then deputy- principal and lastly a school principal. Violetta believes that it was partly because of her qualifications that she moved up the leadership and management ladder so quickly. This could have served as a barrier in her advancement to leadership position, even though she was a competent teacher. The women principals in this study decided to seek promotion by applying, and I find that they were not recruited into promotional posts. This is noted in the curricula vitae of women principals. However, Norah had to wait for fifteen years before her appointment as Head of the department. This is noted in the following extracts:

Promotional posts (HOD) were advertised in June 2005, I applied and other colleagues also applied, but I was the only who was shortlisted. When promotional posts for deputy- principals were advertised, I applied, and finally appointed as deputy- principal in another school….. I was appointed a deputy- principal in a school far away from my home from (Violetta).

I didn’t wait for someone to shift from the post like most female teachers do, as long as I have the resources to apply, there are no boundaries for me (Norah).

Some teachers complained that I do not qualify to be shortlisted because according to them I did not have the experience of teaching maths in higher classes The mood in the school was very disturbing for me, I could feel that colleagues were not happy even after
the other maths teachers were shortlisted. I think they wanted me out... I could not tell exactly what was going on. A day before the interviews, I overheard some of my colleagues talking about me, saying that; I am wasting my time and energy because I will not be appointed. Instead of being scared, I felt more confident about myself and this made me prepare well for the interviews. Due to SADTU dispute, the district senior manager sent two officials to observe the interviews, and the senior manager even requested the SGB chairperson to constitute a new interview panel (Violetta).

when principalship post were advertised the SGB chairperson told me not to bother applying for the post I was acting on school, because their school needs a male principal. I was not scared by him, I told him ... I have the right to apply ... I did the opposite... I applied to many schools including the same school I have been acting as principal. I was shortlisted at four schools but get appointed in another school. I was not surprised by the outcomes (Violetta).

Violetta described the difficulties she encountered in the process of getting promoted from level 1 educator to a level 2 (HOD), as well as the deputy principalship post. The extracts show how confident they felt ready and prepared for the promotional posts. They were well experienced, and had qualifications, especially Violetta with PGCE and B.Ed. with leadership and management. This also suggests that they were determined to transition from level one to level 2. Violetta did not give when she realized, her male colleagues insinuate that the HOD post was for one of them…. Instead, she remained focused and continue preparing for her interviews. This shows her strong determination which was also displayed amidst the dispute lodged by the union.

The narratives indicate some of the difficulties women participant’s experiences especially when they aspire for principalship, a role previously held by men only. The extracts also reveal some gender discrimination levelled against Violetta, being underrated by the SGB chairperson. The narratives also show the confrontations she had with him. Through her professional capability and capability of voice and educational resilience, she was courageous and determined to get a principalship. The narratives indicate that Violetta was highly qualified for principalship, hence shortlisted in four schools. Women principals also worked very hard to have finally be appointed school principals. It was through determination and commitment to their professional development. This is noted in the following extracts:

I was appointed the school principal in another secondary school...I was happy to finally leave the school because my life was in danger. I was happy that finally I was leaving the school, and going to work in my community where I grew up (Violetta).

I started working as a secondary school teacher in my childbirth community and taught there for 5 years. I then moved to another secondary school away from her community for another 10 years. Then later I was appointed HOD at a primary school and two years later I was appointed principal of another primary school. Then realizing that the
principal post level at that school was low I decided to apply for another post at a secondary school, higher level (Norah).

The extracts above show that women participants started their teaching profession as level one teacher, then appointed as HODs, deputy principal and then finally as school principals for secondary schools in rural areas. The professional development of women participants, and the difficulties they experienced; thus, their professional journey from level one until school principal were highlighted.

Findings reveal that women participants in this study were qualified teachers, and how do women participants as teachers in this study able to utilize and convert professional opportunities into valuable functionings to support them in their professional work have the freedom to pursue the kind of life they want to live and have a reason to value. They were able to convert the resources at their disposal into achieved functioning; thus, progressing from being a teacher to HOD, to deputy – principal, and to school principal. Findings also reveal that they relied on their qualifications, determination, self-confidence as well as their management experience to acquire principalship position. They were also motivated by external forces such as mentors, who supported them in career journey. Findings confirm that it was out of their freedom and choices to become school principals; they intended to lead as they progress in their professional journey. The findings concur with Komiti and Moorosi (2020) when saying participants intentional sought promotional posts.

After a thorough study of the Capabilities Approach and also based on narratives of women principals it became evident that I should change the set-up of this block, and start with the agency aspect. Sen (1999: 18) defines agency as “the ability of people to help themselves and to influence the world”. He further argues that “a lack of agency equates to disadvantage”. If agency is being disabled in some way, then educational experience is diminished, quality undermine and prospect of women’s life is constrained (Chikunda & Chikunda, 2015). Participants in this study aspired first and were determined to become school leaders, hence they were able to convert their capabilities into functionings. It all starts with a choice to make a difference in the lives of children they teach as well as inspiring the whole school community.
6.3. Agency exercised by women principals

Agency is “ability of people to help themselves and to influence the world” (Sen, 1999: 18). An agent is therefore a subject and actor in his own life rather than an object of actions made of him. Sen argues, “these are people who have to be seen as being actively involved, given the opportunity in shaping their own destiny, and not just as passive recipient of the fruit of cunning development programs” (Sen, 1999: 53). Sen (ibid) emphasises that the sole measure of development is more on the person’s real freedom or capability to function than on what he achieves. CA is more concerned with what a person can do or be. Sen (1999) ‘s agency consists of four components which are self-determination, reason orientation and deliberation, action, and the impact on the world. I felt it very necessary to indicate how women principals have developed their capabilities throughout their life experiences; thus, how they started on building their agency especially from childhood. Agency is characterized by an internally caused behaviour that is freely self-determined. Women principals are agents of their own lives, because they were able to make decisions freely which impacted their lives positively; thus, reaching their valued functionings.

The empowerment of women consists of choices regarding access to resources, agency in the decisions they make, and achievement of valued functionings or outcomes. This study will trace how women were able to make decisions and live the kind of lives they have reason to value from their childhood, through schooling to adulthood. I therefore argue that without this agency it would have been impossible to bring about any actions that are required for a “moral and purposeful life” (Liao, 2010:16). I argue that through their level of motivation, women principals in this study were able to remove the obstacle that could prevent them from advancing into leadership positions. Their self-motivation is revealed in the narratives as they apply for various promotional post, for example HOD, then deputy-principal until principalship. Narratives indicate that Norah aspire for from the moment she was spotted by her mentor where she started working as a teacher. On the other hand, Violetta pursued her studies further to increase her chances of being promoted. It all started with the inner drive.

6.4. Resources

Resources refers a stock or supply of money, material, staff, and other assets that can be drawn on by a person or organization in order to function effectively (Alkire, 2005). Resources in this study refers to resources available for women principals to utilize in order to achieve their goals. The
The main question here is, what are the resources that played an important role in women principals’ career progression. I identified the following resources which enabled women principals to advance to leadership position.

6.4.1. Personal resources

Motivation is an important trigger for initial for career choice (Hong, Guangtong, Wenchuan, Dan Fan, Jun Wu, Yanying, Haijun & Qingsong, 2012). Factors associated with emotions are optimism especially academically, while social and emotional competence are described as protective factors, “the capacity to move into situations when we feel fear or hesitation” as another featured identified in the narratives of women principal especially in their early careers as teachers (Mansfield, Beltman & Weatherby-Fell, 2016).

I wanted a promotion…. I realized that no one would promote a lazy person, no one. I applied and other colleagues also applied; I was appointed a deputy-principal (Violetta).

I didn’t wait for someone to shift from the post like most female teachers do, as long as I have the resources to apply, there are no boundaries for me (Norah).

Through self-determination and confidence, they were able to advance to leadership positions. Women were confident with themselves, and felt that they are ready to take up leadership positions within the school. Yes, they were motivated by various situations, however, they took an action to apply for promotional posts.

Narratives show that women principals in this study were fully prepared when assumed their roles as principals. Firstly, women principals acquired qualification that opened doors for them to advance to leadership positions, thus teachers’ diploma and degree in leadership and management. Furthermore, women principals also fulfilled the departmental requirements for principalship, which are stated in the Amended Resolution 8 of 2020. It is evident from narratives that women principals were knowledgeable about legislation and policy framework pertaining to education management and practices. As school principals, women participants are expected to act and manage as per legislation and refer to them. This affirms the findings in De Bruyn & Mestry (2020), when saying that female principals in their study were fully prepared theoretically.
Women principals have more than five years’ experience in the teaching profession, and they have served as School Management Team (HODs) before their appointment as principals. They have served as administrators in their previous schools which also assisted them and made them confidence to apply for senior leadership posts.

6.4.2. Parental support

Sen (2002:80) asserts, “No individual can think, choose or act without being influenced in one way or another the society around him or her”. Social relationships provide the narrative web that enables a person to make sense of herself; a person’s self-concept which is derived from and sustained by her social relationships, as well as her future plans and goals (Day & Sammons, 2014). It is therefore important to consider the background influences on why and how these were formed. It is true also with participants in this study they had social supports which played a huge role in how they make sense of themselves with regard to their life plan and goals. This is noted in the following extracts:

My dad would buy all the prescribed textbooks without us giving him the list. This was a big surprise for us all. Not only that, my dad would even know who of his children will pass or fail. When I asked him why he does not buy Christmas clothes and gifts, he told me; “I am more concern about your education and future”. At that time, I did not understand him, until when I was old enough. I will forever be grateful of my dad, because he used his money for the right reasons, every year we would wear new school uniform with new textbooks, and stationery in new schoolbags…we had basics for school, and never went to school barefooted. He worked and provided for us especially in matters of our education. When I graduated from Teachers’ college, he was very proud of me.

My mom was a quiet person, but she remained my pillar of strength. She was always calm and will not show her emotions; sometimes her emotions will be reflected in the actions she took. She supported me throughout my two pregnancies; caring and nurturing me as well as showing me how to care for my two kids. I will always cherish my mom for taking care of my two kids whether she was ill or not, she had to wake up very early in the morning every day and prepare us for school. I am very proud of my mom, when I think of her, I remember an idiom in my language which goes like; Mosadi o swara thipa ka bogaleng” meaning that a mother can do anything to protect her children even if it means risking her life (Violetta).

Narratives indicate that parents played a role the career progression of their children, firstly by realizing the importance and value of education, and the desire for their children to obtain good education. Secondly, narratives reveal that parents supported them financially by paying for school and tuition fees for their children, as well as buying them basic needs, and other material such as
textbooks and school uniform. Parents were also supportive by sustaining them in their first months of working, especially in the case of Violetta.

The extract above shows Violetta’s dad “worked and provided” for her education buying textbooks, school uniform and stationery. Furthermore, he even compromised other things (Christmas gift) so that Violetta could get educated. Words such as “I am more concerned about your future” and “proud” show parental support. In addition, parental support is also revealed in the narratives, especially with regard to Violetta. Apart from financial support from her dad, Violetta’s mom took care of her two children which gave her an opportunity to complete her matric as well as furthering her study at tertiary.

6.4.3. Role models and mentors

According to social learning theory, new leaders are most likely to accept the behaviour of a credible role model to ensure future success (Bandura, 1977; Weiss, 1977). Role model credibility comes from the perception of status, power, and competence as those are cues providing evidence that a role model’s behaviour is appropriate to the situation and have been rewarded. A perception of status, power and competence are associated with both formal leadership positions such as having the title of manager, and with the ability to control resources (Brass & Burkhardt, 1993).

Role model success is important because “it reduces the new leaders’ feelings of uncertainty; it signals to the new leaders that observing and emulating role model’s behaviour will be helpful in acquiring the critical skills needed for success in that environment (Maitlis, 2005:25)”.

Women principals in this study also had people in their surrounding who influenced their career lives. “A role model is someone whose behaviour in a particular setting is imitated by others especially young persons” (Bandura, 1977:191). Norah grew up looking up to her mother, her mom became her inspiration. This is noted in the extract below:

My mom never had a stable family until she got married to her father. She got married at a young age because her maternal uncles always wished her to get married at an early age, because her parents died while Norah’s mom was 7 years of age. Despite all her troubles of not having a stable family the little that her uncles provided for her she embraced (Norah).

Norah was also inspired by her mom’s bravery and boldness to convince her husband to further her studies, she did that against all odds and become a schoolteacher. She was so inspired by her
mother that she also decided to become a teacher in her life. Observing her mom being the bread winner, providing for her family has inspired her a lot.

Norah mentions that her former male principal discovered that she had leadership potential in her early years of teaching career. Her former principal encouraged her to serve in School Management Team her. She said that when she started teaching, she never aspires to be a school principal until her former principal told her this;

“I don’t want to see you spending five years as a level one teacher, because you are destined to be a school principal, and even a circuit manager” (Norah).

She never looked back, all throughout her career she had carried these words until she was appointed school principal. Norah admitted that she learnt a lot about school leadership and management by performing all assigned duties and responsibilities delegated to her by her former principal. She learned how to administer exams especially grade 12 examinations, leave form, writing weekly and monthly summary reports, etc. This made her feel that indeed she did not belong in the lower level of the teaching profession. She said that this made aspire for leadership especially in her early years of teaching. Moreover, her leadership skills and aspiration made her to always apply for advertised promotional posts.

Unlike Norah, Violetta admitted that she never looked up to anyone as a role model. Her life was just about herself and all her painful experiences. She encountered some painful experiences both at her primary and secondary schooling. She is her own inspiration, rather her life inspired to achieve more for her and her kids. I think that it is important to learn from other women especially when one aspires for leadership position. Durbin (2016:72) maintains that “people learn new roles by identifying with role models, experimenting with provisional identities, and evaluating experiments against internal standards and external feedback”. Violetta could have chosen not to have a role model in her life, because of her hardships. Furthermore, Violetta also mentioned that when she became a secondary school principal, she had no one to mentor her. Her seniors and other principals in the neighbouring school were mostly male people who troubled him until she decided not to consult any of them anymore. Instead of helping her, she said they harassed her. When she stood against them and fend for herself, they abandon her, especially after she reported the circuit manager to the district office. She never had any formal or informal mentorship.
However, Sen (1999) maintains that one key basis of unfreedom is social deprivation. Mentors and role models help leaders to develop capabilities such as resilience, emotion, social and collective struggles, and qualities needed to function as successful women principals. Sen also emphasises that sometimes a person can develop a weak capability or strong capability set. In other words, the lack of mentor or role model can be regarded as a weakness, especially if it decreases one’s chance of leadership and management advancement. In this case, this would imply that Violetta has developed a weak capability set, in a sense that Violetta never had the freedom to identify a role model in her life. The fact that she had been alone solving her problems, and she is not used to being guided or supported in any way better than herself. Her narrative shows incidence such as those of loneliness, desperation, humiliation, and isolation.

Nevertheless, she has exercised her agency for her own career development. It was through her determination and hard work that she is a successful woman principal she is today. She took charge of her own life, becoming an agent by developing her career, which had a positive impact on her state of well-being. She was also able to develop both her management and leadership capabilities and turned them into functioning’s. She became resilient and persistent to all challenges she met on her career journey. I think that she inspired herself; the more she comes out of a problem, the more inspired she becomes.

6.4.4. Credentials and management experience

Sen (2004) discusses the two aspects of freedom; opportunity and process. The opportunity aspect of freedom relates to people’s freedom to achieve that which they value and have reason to value. People’s ability to freely exercise their practical reasoning and make choices about their way of living is referred to as the process “aspect of freedom” (P.84). The aspect of freedom consists of two processes which are “personal process concern” as well as “systematic process concern” (P84). Practical reasoning is personal process aspect of freedom, and is also referred to as internal capabilities by Nussbaum (2000a:84) internal powers of a person which result in a person being educated and trained to realize her innate(basic) human capabilities; “developed states of the person that are so far as the person herself is concerned, sufficient conditions for the exercise of the requisite functions”. Women principals both obtain their teaching qualifications at colleges and the started working as teachers. Narratives show that they acquired their management and
leadership skills by working as level one teachers, then HODs, their appointment as principals. Their qualifications as well as their teaching experiences played a role in their career progression.

6.4.5. Community support

Another form of support that enable women principals to progress in their career is community support, especially in Violetta’s case. This is noted in extract below:

The higher primary school though not far from the village, it was built between mountains and scary bushes. Parents were not comfortable with this...I mean this situation... to an extent that they had to come up with a plan to safeguard their children to and from school. So, our mothers had to accompany their children to school in the morning, and also fetch them in the afternoon; they had a roaster for doing this. Life was so difficult... I think most parents especially women, our mothers had to come with a plan to share this duty of escorting their children to and from school. Anyway, here I am today, a school principal of a big secondary... a successful school...I am a product of this village...

Narratives shows that Violetta’s community played an important role in her journey to acquiring education for herself. Women in particular were cited by Violetta as the one who made it possible for their children to go to school under some difficult and risky circumstances the community faced. The women took up on themselves to fight for the education of their children by doing something, escorting their children to school, taking the initiative to draw a schedule to make sure their children are safe to and from school. Again, the extract above also indicates that the women in particular played a role in the education of their children, despite the fact that they themselves were not educated. Through this group of women’s support, Violetta managed to inherent good life for her and family, as well as using the education as an instrument to expand on other capabilities.

6.5. Conversion factors

Conversion factors signify the extent to which women principals were able to convert available resources into achieved functionings. For example, the support of families, mentors and role models, the ability to work with learners, parents and the entire community enabled women principals to function as successful leaders. In other words, women principal in this study were able to utilize the agency freedom available to both of them at homes, schools, colleges and work, these coupled with their self-determination and convert them into achieved functionings, such as making a difference in the lives of learners, creating a vision for the school, developing people and
improving teaching and learning in their schools. Narratives of women principals reveal that despite external resources at their disposal, they were driven by self-motivation. Women principals were seen seeking promotions, they were motivated by a sense of duty and service to the learners who were their sole responsibility, they also modelled behaviour; thus, leading by example and becoming mentors and role models to others. In this way, they were able to convert the resources available to them into functioning, by doing and becoming what they value in their lives. Thus, the capability set for leadership and management.

6.6. Capability sets for leadership and management

Section 4 Chapter A of the Employment of Educators’ Act (Republic of South Africa) of 1998 stipulates both leadership and management responsibilities the school principal is expected to do, and further indicates the core duties and responsibilities of the school principal which are stated as follow: general administration, personnel, academic performance of the school, teaching, extra and co-curricular, interaction with the stakeholders and communication. Leadership is seen as an attribute directed to those members of the school who are seen to influence others (Robinson, 2001). Leadership capability is more concerned with relationships, thus the extent to which school leaders engage in particular sorts of leadership practice which also include leadership qualities. Management is defined as a professional administration of an institution with a purpose of realizing such institution’s mission, guided by its vision. Management is more concerned about “keeping the engine running” or getting things done (Day & Sammons, 2014).

Capabilities refer to the potential, and also to the “power of what a person is able to be and achieve in terms of valued choices (Gangas, 2016:56)” . These are combinations of functionings and sets of functionings that are feasible for a person to achieve, which constitute “capability sets” (Sen, 1992:120). The capability sets include “interpersonal and inter-social variations, systemic contrast between groups, the relationship between primary goods and well-beings, personal diversities, needs, desires, interests as well as spatial inequalities (Sen, 1992:44)” . This study will use the capability sets as a criterion to determine what women principals were able to do or be. The Capability Approach (CA) argues, “the perspective from which to judge a person’s well-being is that of his or her functionings, a perspective that will indicate whether persons actually have the freedom to choose an alternative to what is available, or choose from the existing options” (Sen, 1992:44-45).
This section is concerned with the school context and how women principals function within the departmental structures of secondary school as leaders and managers. It becomes clear that women principals may be disturbed to function as successful leaders and managers due to the external factors such as how they interact with internal and external stakeholders as well as the culture of the school. I argue that the way women principal function as leaders and managers of school will depend mostly from the capabilities they have acquired throughout their personal and professional lives; thus, will enable them to function successfully in their schools. As school managers, women principals need to have a capability set appropriate for their job. Women principals may have a strong leadership and management capability set or weak one, depending on the external conditions of their school contexts (Nussbaum, 2000b). She further (ibid) argues that when internal capabilities are not aligned with external conditions, women principals may find it difficult to function as successful school leaders. This is true in this study, though women principals are successful they also encounter challenges in their leadership and management roles. External conditions are critical if women managers are to function as school leaders. From capability perspective, I found the practice of school principals to be a “functioning”, because it is based on the person ‘s capability set. I therefore present human capabilities of women principals acquired through their youth and professionally as teachers as the leadership capability set. I argue that the development of sense, knowledge, imagination and practical skills, social affiliation and emotional well-being both in personal and professional areas enabled women principals to function successfully in their schools. Five themes emerged as follow, building vision and setting the direction of the school, understanding people, developing people, redesigning the school. Women secondary school principals have internal capabilities to function as successful leaders; their internal capabilities combined with external conditions can be a constraint on their functioning as leaders. Hence Nussbaum (2000a: 79) argues, “an internal capability requires an external condition and educational context”.

In addition, successful leaders are those who respond most appropriately to the demands of specific situation. A range of contextual factors affect schools within a country as well as across countries, such as location, history background, level of development, leadership structure, curriculum program, educator competence and professional disposition, learner performance, available resources as well as school culture (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006; Moos and Johansson, 2009). Even though the International Successful School Principalship Project
(ISSPP) studies have not been conducted in South Africa so far, considering the intense diversity among South African schools, their findings are still relevant to South Africa. The ISSPP findings also indicate that successful practices of school principals show some elements of several established leadership models which are enacted in response to individual context (Gurr, 2015). Several themes that emerged in this case are: providing vision and goal setting, redesigning the school organisations, improving teaching and learning, creating a positive environment, collaborating with parents, as well as collaborating with the community.

6.6.1. Building vision and setting goals

One of the key dimensions for successful school leaders is the ability to create a vision and set specific goals for their schools, and ensure that they communicate them to various stakeholders, in order to achieve collective commitment (Robinson, 2010). A vision refers to a broad picture of the direction in which the school seeks to move; and goals means the specific targets that need to be achieved on the journey towards that vision (Hallinger, 2015). Women secondary school principals in this study had the desire to make learners to pass and pass well; thus, improving the quality of teaching and learning. Narratives of women principals reveal that the professional and informed vision capabilities enable them to succeed as leaders to direct their schools in the way that would yield desired outcomes. I noticed that women principals were very much aware that as leaders they must influence and motivate everyone in their surroundings to achieve a common goal. To achieve their desired goal, thus by being “successful principals in successful schools”. The difference between building and establishing goals lies in the time frames and “scope of concern” that these two types of practice require. Goals consensus is accomplished in the short term and moves towards achieving the vision (Leithwood et al., 1999). In this section I discuss how women principals as inspirational leaders build and share their vision with other stakeholders in the school.

6.6.1.1. A shared vision

Vision building is a fundamental sense of purpose that is likely to pursued over a number of years. Sun and Leithwood (2015: 499) contend; “vision and goals inspire people to contribute, even sacrifice their effort towards the achievement of a collective goal”. Through her professional capability and the capability of knowledge, practical reason and imagination, Norah is able to detect that the school is heading in the wrong direction. This is noted in the following extracts:
When you take control of a school, as a school principal you must bring with you a vision for the school. In my analysis of the school in general, I realized that there were two major concepts which were fading: discipline and excellence. My vision is to restore the culture of discipline and, (Norah) I am very much aware that alone I cannot achieve this on my own. I need the SMT by my side and all other stakeholders to be on board.

I instilled a sense of purpose, and ensure unity. You make people realize the purpose of who they are, and why there here at work. When I arrived at this school, I gave them my core verse 1Peter:5; “We are the shepherd of the flock”, just make them feel that they have a duty to perform. I wanted my colleagues to know who they are, and what they want to achieve. As a shepherd you cannot leave the flock go astray. A teacher is a shepherd and therefore, he or she must be concerned about the learners and their well-being (Norah).

I asked them a question; Is teaching your job or your work, because if it’s your job, then it means you don’t care about anything else except your salary. A job is an exchange of money. If teaching is work, then you will expect to see the outcomes”. I asked them questions but did not want answers from them, I wanted to tell them what teaching is according to my perspective. I still remember my lecturer, one of my lecturers from college saying that “a teacher must have a burning desire to see the outcomes at the end; satisfactory or excellent one”. So, I also expected teachers here to start worrying about the overall performance of learners (Norah).

The first extract reveals Norah as a visionary leader because she is mindful that as a leader, she must create a vision for her school. The professional capability and that of knowledge enables her to analyse and identify the obstacle first which are, discipline and excellence are fading. In other words, she was aware that for her to succeed she must first know the factors that hinder the school to excel and have conducive working environment; which can lead to effective teaching and learning. It is also through her capability of practical reason she is able to reflect on the status of their schools, and find the school being dysfunctional and poorly performing. Hence, she declares, “my vision is to restore the culture of discipline and excellence”. To “restore” is to give back meaning and value which were lost due to a variety of factors. This is her first priority in setting the direction of the school towards achieving “back” the functionality and good performance.

Visionary leadership can be achieved by developing strategic initiatives for the school, inspiring and motivating the educators, which is what Norah does. She uses the capability of informed vision which enables her to practice her leadership and management roles through inspirational motivation. It is through the functioning of inspirational motivation that woman participant is seen to be able to challenge others on issues of work ethos. She uses her inspirational motivation to provide meaning and instill a sense of purpose among their staff. This is noted in her question, “is teaching your job or your work?”. At the same time, she also spells out to their staff what is expected of them. Norah takes to change the direction of the school is by instilling a sense of purpose. She is guided by her spirituality; She uses this bible verse(1Peter:5) to awaken staff
members with the aim of instilling the sense of purpose during her first meeting with staff members. In her utterance, she equates teachers with the shepherd who will protect and guide his or her flock, which in this case are learners. Again, the extracts reveal that she is mindful of the fact that she cannot carry the vision alone and be successful, she need other stakeholders to buy in, and embrace the school vision. Vision must be communicated in a way which secures commitment among members of the organization. Norah uses the “management of meaning, and mastery of communication” (Bonvin, 2012:56), in order to purse her staff member, for example, she asks question while at the same time giving answers. In all her utterances, she puts learners’ interests as the first priority; thus, appealing to her colleagues to be “shepherds”, and that “a teacher must have a burning desire to see the outcomes at the end”. This shows that she is concern about the well-being of learners. Norah as a school leader is seen to work with other stakeholders “to implant the vision in the structures and processes of the school” (Bennis & Nanus, 1985:33). A vision without goals will not be realized.

6.6.1.2. Goal setting

Just like in building school vision goal setting require the professional capability of informed vision to direct the school in accomplishing its vision. Goal setting activities are seen as motivational because they “increase the clarity of goals and perception of goals as challenging but achievable” (Leithwood, 1994:64). Goal-setting is regarded as leadership practice for successful leaders is to influence pupil learning and achievement as well as to improve staff performance (Gurr, 2015). Narratives reveal the women participants in this study use their professional capability and capability of knowledge, imagination and practical reason to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their schools by setting goals individually and collectively. The following extracts serve as examples:

In each meeting with an individual educator, I requested them to set their own target for the term, indicating how they are going to achieve their targets, what type of support they would need to achieve their targets. Mine is to listen carefully to every teacher, record their needs as they spell them out to me. (Violetta).

My target is to restore the school and bring excellence back. I believe that if were a team we are bound to succeed. At the end of each year, I call staff members to a curriculum meeting to verify if the set goals were attained. We use the checklist drawn collectively at the beginning of the year; to check every aspect of the curriculum, governance, extra-curricular etc., and also do planning in the last quarter of the academic year for the next year. I make sure that we do this in advance, this will assist greatly when we do School Improvement Plan for the following year. Every department in the school is expected to compile a full report (Norah).
It is evident from the extracts that women principals set goals for themselves as leaders of schools, as well as encouraging another stakeholder to do so. Women participants are seen to be able to communicate clearly to staff members what is expected of them. Individually, they set themselves specific goals, whereas Nora and her staff members plan and set goals collectively. Narratives also reveal that women participants set goals for themselves too, for example, Norah says, “my target is to restore the culture of excellence and discipline in the school”. She also helps others to set their own targets as she engages everyone in curriculum planning.

The extracts above also show that women participants were able to set goals for their schools by engaging other, while taking the lead and setting good examples. In addition, I find that Norah did not only set goals to be achieved, but she also makes follow-ups to check if the goals sets are attained at the end of the year. As school managers, women participants in this study focus on functions, tasks and behaviour so that functions are carried out competently; and they are also able to facilitate the work of others (Bush & Glover, 2014). Narratives indicate that women participants facilitate the work of others, meeting with individual teachers to secure personal commitment, engaging them in curriculum planning and strategic meeting both at the beginning and end of year. This suggests women principal wants everyone to be on board and to do their best in improving the learner academic results. The last extract also show that Norah sometimes was able to assess their progress in terms of achieving the set goals, thus through the checklist so that they can plan better for future.

6.6.1.3. Expecting high standards

According to transformational leadership theory, “a high-performance expectation involves the practices that demonstrate the leaders’ expectations for excellence, quality and high performance for the members of the organisations (Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 1999:68)”. This is what women principals in this study do. Narratives indicate that women participants in this study manifest high expectations at both personal and collective level (Gurr, 2015). This is noted in the following extracts:

teachers and learners are expected to be at school by 7:00, teaching time is meant for teaching…My main aim was to instill time management in everyone in the school. I encouraged everyone to come earlier than the expected time; and teachers to honour their contact time sessions with learners. (Violetta).
I called their parents to a meeting and mainly on the agenda, code of conduct was business of the day. I told them my concerns about learner’s behaviour and how this could be remedied. I know what I want for these learners. In each meeting with an individual educator, I prepare well in advance for all my meetings... I never attended any meeting empty-headed and empty –handed; because I know exactly what I want for this school…. for example, in one of our staff meeting teachers recommended …(Norah).

At the beginning of the year, all HODs and committee leaders are expected to submit their management plan to my office, so that I have all plans that I can incorporate their plans into the school’s year plan. I try by all means to stick to the school plan (Norah).

When the school is due to appoint new teachers, I always advise the School Governing Body as well as the interview committee to recommend the best and competent candidates; when new teachers report to work, I call them into my office and state the school’s expectation to them. New teachers start to work knowing what is expected from them and this help improve the learner performance (Violetta).

All I said to him was; I want excellent results. You were appointed because you were competent and had a good reputation of producing good results…. Work hard and keep up the standard, that’s all I want from you. (Violetta).

Narratives show that women principals in this study do not set high expectations for others, but also for themselves as leaders. I find women principals leading by example. The expectations set by women principals are high but also reasonable; in a sense that there within the job descriptions of educators as stipulated in the Employment of Educators Act of 1998(Section A), are core duties and responsibilities. Again, I find women principal supportive to their teachers, because when they set these high expectations for others, they also provide the necessary resources such as Learning and Teaching Support Material (LTSM) an also listening to teachers’ needs. Narratives also indicate that the expectations are individualized (Gurr, 2015), with the purpose of achieving to the best of their abilities.

Narratives indicate that women secondary principals also remind teachers of their duties and obligations, using their capability of voice to express their expectation to teachers. This is noted when Norah says “I therefore lawfully instruct you that these learners need more time to perform”; and Violetta says “I want excellent results “just to put the message across. Narratives reveal that they were also able to set standards and expectations for their teams, for example Violetta expects teachers, learners and support staff to be at school by 7 a.m. The second last extract also shows the woman participant, Violetta in this case was also selective when with regard to recruitment of teachers, she urges the SGB to set high standards in their recommendations, and recommend competent teachers to work in her school, she is seen to be vocal on what she expects from the SGB. Narratives reveal that to achieve the set goals, some behaviours must change, especially from stakeholders. In the first extract both Violetta and Norah emphasize the importance of time.
management as well as that of going an extra mile. High expectations in this case were to protect teaching time, commitment as well as excellence in the schools. Women principals also used the capability of voice to express their concerns.

Narratives reveal women secondary school principals in this study communicated their goals and expectations clearly to all stakeholders in the school through various platform; they held regular meetings with the staff and individual members, parents as well as SGB meetings regularly to remind them of the set expectations and goals.

The extracts show that women principals were able to hold regular meetings with various stakeholders. Meetings were platform for communicating new ideas, for feedback and updating various stakeholders. Narratives also reveal that Norah prepares for these meetings, this is confirmed by Norah when saying, “I never attend any meeting empty headed and handed”. This implies that she prepares herself well mentally and physical, and also in terms of resources needed to make the meeting effective. Narratives indicate that women principals were able to communicate their concerns with various stakeholders to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the school. This is evident, for example when Norah calls parents and she also engage teachers in matters that need their attention.

6.6.2. Understanding people

Sen (2002: 81) ‘s capability approach considers individuals as “quintessentially social creatures”. The thought, choices and actions of individual human beings cannot be separated from particular society in which they live. Individual freedoms are unavoidably linked to the existence of social arrangements, and so freedom is itself a “quintessentially a social product” (Sen, 1999:31”). In his account, Sen (2004) emphasises how much our relationships to others determines our identity. Sen (1982) identifies two forms of other-regarding concerns which are particularly central; sympathy where concern for others directly affects one’s welfare; and secondly, commitment, where concern for others is independent of one’ own welfare.

“A sense of affiliation and of feeling linked to another person can be a powerful derive for undertaking action to relieve the suffering of other. In the case of sympathy, action is based on the recognition that one’s well-being is directly affected by one’s actions to help someone else (Sen,1999:270)”. Whereas, in the case of commitment, the action is based on the
awareness that someone else needs help, and that has the means to help that person. Narratives of women principals’ account on other-regarding concerns seems to arise directly from the feeling of affiliation, as a response to an awareness of the fact that one’s life and that of another are linked in a common destiny (Sen, 1999:270). The capability of affiliation is described as “architectonic” because is the capability that infuses other central human capabilities; as Nussbaum (2011:76-77) notes that the capability of affiliation requires two broad considerations:

a. Being able to live with and towards others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various social interactions; to be able to imagine the situation of another

b. Having social basis of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being with equal worth; this entails provisions of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin.

The quality of social norms and practices within the school will necessarily impact the well-being of the inhabitants therein”. The capability of affiliation describes a person’s ability to live alongside and towards others, and a person’s capacity for self-respect and desire to be treated with personal dignity. The narratives of women principals indicate that a capability of affiliation cultivated by women principals play a crucial role in enhancing skills and values essential for their leadership and management roles. The leader displays behaviour that demonstrates an acceptance of the followers’ individual difference (Bass & Avolio, 1999:4; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Successful leaders are leaders who understand their followers.

6.6.2.1. Human beings are unique

The capability of knowledge, practical reason, sense and affiliation enabled women principals to develop patience, tolerance, moral as well as social obligations to others (Walker et al, 2010). From a capability perspective, the capability for affiliation shows that women principals’ regular interactions with different stakeholders within and outside the school enables them to develop self-knowledge and knowledge of other, as well as to increase tolerance. This was noted in the following extracts:

I have to recognize that human beings are unique in their own way, and they differ in their thinking, behavior and otherwise. I have to accept that … I also have to know my strength and weaknesses… before gunning at others… so that I become strategic in my leadership role…and… and become a better leader who create a better team (Violetta).
Human beings are.... They are so unpredictable.... I was once a teacher, so I know exactly how they can behave. So, I engage them especially in matters that concern them and learners. I am approachable... people don’t hesitate to open up to me with personal stuff, ... they know that they can talk to me about anything... anything. I give myself sometime to listen to my colleagues, even if I cannot change their circumstances but I do listen... it means a lot to them.... it makes me happy because when people open up to me... it says something to me... that, that they trust me as their leader. I am comfortable in my character...(Norah)

Women principals are seen to be mindful of the personal needs of their colleagues. This is shown by Norah when saying, human beings are unpredictable, and Violetta saying “human beings are unique. I was once a teacher. This suggest that they both through professional capability, knowledge and imagination were aware that human behaviour is bound to change due to various factors. This again shows that women principals are prepared to attune to the needs of colleagues, and they both know how to handle them, hence Norah says, I engage them, listen to them, and Violetta becomes strategic, in a sense that she takes her time before acting; this is noted in her utterance, I have to know my strengths and weaknesses. This suggests that she acknowledges that there is no perfect human being and leader. she therefore demonstrates an acceptance of the followers’ individual differences (Leithwood, et al., 1999).

It is also evident from extracts that she gives them opportunity to them to open up to her since she is approachable.

6.6.2.2. Showing concern and care for others

These affiliations remind us of our human connectedness and interdependent nature of human kind (Gereluk, 2015). There is an ethical and moral dimension to this interdependence which is a particular kind of dignity and worth that comes from having positive affiliations with others. Mutuality and reciprocity arise in the care and concern that we show one another, and our affiliation with one another improves our well-being. Gereluk (2015:181) argues, “it is true that limited affiliations with one another will have an inverse effect on our well-being”. Nussbaum (1996: 37) argues that the emotion of compassion is an essential bridge to justice, because it makes us to see the importance of the person’s lack and considers with keen interest the claim that such person might have”. Narratives show that women principal through the capability of affiliation were able to show concern and care for other stakeholders in the school. This is noted in the following extracts:

Senior girls in the school are busy helping in the school kitchen.... While boys take the lead in various committees. Yes, is good.... according to me it another way of
strengthening some gender stereotypes … I was very much concerned about what we teach these learners, for example boy learners in this school are not included in the cleaning roster. In my heart I knew that I am the right person who can change the situation for better…. Especially in a democratic country like ours. I told myself that I must rectify this behavior and thinking… how? (Violetta).

When I came here, office bearers in the RCL were male learners, as well as in other different committees in the school. Girl learners are busy with activities such as cleaning classrooms, and dishing up during break-time. I have always encouraged girls to also compete for leadership roles such as chairperson and president, and stop serving as secretaries…I always tell my learners that leadership starts at school and home… and if you are not afforded an opportunity at home… you must then use the platform at school, you start now to gain your confidence now… so that when you go out there you know how to stand your ground. You are also born to lead…. (Violetta).

The woman principal in the extract above shows compassion for the girl learners for being “stereotyped” even at schools. Violetta shows concerns for the girls and the school community, thus teachers as well as learners for clinging and promoting of gender stereotyping at school level. Violetta as woman principal, she uses her capability of knowledge, practical reason as well professional capability to put an end to such discriminatory practices in the school. Violetta was not only concerned about gender stereotypes in the school, she shows capability of practical reason when she identifies the gender imbalance in school learners’ leadership. This is revealed in the second extract; thus, Violetta’s conception of human flourishing, she becomes aware that girl learners suffer from lack of self-confidence and courage to aspire for leadership in the school, which constitutes a good human life, especially as young girl. Violetta was also able to see that it was not fair for girl learners, because they need to develop their self-confidence while still at school. Findings also indicate Violetta’s capability for affiliation, “the ability she has to live with and towards learners and teachers, and to show concerns that everyone should be treated with respect and dignity, whether or not one chooses to do so. Moreover, the capability for practical reason is revealed in Violetta’s capability for affiliation; she was able to conceive what was good for everyone in the school by putting an end to the wrong practices within the school. Violetta has also achieved “solicitude”, “the feelings that are revealed in the self by others’ suffering, as well as by the moral injunction (Ricoeur, 1992:191-192)”.

6.6.2.3. Respecting each other’s identity and dignity
Narratives also indicate that women principals in this study were able to respect and develop other people’s personal dignity through interaction with various stake holders. Women principal were also able to contribute to the human dignity of girls in their school, especially in the case of
Violetta, she acknowledges girls as important, and also regard them with equal worth shown to boys in the school. Violetta does that verbally by encouraging girls in her school to take up leadership positions and giving them empowerment talk. She also contributes to their personal dignity by giving them an opportunity for personal growth and relief from gender stereotypes. She also goes an extra mile to give them space to be treated with respect and dignity. She gives them space to learn leadership skills through school platforms that are available to all learners, boys and girls should be given equal opportunity to learn. Women principals were able to help learners with their human dignity, which is referred to as “status dignity”, which refers to respect-worthy status of a person him or herself, and is permanent, because it stands in the Constitution of the Republic of South, Section 10 of the Bill of Rights, 1996. Like they said in their narratives, “they want to make a difference in learners’ life”. They also want learners to envision themselves as active agents of their own destiny. They want learners to have control of their lives and their future as being capable human beings of creating change and achieving a lot.

On the other hand, women principals were also able to achieve their own personal dignity as leaders and managers of schools. Nussbaum (2006:161) asserts that capabilities and dignity are intertwines concepts, because the ten central capabilities are “ways of realizing a life with human dignity. However, Sensen (2011:262) defines the “achievement dignity” as a matter of degree and it is not a stable or permanent property since it can come and go.” achievement dignity has a moral worth that does not change one’ status dignity. However, Kant (1996:434-436) describes dignity as “respect-worthy status that the bearer of which has an absolute worth”. Both Sensen, (2011) and Kant (1996) ask, is who or what has dignity? Anyone with “dignity of a rational being, of morality, and humanity insofar as it is capable of morality as that alone has dignity and of autonomy as the ground of the dignity human nature and of every rational nature (Kant, 1996:345).” All rational beings who have the capacity for morality have status dignity, and therefore should be able to fulfill all their duties and thereby act in a dignified manner to have achievement dignity. In addition, Kant (1996:440) argues that “the capacity for morality requires cognitive capacities for thinking in terms of principles, thinking oneself into the position of others, imagining different outcomes and choices, applying general principles to particular cases with judgement, and so on”. In addition, “one also needs to be able to acquire attitudes of self-respect, esteem, and love towards both oneself and others (Formosa, Claudio, La Rocca, Ferrain &Bacin, 2013:190-191). The notion of “capacity’ means something that a person could do now, which
supports what Nussbaum (2011: 20) calls “internal capability” which is a capability in a mature condition of readiness, which when combined with the appropriate political, social and economic conditions, constitutes a combined capability. Lastly, the notion of capacity could also mean “innate equipment”, innate powers that are nurtured or not nurtured, “basic capabilities” (Nussbaum, 2011:23). This was achieved through the capability of affiliation as they were able to work and towards other people.

6.6.2.4. Working with others

Narratives in this study indicate that women principals earned the respect and dignity by working as leaders and managers of their schools, leading by example and also appealing to others especially the SMT members as leaders and managers of department to set good example to those they lead in school. The way the women principals were able to communicate and express their thoughts and opinions also contributed to them being respected and therefore earned the personal dignity they deserve. The way they have interacted and work amicably with others, treating others with dignity also earned them respect and dignity in the process. Moreover, women principals were work hard in their leadership and management roles to prove the stereotypes wrong by becoming capable leaders who earned an “achieved dignity”, as well as being respected by others, because others saw how well they respected themselves. Narratives attest that women principals in this study were able to develop and achieve their personal dignity and respect. This is also noted in the extracts below:

I support and protect the right of each individual within the school, their privacy by keeping personal issues confidential as agreed with each one of them. By so doing I earn their trust in return. It feels so good as a leader to know that your subordinates trust you with their personal issues. I try by all means to embrace every staff member irrespective of their personality. Some personalities are so difficult to handle… but I accommodate all people.

I am also welcoming, and they know that they can confide in me, I listen and show empathy when people explain their difficult circumstances. One of my leadership strengths is that I am a patient person by nature (Violetta),

I am not here to make friends… no we are co-workers… I mean the main reason we are here is the learners. So, building good working relationships was key aspect if I am to succeed as a principal. I wanted to win them to my side. I respect my colleagues; I don’t gossip about any teacher. I listen to all teachers’, (Norah).

Team members will hold you accountable if you don’t deliver as planned. There is a sense of ownership with teamwork and shared decision making as well, which is good because it keeps the school running effectively. Team work makes members to share the responsibility and credit. The credit does not go to the principal alone, but to the whole
staff. If the team succeeds, we celebrate together, even when the team fails… we all take the blame… no one to blame. I encourage teamwork (Violetta).

The South African Educator Council of 2000 (SACE) believes that the ethics of the profession means making the Code a part of every educator’s professional life. To be ethically competent means one is able to make ethical decisions and act ethically in the context of one’s everyday professional life, and that one understands the difference between, right and wrong, good and bad (Norms and Standards for Educators). The SACE Code of ethics tells us how educators “ought to behave in their working lives as professionals. “Ethics does not happen in vacuum; it happens in and through the interactions and relationships with other people” (SACE, 2000: 5). Narratives of women principals in this study reveal that they were able to demonstrate the ability and consider a range of ethical possibilities for action, in terms of what is the right action to follow, and to perform the chosen action which is referred to as “practical competence” (P6).

Furthermore, women principals in the study have demonstrated an understanding of ethical knowledge and thinking that underpins the actions they take. Findings also reveal that they notice of their core professional values, for example the extracts below serve as example of that; words such as “support and protect the rights of other, trust, listen, and patient are clear indication that women principals in this study have established working relationships with various stakeholders, earn the trust of their colleagues as well as to work amicably with everyone. This also an indication that they are capable to act and behave ethically around others, which is influenced by the ethical knowledge they possess as professional educators and school leaders.

Finding in this study show that women principals were able to establish positive working relationship, where members of staff were able to work collectively and cooperatively with each other. When there is trust, people feel free to perform their duties, they commit themselves to their duties, participate fairly in meeting and decision making of the school. Moreover, narratives indicate that women principals were also able to tolerate others without unnecessary misunderstanding. In other words, they were able to draw the line in their leadership and management roles, for example “I kept quiet”. Keeping quiet could mean many
things, in this study this shows that Violetta was not happy when other members of staff were happy, and she did not want to upset the mood…so she kept quiet. It is a sign of tolerance.

I kept quiet… didn’t know what to say… because average pass percentage was 52. But they were happy…. maybe it was because the school operated for a long period without a principal… perhaps it was good to applaud the SMT and teachers for having achieved that percentage…. I was new … therefore I was not even aware of the challenges they went through (Violetta).

I believe in second chance. It worked out well and I am very proud of myself and the accounting teacher (Norah).

The culture here is that we care a lot about each other; mostly about the wrongs that will bring our school into shame. I believe that as a leader, you set the tone for the school and others will follow (Norah).

The third extract also attest that women principals were aware of who they were dealing with, and admitted that “I have to accept”, this shows that they were ready to work with different people and accommodate all of them despite their characters. Women principals in this study were also found to create a positive school learning culture in various ways. They protect teaching time by instilling a sense of time management in teachers and learners. They develop teachers professionally through empowerment and role modelling. They do these with the purpose to improve the academic performance of learners, and by creating a conducive environment for teaching and learning. Narratives indicate that women principals in this study are successful because they can protect teaching and learning time.

On the other hand, Norah slowly introduces afternoon, evening and weekend study and extra lessons for teachers to cover the syllabus and learner to study on their own. She affirms that imposing this idea of extra lessons outside normal teaching time was not easy to coordinate, because she did not want to impose the idea on teachers. Instead, she used the poor results to talk sense into teachers first, and then brings parents on board later. In one of the staff meetings, she alleged; “I therefore lawfully instruct you that these learners need more time to perform. Please go and check your results and think about how best you can help your learners perform better”. Nora was aware that for learners to perform well academically, teachers ought to commit themselves even outside the allocated teaching time. This was only possible through teamwork, parents, learners, and teachers were on board for this new change. Teachers were given some incentives as a token of appreciation, which was agreed upon by parents and members of the SGB. Findings also show that learners were motivated through prize award ceremonies annually. Learners were
appreciated for excellent performance academically, leadership, sports and cultural activities such as debate.

I was worried because more time for teaching and learning was lost…. I can see that parents now trust me with their children and they believe in me as a leader, and not necessarily the woman principal (Violetta).

According to Buttram (2006), management as a dimension focuses on the role the school principal play in many areas of the school. Management is about running day to day activities of the school in general. It should therefore be noted that the principal will need some help from other stakeholders to run the school efficiently and effectively. In this case, I am referring to the School Management Team, who have a duty to assist the principal in carrying duties of monitoring and supporting teaching and learning program. Hallinger (2015: 31) asserts, “this requires the principal and other leaders to be engaged in stimulating, supervising and monitoring teaching and learning in the school”. Narratives reveal women secondary school principals manage the curriculum program through monitoring learners’ progress and making teachers accountable in their own subject and by setting high academic standards. Norah classified learners in her school according to their learning abilities. She asserts that by so doing teachers’ job become much easier, in sense that they know exactly where to put in more effort. Thus, teachers know how best to help learners at high risk of not achieving; they will also know the type of questions learners at high risk of failing are able to answer so that they can get a pass. Norah said that this classification of learners according to their learning abilities has improved learners’ performance especially in grade 12 where they got 100% pass rate.

The other major decision I took at this school was to classify learners according to their learning abilities. I decided on this strategy after releasing that learners are given extra lessons during weekend and in the afternoons, and I think I started to worry because learner performance was no longer improving… you know…. It was as it as a school we have reached a plateau… The main purpose for the school to embark on this process was to get all learners pass especially in grade 12 classes. My idea was, we start we grade 12 and see what happens… and then take the process to other grades gradually. This classification of learners was aimed at benefitting the learners because when they are in their learning abilities groups, they will get the relevant and necessary attention they need (Norah).

Secondly, women secondary school principals also indicated in their narratives that every teacher in the school is held accountable for their results; term or quarterly results are analysed, and this has instilled a sense of accountability in teachers. It is evident from the extract above that those
who lag behind were called in to explain themselves to Norah, for example, grade 12 accounting teacher who was always absent and missing contact sessions. However, through patience and support the teacher is now excelling in his accounting teaching and results are excellent. Norah uses the checklist to see if goals set at the beginning of the year were achieved.

Furthermore, Violetta manages the curriculum of the school by making sure that the school appoints competent teachers.

I want excellent results, and nothing from you. You were appointed because you proved to be competent and had a good reputation of producing good results… work hard and keep up the good standard, that’s all I want from you (Violetta). I think teachers know that if they do not produce good results, they will have to account, and many of them do not want to account for poor results. Teachers are serious about their work; they do not want to be pushed to do work (Norah).

when learners continue to make noise for more than ten minutes, I know that they are not being attended to. I simply go straight to that class and ask them which teacher is supposed to be teaching them, or else I consult the main time-table and call the teacher concerned…, I am paid to do that”.

“As I am speaking to you right now, I am at school monitoring grade 12 afternoon study, it is Sunday afternoon (Norah).

This is what Violetta say to the newly appointed teachers during induction. She does this to ensure that the teacher knows what is expected of him. She also motivates the teacher to work hard, because all she cares about is quality results. She also manages the curriculum through supervision and monitoring. The narratives show that teachers call her an autocrat simply because they hate her when she reminds them to attend learners.

Women secondary school principals manage the curriculum by setting good example, thus leading by example. Findings disclose that on regular basis Violetta reminded her SMT members to lead by example. Violetta is a grade 12 maths teachers, honouring her contact sessions, she attends meeting called by Mathematics HOD, and also claims that during the meeting she remains a teacher and not the principal. She wanted them to set good examples to other teachers and learners. On the other hand, Norah maintains that as a school principal she always leads the way, offer support and monitor afternoon and weekend studies.
6.6.3 Developing people

The primary aim of this leadership practice is building not only knowledge and skills that teachers and other staff need in order to accomplish organizational goals. This includes practices such as modelling behavior and values, leading by example, supporting, developing, mentoring, recognizing and rewarding others, listening to others, looking out for teachers’ personal lives and professional work, as well as giving them space. Mentoring is about professional development, and professional development is about growth and advancement which it enables adults to explore their own thinking and contradictions that enhances self-development (Drago-Severson, 2004). This according to capability approach is to exercise a strong sense of the own effective agency (Nussbaum 2000a). In the next section I discuss how women acted as role models and mentors

6.6.3.1. I lead by example

According to Leithwood et al, (1999: 80),”the best practice is practice that sets an example for members to follow and are similar to the values of the leaders”. I found that women principals in this study acted as role models and mentor in several ways to develop the teaching capabilities of educators as well as their career advancement. “Modelling of values occurred at all times, it is not a matter of choice, you have to model that you work hard, that you have integrity and honesty, and that you respect and that you are worthy of respect (Drago-Severson, 2004:17)”. Women principals were seen to lead by examples setting goals and high expectations for themselves, and want others to emulate them. Besides, they have also led by examples in various ways:

I always lead the way, so that others may see how things are done, and that things are possible. If you want teachers commit to their work, and honour their lessons, monitor extra-curricular, you must lead the way. I offer support throughout the year, monitor afternoon and weekends studies. I compromise my time and family time in most cases just to step in, and monitor grade 12 prep time…. I am always the first person to arrive at school and the last to leave the school premises. I am never late for work or for any departmental activities. I also encourage my colleagues to be earlier than expected when they are scheduled to attend departmental meetings and workshops (Norah).

In a school like this, the principal must lead by example. I volunteered to teach some maths lessons in grade 10 and 12. I did all this to show other teachers that I am also a competent teacher, and can do what other teachers are doing besides my other administrative duties. When the HOD calls a meeting, I attend and during the meeting I am a teacher not a school principal. I listened to my senior and do as requested. This behaviour has helped me change how some insubordinate teachers think about their seniors. I perform all teaching duties and responsibilities such as teaching, setting tests for my classes, record marks and submit to my senior. I am always the first one to submit and meet deadlines, where possible I assist my colleagues with other duties (Violetta).
I do this in various ways possible, such as respecting others so that they can respect me. I do treat the way I want to be treated. I also do not rush to take actions I take some time to get all my facts right before talking and acting. I also appreciate the good work from my colleagues, some teachers are assets to the school, and for motivation I show that their valuable contributions towards the school is noted and appreciated (Violetta).

The extracts above indicate that women participants see themselves as role models and mentors to their teachers. I found women principals in this study expected the teachers to follow their work ethics of hard work, commitment, sacrifice, support, competence and volunteering. These are some of the values they expect their staff members to emulate.

6.6.3.2. I am Confident

Narratives again reveal that women principals were confident with their leadership, and knew when to display their confidence. They did this by speaking up their minds, exercising authority where necessary as well as demonstrating their passion for leadership.

I could see that many people were happy and looking forward to new things, while some looked unimpressed. I was not much worried, because some people are scared of change. Until you exercise your confidence some people will take you advantage of you, undermine your decision and authority as a leader. All I did was to take my position and also requested everyone to know their place. It does not sound nice, but if you want to succeed, let everyone be aware of their roles and duties, in order to avoid confusing roles (Norah).

Leadership without confidence cannot be successful, you will resign in your first year. I repeat, you have got to be passionate leader, lead with passion coupled with confidence, heh! Believe in yourself, in your decisions and plans as well. If you don’t believe in yourself, who do you expect to believe in you? No one… so it starts with the inner self, I speak my mind; I thank God because I am an outspoken person. When there is a need to shout, I do so. When is time to explode I also do that, if this is what will make people listen or understand me, then be it (Norah)? I have been a principal before and I know that there is nothing scary in leadership. I never doubted myself in life. Never…. I know that I am a capable leader and I can meet stakeholders’ expectations (Norah).

When I decided to change the code of conduct for learners, I knew that it was not going to be easy but I knew that some parents will challenge, and indeed, parents I was reported to provincial education legislature. It took me by surprise that I was called to a meeting to explain why I violated learners right to express themselves in doing hairstyles they want. Nothing was going to make me change the decision I made …nothing … I banked on the support of the majority of parents (Norah).

Sometimes you don’t have to instruct people to do other things, such as respect. I respect everyone from learners to parents and teachers to support staff. I only teach learners how to respect each other, how to respect the school ’s property and each other’s belongings. The learner leadership (RCL) practice what they preach and also help me a lot, because they preach the school code of conduct to other learners (Norah)
6.6.3.3. I am dedicated and hard-working

Narratives reveal that women principals learn from their challenges as well as their failures in their leadership journey to success. Furthermore, hard work was also a contributor to the success of the women principal in this study. Norah attests to this:

I have learnt that success does not come cheap. There is also an idiom in my language which goes like; “kodumela moopathutse, Gobane ga go lehumo le legume tiwago kgau/si” meaning the you must work hard and sweat before you can enjoy the benefits of your work. … It was like [whooh!!!] there is light at the end of the tunnel. So, I must keep on working hard and removing all obstacles until this light is all over the tunnel, and everyone can see the road clearly from a distance…. Not easy mam (Norah).

Successful school leadership according to me entails many things, it does not come easy, because along my leadership journey I have committed some mistakes, and I have also failed in some of plans and actions. However, I have learned a lot from my leadership experiences, every time I fail… it’s a wakeup call for me. So, I grow from level 1 to level 2 and then get stuck at level 2, then move to level 3. I grow from my failures and other challenges; I do not give up… (Norah).

Women principals were persistent in the decisions they took as school leaders, based on their experience and knowledge, Norah anticipated challenges and she was well planned and ready to fight her battles, because she knew that as long as learners’ behaviour remained the same, she would not yield the desired outcomes. The passion and care she has for learners, persistence and assertiveness, as well as her problem-solving skill help her overcome some of the challenges she meets on daily basis. The professional capability and of resilience of women principals enabled her to function as persistent and optimistic leader, for example when Norah says, I banked on the support of the majority of the parents, she was optimistic, that she will succeed. In addition, when she says, nothing is going to change my mind; she was positive that the change will benefit the learners and teachers. Norah also acknowledges that as a leader she has also make mistakes, she demonstrates her capability of resilience, by learning from her leadership failures.

6.6.3.3. I can speak my mind

The capability of voice is defined as “the ability to express one’s opinions and thoughts, and to make them count in the course of public discussion” (Bonvin & Farvague, 2006:127). There are three conditions that must be met in order to achieve the capability of voice, which are; the first being that there is a need for everyone involved to be able to express their views and be listened to; secondly, that all involved should be aware and participate in the decision-making process, and that the concept of adaptive preference should be overcome by giving the freedom to everyone
to express their true preferences. (Bohman, 1996). In addition, “the capability of voice is not only a matter of adequate discursive or cognitive competencies, but also of power (Bonvin & Thelon, 2003:20”). The question for this study would be, are women principals able to speak up in their leadership and management roles? In other words, are women principals able to make meaningful expressions to those they work with? Narratives reveal that women principals were also able to speak up their minds, to influence and encourage; and when they are happy and sad, they can express their feelings and thoughts to various stakeholders in the school and as well as those outside the school.

The capability of voice is regarded as important in education, because it helps in the development of other capabilities such as critical thinking and confidence. (Walker, 2015). In addition, the ability to express one’s opinions build on the capability of being respected, treated with dignity and respect by stakeholders in and outside the school. The following extracts show how women principals express their opinions and thought to ensure that the school succeeds in achieving their goals. Women principals are heard to be in power and able to express their feeling with regard to curriculum matters, especially when things are not done accordingly. Words such as “I told”, I said” are evidence enough to indicate that women principals know what must be done, when and how. They speak with convictions as school leaders and managers of curriculum. The extracts also reveal that women principals in this study were able to confront the SMT members and other stakeholders in their unprofessional behaviour. The SMT members are responsible for leading and managing different subject departments in the school, and so the make part of the leadership in the school. this is revealed in the following extracts:

I told them to honour their periods and lead by example. The SMT members complained about too much work that they also have to meet deadlines. I told them that they cannot compromise teaching learners to perform other duties. If they cannot finish their other duties, they must take them home…. Teaching time is meant for teaching learners and not for moderation test and CASS while learners are unattended…This cannot be right, what about teachers, should they be marking tests and compiling marks when they are supposed to be teaching learners… please rectify this… this cannot continue (Violetta).

I told her that if she is not careful and rectify that she will soon be a dysfunctional HOD… which I will not allow. From that day she followed her schedule and even stopped her negative attitude towards me. I was very assertive yet polite when talking to her, reminding her of what her job description states and I also quoted the code of ethics for teachers, just to remind her how she is expected to relate to others, her colleagues including me as the principal of the school, learners and parents (Violetta)

I told him I just want to recognize him as my deputy, his work is to deputize me…. I do not delegate tasks to you because I do not know how to perform the tasks. (Norah)
Furthermore, Violetta is also able to speak up when the circuit manager violates her rights as woman; thus, taking authority to face her and report her to the district director. This shows that she knew her rights and has chosen to exercise her freedom to express how she feels, as she declares that, “I could see that he takes advantage of the fact that I was still new”. It was through her voice, speaking up to put an end to unfair treatment by her senior. She has also exercised her capability for voice, thus, “there is a need for everyone involved to be able to express their views and be listened to” (Bohnman, 1996: 18).

The extracts below are examples:

I told him I am going to report him to the district director and I did that. I could see that he takes advantage of the fact that I was still new. The district director promised me that he will take care of the matter. I do not know what he did, but the circuit manager stopped telling me all those things (Violetta).

I said to the circuit manager, I think that if Mr. X meet the requirements of the post, he will be shortlisted and then invited to attend the interviews. I cannot promise anything; you know the procedure…. I am new here… and all I want …is to do things the right way. I don’t want to set the wrong precedence… NO… (Norah)

In the second extract Norah also opens up to her circuit manager, when she is not happy to do what was requested from her. She demonstrates integrity and dignity as a school principal, by being “ethically and professionally competent”. She refused to compromise the standards of her leadership. Again, we see women principals, both Norah and Violetta exercising the capability of practical reasoning; by conceiving what was good for them personally and professionally. Narratives show that women principals were able to choose to be treated with respect and dignity. Nussbaum (2000a:131) argues, “even though it is the actual function of affiliation which matters, such as living with and towards others, being treated with respect and dignity, showing concerns for others; the capability of such states of “being and doings” would be purely political goals.

Besides, women principals were able to voice their views even with staff members, especially the educator component in staff meeting as well as with individual teachers. As a new principal, Violetta was not pleased with matric results, and extracts shows that she was happy for them because they were happy, but she wanted more from them, hence she said” This year we must come position one in the circuit”. She carefully does this with words of encouragement and support.
I still remember the exact words I said to the entire staff; Well done… you did your best… however, this year we must to obtain position one in the circuit…. And they were excited when I said that…(Violetta)

To end the meeting with my staff I said to teachers; I therefore lawfully instruct you that these learners need more time to perform, please go and check your results, think about how best you can help your learners perform better (Norah)

I have said to the learners when I arrived here, and I will continue to say, that one’s appearance determines one’s behaviour, I am so happy that the learners are singing this as a slogan when entering the school premises (Norah)

The second extract shows how Norah speaks with boldness and courage to convince her staff members that things must change. She was loud and clear when saying, “I therefore lawfully instruct you”. She speaks with power and authority to influence the decision that educators should consider giving learners extra lessons. From her voice, emerges the capability knowledge of education policy and legislations, sense and imagination are revealed. In addition, Norah also speaks up to change learners’ behaviour in the school. The words, “I have said” and “I will continue to say” show that she is very patient with learners, and would not give up until she sees learners dress and behave as stipulated in the code of conduct for learners.

6.6.3.4. I empower others

Delegation is one of the core concepts of leadership and management. It is the process of distributing and entrusting work to another person, normally from a manager to a subordinate. Delegation in this study would allow women principals to make the best use of time and skills, while on the other hand, it helps other people in the team to expand their own capabilities. It is a clear sign that women principals respect other staff members’ abilities, and that they trust their discretion. This only mean that when principals delegate they want to share the burden of management and leadership activities with other staff members. The second extract below also indicate that when principals delegate, they would have time to do other duties. Norah says, “team work makes her life easier”. Second benefit of working as a team is that” learn to understand each other better”, thirdly there is accountability and lastly, a sense of belonging because you share activities, good and bad news as well as sharing decisions.

When I performed some duties, I always made sure that there were two or three people I show how the duties are done. Then, at a later stage I started delegating staff members. That is how I have survived without a deputy–principal (Violetta).

but now I have learned to relax and let things go, because I have people that are willing to work together, I am referring to a team. Over the year I have managed to build a strong team in this school, and this make my life a lot easier than before when I was still new as leader. When you work as a team you, you learn to understand each other better (Norah).
I have learnt a lot from mentor that if you want to lead and manage the school effectively and efficiently one must be consistent and fair; having favorites teachers can actually make you lose control of the school. People are observant, you can simply lose the respect and trust of all stakeholder in the school community if you are bias. Again, as a leader you must be patient with everyone, from learner, teacher, parent and support staff. Just be patient. I think this too has helped me build good relationship with some of the teachers, especially those who are problematic (Norah).

I also encourage my colleagues to be earlier than expected when they are scheduled to attend departmental meetings and workshops. Yes, there must be there earlier so that they can relax and get themselves ready for the meeting, because when they come back, they must report to me in writing and also to their colleagues in their various department. At first, they did not like it. I mean reporting to me and their colleagues, but now it’s no longer an issue. It is part of our culture… My colleagues know that when I am not around due to departmental commitments, the next day I report to them unless if it was for personal commitments (Norah).

When I came to this school, I requested two teachers to step in and act as HOD to replace the two deputies who left the school. They were scared and did not know how to handle the assigned duties, but I helped them until they were not scared. (Violetta).

Extracts above reveal that women participants are able to open channels of communication, respect everyone and have compassion. Women principals must never compromise the culture of the school (Violetta). Moreover, women secondary school principals promoted professional development through various ways such as delegating tasks to teachers and allowing them to attend subject workshops. Norah asserted that when assigning tasks to teachers to perform, they in return learn more. She said that that she learned through performing tasks delegated to her by her former principal. Teachers gained more experience in their teaching of subject as well as administrative work, which could open doors for their career development. Hallinger (2015:34), asserts that the school principal has several ways of supporting teachers in their efforts to improve teaching and learning by informing them about relevant opportunities for staff development. In addition, Norah also encourages her staff members to report back to relevant staff members upon attending any type of workshop or seminar. She also expected a written report to her as the principal of the school. These enhanced teachers’ communication skills such as such as verbal, presentation as well as writing.

Narratives also reveals that Norah always release teachers earlier so that they are not late to workshops or conferences; in this way they will capture all details pertaining to the workshop and thus will be in a better position to report back to their own colleagues at work. In the process of, teachers were empowered in their own profession in different ways.
Sen (2001) asserts that transparency guarantees should be considered because the focus is on social interactions and how people relate to each other considering what they are being offered, and questioning what they will essentially acquire at the end. Women principals’ working relationship with teachers indicate that there is trust between them. It is also revealed that the working relationship that exist with trust is a mutual one; in a sense that they depend on each other as they work in team. Women principals were able to establish teams within the school. Interdependence come in two ways, such that women principals have confidence and trust in their staff members, and therefore can delegate task to teachers. On the other hand, teachers also get empowered as they perform delegated task, because they learned more administrative work which they could add to their managerial experience.

The conception of common good benefits the functioning of the whole school, because staff members feel responsible and accountable for leading and managing their own curriculum activities through individual leadership (Leithwood, et al, 1999). It is through the capability of practical reason, that a person is able to alter certain working condition, so that as staff members they collaboratively plan and make decisions. This is evident when Norah engages her staff members in curriculum planning. In a way she was able to empower them by giving them the opportunities, also to enhance their presentation skills by reporting whenever they attended a workshop. I find women principals in this to exercise distributed leadership, because they were able to empower teachers to grow personally as well as professionally, but also helps to promote effective teaching and learning; by creating a climate of trust and innovation. (Grant, 2010).

In this section, I discussed how women principals in this study were able to develop their colleagues through their strong sense of their own effective agency; leading by example, showing dedication and hard work, as well as empower them. The capability of practical reason and collective struggles enabled them to function as role models and mentors to various stakeholders.

6.6.4. Redesigning the school
According to Leithwood, et al, (1999:82), assert, “a school’s success depends on the norms, values, beliefs and assumptions shared by the members of the organisations”. I also find that redesigning the school will depend more on the cooperation of stakeholders within the school, in order to promote both teaching and learning activities. I argue that the capabilities of practical reason, social, collective struggles, confidence and resilience will enable women participants in this study
to function as contributors towards building a positive working environment. Thus, they were able to redesigned the schools they lead.

6.6.4.1. Creating a positive working condition in the school

Studies show that there is a strong relationship between a positive environment and student outcome within the school; this also contribute towards teacher self-efficacy, collective efficacy and job satisfaction (Leithwood et al., 2006; Hirsch; 2005). Through the capability of informed vision women participants in this study are able to improve the social interactions within their schools. Narratives of women participants in this study indicate that they are able to establish working relationships, with various stakeholders to ensure that everyone within the school campus feel confident and commit fully to their teaching roles.

The extracts below show how women principals support various stakeholders in the school:

building good working relationships was key aspect if I am to succeed as a principal. I wanted to win them to my side. I respect my colleagues; I don’t gossip about any teacher. I listen to all teachers’ (Norah).

I developed some patience towards him. Maybe, it was because I know that he was a good teacher, I observed him teaching, shooh! you’ll love what he is doing, and even learners confirmed this. So, I call him to my office on regular basis, sit him down and show him his accounting results in comparison to other subjects. I did every term after results were analysed, until the teacher changed, he was seldom absent, and more committed to his work. As I speak right now accounting result are the best in the school; last year four accounting learners from this school were awarded best learners in the province. I am very proud of this, and how he made a turnaround. When I join the school everyone in the school badmouths him to me, they wrote him off; saying he is liability to the school and I must get rid of him because he is the one pulling the school down with his poor accounting result. I am happy that I did not take their advice, I believe in second chance. It worked out well and I am very proud of myself and the accounting teacher (Norah).

It didn’t feel right to make teachers account for poor results, it wouldn’t be fair to them and myself. teachers are creative when it comes to defending themselves. I didn’t want that… I was not there, so why worry about the past. all I needed was all of us to start working on a clean slate. I strategize well in my planning, and made sure all problems were eradicated, for example if learners were short of textbooks, stationery for teacher and everything the teachers demanded; I requested the SGB to purchase every item that teachers needed is provided.

I supported the SGB, because even the learners’ furniture is dirty and has graffiti on it. I then proposed to the SGB that if they can buy paints and other cleaning chemicals, I can engage the whole school in panting and cleaning of classrooms and furniture (Norah).

Then, on the day of the cleaning campaign, I suggested that males and females switch roles, …by the way some parents also volunteered…girls painting and boys scrubbing the floors… it was fun… day. The day was a success, and since that day I have instructed
all class managers to include boys in the cleaning roster, and requested that if they find challenges, they must report those to me. No complaint was submitted to me, and girls are no longer complaining (Violetta)

I regard myself as a contributor. I always ensure that the environment of the school is positive so that teaching and learning take place effectively. I do this in various ways possible, such as respecting others so that they can respect me. I do treat them in the way I want to be treated. I also do not rush to take actions I take some time to get all my facts right before talking and acting. I try by all means to embrace every staff member irrespective of their personality. Some personalities are so difficult to handle… but I accommodate all people. (Violetta).

Extracts above show that women principals support others by listening, being patient, respecting as well as embracing all stakeholders. Norah, for example make sure that teachers have the necessary resources they need to do their work properly. Narratives also indicate that women participants also support those who were unfairly treated, Violetta was creative in showing and making other people how unfairly girls were treating by switching roles on the day of the cleaning campaign. Norah also shows support to the accounting teacher and through patience she was able to make sense into the teacher, until he makes a turnaround in his professional life. Narratives also show that women participants are always visible around the campus, which is another way they interacted with various stakeholders, by just being there and not hide in their office. Visibility on the school campus has been seen to have positive impact because it increases the interactions between the principal and teachers as well as learners (Leithwood, 2012; Walker, 2012).

The following is extract is an example on how Violetta interacts with learners and teachers:

I do class visit; I don’t spend most of my day in the office. I wander around as a school manager. I am a leader who want to see for myself, yes, it is true that I can’t be all over the place and witness everything that is taking place inside the school. I hate the office...

I prefer to be out there, listen to teachers teaching, and sometimes help with invigilation and other duties and also sit in subject or departmental meetings. I rotate in my visitation, what I do to keep the engine running. When I sit in departmental meetings is an advantage because they do not have to report to me, if they have challenges, I will be near to help overcome the challenge (Violetta).

The extract shows that she interacts with teachers and learners during class visits. She also helps with other duties such as invigilation, sitting in various department meeting and class visits. Though their daily schedules are packed, but they are to create some time for others. Narratives reveal that women participants encourage and motivate others.
6.6.4.2. Teamwork

Teamwork is the state of working together for the purpose of achieving set goals in the school. According to Katzenbach and Smith (1993: 164) “a team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach to which they hold themselves mutually accountable”. In addition, regular communication, distinctive roles, coordination, interdependent tasks, and shared norms are important features of a team. Teams also enable people to enhance individual skills, provide constructive feedback without any conflict.

To ensure a positive working relationship with the stakeholders and amongst different stakeholders themselves, women participants motivate and encourage staff members to work towards achieving the goals set collectively. Narratives show that women participants were able to make others feel good by appreciating their efforts towards the development and improvement of the school, as well as sharing important information with their staff. Women participants shared their leadership responsibilities and decision making with staff members (Gurr, 2015). Furthermore, narratives show that women participants create a positive working environment through teamwork. In this way they were able to bring different stakeholders to work together by accommodating and embracing one another.

The following extracts serve as examples:

Team work makes members to share the responsibility and credit. The credit does not go to the principal alone, but to the whole staff. If the team succeeds, we celebrate together, even when the team fails... we all take the blame... no one to blame. I encourage teamwork, because they hold each other accountable [she sighs] .... Team members will hold you accountable if you don’t deliver as planned. There is a sense of ownership with teamwork and shared decision making as well, which is good because it keeps the school running effectively. I don’t have to instruct anyone anymore… I just lead the team, share ideas and decisions. I think we are doing well as a team, pushing each other to do their work (Violetta).

I asked my colleagues: What do you think can be done? This situation cannot remain like this. Immediately teachers started discussing and throwing in some suggestions. I wanted them to feel that they are part of the decision making in the school. At the end, they decided that extra time in the afternoon and during the weekends will benefit both the learners and teachers. Teachers will have ample time to complete the syllabus and learners more time to study on their own. That was what I wanted from my colleagues, I wanted them to spell it out for themselves. I believe that’s how I won them on my side. If it’s their decision, and it was not imposed on them, they become fully committed to the decision taken. Whenever I have something in my mind, I always post it on our WhatsApp group, not because I do not have solutions to these challenges, but simply out
of courtesy, to make them feel that they are part of the decision making in the school. (Norah)

Over the year I have managed to build a strong team in this school, and this make my life a lot easier than before when I was still new as leader. When you work as a team you, you learn to understand each other better, for example… I know that teacher x is good in presentation while teacher Y is hands-on… makes things happen… good in organizing…yes, it’s good because it makes me delegate well, and this makes me happy… I know that the assigned task will be well executed. Teamwork also gives members a chance to connect with each other, [She laughs] …as team members we learn to feel for others, empathy automatically comes naturally, it develops faster. We work better as a team (Norah).

Narratives above reflects the extent to which members perceive each other as fulfilling the expectations and obligations appropriate to their role. There are benefits that are attached to relational trust which are; a greater willingness to try new things, a greater sense of responsibility for learners, stronger professional community involving more shared work, more conversation about teaching and learning, as well as stronger focus on learner learning (Robinson, 2001). Narratives above reveal that women principals as leaders believe in team work, not only do they believe, but they were able to form teams though motivation and encouragement. Women principals are able to make the staff members cooperate, because they make them responsible when they share responsibilities with them, for example when Norah asks her colleagues; what do you think must be done. This shows that they regard them as equally important, and valued their contributions in the school. This suggest school vision is shared by team members and they are engaged in decision making of the school.

Furthermore, women principals used their professional capability of knowledge, practical reason and imagination to build strong teams hence they talk about the benefits of working as a team which are highlighted in the above extracts; learn to understand one another, enhancing individual skills by executing assigned tasks as expected, sharing ideas, learning to be accountable, sharing successes as well as failures as a group. All these can only be achieved if the leader regularly communicates with staff members; women participants in this study demonstrated in section 6.6.4. They encouraged and motivated staff members to work hard, and be committed towards achieving the school’s vision.

6.6.4.3. Collaborating with parents

Gurney-Read (2018) maintains that most parents wish to achieve the dream of their children having a better life than their own, and thus are willing to invests in the development emotionally
and practically wherever possible. Parents are described as “the adults responsible for the welfare of each student, and therefore regarded as key when it comes to effective working relationship” (Male & Palaiologu, 2017: 148). It is therefore incumbent on schools to seek to promote student achievement as well as attainment and to have clarity on how this is to be reached through partnership. According to Male and Palaiologu (2017:149), parental involvement is related to school-initiated activities, which have their focus on parental interaction with the school rather than with the learning of the child, and is measured by parental presence rather than by student outcomes. Women participants in this study were able to work and interact with parents of learners in their schools in a variety of ways; such as through parents’ meeting, celebrations and other events.

The following extracts serve as examples:

When a parent complains about a teacher, I tell the parent to come and see me in a week’s time. I know that I would have enough time to investigate the matter, checking on the teacher concerned, checking their progress, requesting learners work book and interview some learners in the same class, just to get my facts right as well as talking to the teacher about the allegations. When the parent come back, I tell him or her my findings….

I called their parents to a meeting and mainly on the agenda, code of conduct was business of the day. I told them my concerns about learner’s behaviour and how this could be remedied. She was happy that most parents supported the idea and they signed the amended code of conduct. Only one clause was inserted in the code of conduct, which was all learners must have short, new braids, no dreadlocks and no funny styles. All hair must be manageable.

This was not easy especially in the first year, because some parents were not convinced that appearance could not affect learner performance negatively. I have to cautioned parents that secondary school learners especially teenagers behave differently when they feel different from others, they get distracted easily. Nothing was going to make me change the decision I made …nothing … I banked on the support of the majority of parents.

parents are very impressed with how the school yard has been changed. The school environment looks pretty because I requested the SGB to install a welcome signage, to construct car ports for the staff and visitors, as well as to renovate the reception area in the administration block. The whole area is now welcoming

The extracts above reveal how Norah interacts with some parents when they complain about teachers. This suggests that parents feel free to come to her office and express their concerns in relation to teaching and learning of their children. This suggests that they have trust in her to help solve the problems of their children. On the other hand, Norah enjoys the support she gets from some of the parents, which implies that she has trust even though some parents may object to her changing the learner code of conduct, the majority support her. Hence, she says, I banked on the
majority of parents. In addition, narratives also show that she has a positive working relationship with the School Governing Body (SGB) towards the development of the school. The SGB cooperates and do as they are requested. This is how Norah and Violette engages and interacts with parents of the learners in her school. This is noted in the following extracts:

Parents of learners at this school are supportive in matters that interest them, such as celebrations, farewell, prize giving and helping in the nutrition project because they benefit in one way or another. For example, sometimes they take leftovers to their homes for their children (which is not a problem). However, when you call them to a formal meeting to discuss more important issues they seem not to be interested. They do not come in large numbers as I would expect. Well, at first but now it has changed for better. They majority of parents do not come to parents’ meeting, I had to summon them to come to the meeting. Some parents told me they would come to the meetings even if they sometimes do not understand what is going on.

During my first meeting with the SGB, I requested the School Governing Body to renovate the school, because according to the SASA (South African Schools’ Act 1996) it has 16 classrooms to accommodate 434 learners with 17 state-paid and three SGB paid educators.

for example, some parents will come when school reopen in January to seek admission for their children or grandchildren. I can’t say no, because sometimes I know their situation…. The good thing is that when learners know you know their homes and parents, they behave, it put then on their toes to be good learners, when they misbehave… they come rushing to my office to plead with not to inform their parents. If it is minor, I just punish them … but there are cases that need parents. When teachers complain about the same learners who misbehave and not do their work, I do home visit to check the situation, and where possible I involve the social workers to intervene.

… the SGB volunteer to provide some music system and fruits… fundraising committee contacted local business sectors for donations such as drinks and other food items…. Then, on the day of the cleaning campaign, … some parents also volunteered…

Narratives reveal that Violette engages the SGB and parents in decision making of the school, such as cleaning campaign for the school. She accommodates parents in matters of admitting their children even when date for admissions has passed. The SGB and parents support the schools by volunteering and the SGB donating some items on the day of the cleaning campaign. There is also parenting partnership where she sometimes visits families and homes, she of learners who are troublesome at school. This suggests that she is also concerned about the learners and their families; this is a form of communication from school to home and home to school (Epstein, 1995). She uses her practical wisdom to assess the home situation of learners and recommends to the local social workers to intervene. Parents are also seen supporting the school events. However, narratives indicate that they still lacking in attending parents ‘meeting but they support the school in other initiatives.
I therefore conclude that women principals in this study were able to use their capability of affiliation, knowledge and practical reason to build productive working relations with parents, teachers and the community at large through team work and support.

6.6.4.4. Collaborating with the wider community

Community refers to the “immediate local environment rather than the national or global setting which also have an impact on educational expectations. The features of that local environment are formative in terms of desire outcomes, but can be harnessed and changed through intervention (Male & Palaiologu, 2017: 149).” School community relationship cannot be ignored if a school is to succeed. Women participants in this study established working relations with local communities to ensure that they succeed. The capability of affiliation and practical reason enable them to function as leaders to interact with outside stakeholders to benefit the school, as well as benefitting the community. Thus, women participants are able to establish mutual working relationships with those in their communities.

The following extracts show how women principals interact with community:

The good thing about being daughter of the soil, …. You get support from people and also from senior members in the community such as the chief and his assistants. I become rest assured that I will be supported.

The school is part of the community, so I am a leader in this school, I automatically became part of the community. I serve the community inside the school and I must also be visible in community gatherings and events. The community become part of the school because the SGB has allowed community members to use our facilities such the hall for memorial services, elections, and school grounds. Sometimes the school uses home ground for athletics practice and soccer tournaments. This has a positive impact because the community feels that they own the school, there is sense of ownership, everyone looks after the school; any incident of theft or burglary they notify me or the police.

I still remember at some point ten laptops were stolen from the school, I open a police case, and it was announced at the local radio station for community members to help if they have any information on the case. Before the end of the day, the police called me to say that they found a lead. The ten laptops were found hidden somewhere in one of the mountains by some women very early in the morning when they went to fetch some firewood. Yes, it feels nice to know that some people care, when you are hurt, they are hurting too. I really appreciate all the effort by community members (Violetta).

I think we have made a difference in the lives of many learners and their parents, especially because we work hand in hand with local social workers. I am also proud to mention that we are blessed and honored because one of the social
workers, we work closely with the chief’s wife. She has handled so many cases, and we are very proud of her and her team. She also gives us the necessary training where necessary, so that we can also identify indicators of social ills learners may be experiencing (Violetta).

I guess we cannot disconnect the school from the community…. what happens in the community will end up in the school… but if we join hands with the community we can overcome. I think we are winning. Sometimes I also invite the social and health department teams a slot to talk to parents about issues of concern during parents, just before we start with our meeting. They also work closely with some of our life orientation teachers, they come and present during school assemblies and engage our learners in awareness campaigns on illnesses and wellness (Violetta).

Moreover, when you are appointed the principal of school and a secondary school for that matter…ehhh... there are certain expectations that you are required to meet… for example parents and the community expect you to make their children pass, I also have expectations that I want other stakeholders to meet…when you appointed you are seen as the hope for the community you will be serving. So, if I fail … it means everyone fails…… even the community. I cannot afford to fail, especially failing learners. One reason I am appointed to this school to make a difference in these learners, that my core business as a school principal… if cannot do that … (Norah).

I find women principals in the above extracts working with the community as well as working for the community in various ways. I also find Violetta speaks with conviction when talking about the community she serves, there is trust in her utterance. This suggest that as part of her duty they fulfill their responsibilities as expected by the Employment of Educators’ Act of 1998, and South African Council for Educators (2000). In the first extract Violetta shows her professional knowledge and experience of what it means to be a school leader; when she says’ the school is part of the community, and you cannot disconnect the school from the community. She is aware of her role as a leader that for she must serve and be seen in the community; thus, respect and honour the invitations whenever possible. The same goes for Norah when she says” if I fail, I also fail the community; this shows her understanding that a leadership role also means being part of the community.

Furthermore, narratives show there that Violetta establishes positive working relationships with other stakeholders such as social workers, health experts, police officers, local radio station, the local chief and his wife and the community at large. She works for the community when she invites social workers and health experts in the school to talk about various issues; in the process
benefitting both internal and outside stakeholders in different ways. The school benefits from using the home ground, while the entire community has access to use school facilities, this is mutual relationship. To an extent a sense of ownership has been established. The community protects the school facilities and deal with social ills within the community collectively.

6.6.5 Improving the teaching and learning

6.6.5.1. Using relevant knowledge

Without an understanding of the necessary knowledge for teachers to teach well, content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, content specific, curricular knowledge and knowledge of learners; school leaders will be unable to perform essential school improvement functions such as monitoring and supporting teacher development (Spillane & Seashore, 2002: 97). However, Robinson (2010:2) asserts “it is better to employ the concept of capability rather than the more typical phrase knowledge, skills and dispositions in order to recognize the practical endeavor such as school leadership which involves as seamless and dynamic integration of knowledge and personal qualities”.

Leadership for improvement requires school leaders to be knowledgeable about how to align administrative procedures and processes to important learning outcomes (Robinson, 2010:2). Principals in South Africa are expected to have knowledge of South African legislations governing both public and private school. Findings reveal women secondary school principals in this study were familiar with departmental legislations and policies, rules and regulations. The capability of knowledge, practical reason and imagination enable women principals to use their knowledge of legislations and policies to inform their educational decisions in the schools they lead. This is noted in following extracts:

As the school principal you must have knowledge of departmental policies and regulations pertaining to leadership and management of school because you cannot lead a school with your imagination, you will fail. I always familiarize myself with legislative and policy framework in education, and where I do not understand I ask for clarity. (Violetta).

our school is quintile 1, and therefore qualifies for National School Nutrition Programme which provides at least 1 meal for learners per day. We have parents who cook and are paid a stipend by the department of education (Violetta).

They were right, but they overlooked the lawful instruction in the Employment of Educators Act of 1998. What shocked me was that by 14:30 teachers were one, (ready to leave the school yard) no extra- curricular and co- curricular activities, nothing is
school out. I had to put a stop to all this, by reminding them of work ethic. At the end of the meeting with my staff I said; I therefore lawfully instructing you that these learners need more time to perform, please go and check your results, think about how best you can help your learners perform better. (Norah).

In the new school, I had to deal with Redeployment and Replacement (R&R) process which was incomplete. I referred to departmental policy so that everyone would be satisfied, so I was to be transparent and honest. I also followed the LDOE management plan, followed all stages as stipulated (Violetta).

The extracts above are clear indication that both Norah and Violetta were conversant with departmental legislation and regulation pertaining to human resources in school. This also shows that they understood the legislation and departmental policies, and were also able to use and implement those whenever necessary. They armed themselves well, so that they would not find themselves contravening any departmental Act. They used their knowledge of rules and regulations to prepare for staff meeting as well as to help them make informed decisions in the school. The first extract also shows how confident Violetta is in her knowledge of departmental policies and regulations. Norah spoke with conviction which also displays similar level of confidence when addressing her staff; I therefore lawfully instruct you that these learners need more time to perform, please go and check your results, think about how best you can help your learners perform better. She wanted teachers to start thinking about how to help learners improve in their subjects they teach.

Sen (2009:335) argues “if someone has the power to make a change that he or she can see will reduce injustice in the world, then there is a strong social argument for doing that. This social reasoning obliges anyone to use this power to help others”. Women principals in the above extracts show that they have “social reasoning” to help learners to get extra lessons because Norah could see learners were poorly performing because of less contact sessions with their teachers. In this way, she was able to use her powers both as professional teacher, and the leader of the school to suggest to educators to think about how best they can help leaners pass well. In doing this, Norah was taking her social obligation as a school principal.

I called their parents to a meeting and mainly on the agenda, code of conduct was business of the day. I told them my concerns about learner’s behaviour and how this could be remedied. I was happy that most parents supported the idea and they signed the amended code of conduct. Only one clause was inserted in the code of conduct, which was all learners must have short hair, no braids, no dreadlocks and no funny styles. All hair must be manageable. This was not easy especially in the first year, because some parents were not convinced that appearance could not affect learner performance negatively. I have to cautioned parents that secondary school learners especially teenagers behave differently when they feel different from others, they get distracted easily (Norah).
“If you want stakeholders in this field to take you seriously; you must equip yourself with policies and implement them. Use them as your weapon” (Norah).

“Whenever we hold staff meeting, I refer them to the relevant departmental policy and legislation. I always say to my colleagues that whatever I am going to say or do here is not out of my imagination, but guided by policy. My colleagues, now know that before they could challenge me on decisions I made, they must refer me to policy and not their opinions I was transparent and followed the policy, I am new to the school, fair and objective” (Violetta).

I coordinate the School Based Support Team (SBST)… just to tell you briefly about this team… the team identifies learners with psycho-social problems such as sexual abuse, substance abuse and domestic violence which can disturb them to be fully committed to their studies, learners with learning disabilities such as hearing and vision. Most of learners experiencing these problems are gifted. The SBST step in to help remove some of the obstacles so that learners can perform to the best of their abilities. I think we have made a difference in the lives of many learners and their parents, especially because we work hand in hand with social workers (Violetta).

I changed the system of allocation with regard to duties and responsibilities of teachers. When I was an HOD …. I have seen that the way allocation is done in most school could be contributing to learners underperforming. When teachers are allocated both senior and junior classes, they mainly focus on senior class, sometimes neglecting junior learners, not intentionally. their focus is more on grade 11 and 12 because that is where more attention is…. Grade 12 results (Violetta).

The other major decision I took at this school was to classify learners according to their learning abilities. I decided on this strategy after realizing that learners are given extra lessons during weekend and in the afternoons, and I think I started to worry because learner performance was no longer improving… you know…. It was as it as a school we have reached a plateau… The main purpose for the school to embark on this process was to get all learners pass especially in grade 12 classes. My idea was, we start we grade 12 and see what happens… and then take the process to other grades gradually. This classification of learners was aimed at benefitting the learners because when they are in their learning abilities groups, they will get the relevant and necessary attention they need (Norah).

On the other hand, Norah was well conversant with South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, and this assisted her much when dealing with all stakeholders in the school; she was able to change the learner code of conduct, after having consulted with learners ‘parents. She also was aware of parents’ rights to the education of their children, her calling parents to a meeting is evidence enough that she knows that she cannot change Leaners’ code of conduct without parents’ approval. The extract also indicate that she knew protocol of dealing with school policies especially if amendments are to be done. She was also able to remind her staff of work ethic because she was familiar with the policies. It was also evident from her narrative that she knew exactly what her duties and responsibilities were when she said in one the interviews, she asserted that she advised the SGB members to consider renovating some buildings in the school. This again, suggests that
she knew that maintenance is the SGB’s responsibility (SASA, 1996), and she can only render advice. Through her professional capability she was able to draw the line between management and governance matters. I also found out from the narratives that women secondary school principals did implement policies. They did not only know departmental rules and regulations, but also implemented them in their schools to make succeed. Narratives indicate that women principals in this study were able to use their critical knowledge and understanding to align administrative procedures and processes to create a conducive environment for effective teaching and learning. By using their critical knowledge and understanding women participants in this study were able to sort out staffing issues in their school, for example, Violetta was also able to solve the R & R process for effective teaching and learning to take place. On the other hand, Norah used “lawful instruction from EEA of 1998 as well as SASA of 1996 to restore the culture of discipline and excellence. There was order and commitment which promoted learners and teachers to work towards achieving the vision of school.

The process of resource conversion for achievement is related to personal and social characteristics, environmental features as well as group achievement. The capability approach takes into consideration conversion factors, and therefore takes into account the broader social and institutional context that affect a person’s capability set. The National Programme of School Nutrition (NPSP) for learners at school level which is available play an important role to both learners and educators, because learners will be able to concentrate in class when they had something to eat, or when they know that there is something that is being prepared for them. Learners will concentrate in class, and learners will also work to the best ability to improve their academic performance. This would also imply that learners would be at school every day. Resources have value when used as supporting tools towards people’s functioning and capabilities; the NPSP is the basic survival capabilities for learners in the school. This will help to increase learners’ concentration span during lessons, hence an end-product. Women principal were able to use their professional capability and the capability of practical reason to remove all obstacles that can disturb learners from learning effectively and pass well, for example, when Norah changes the learners code of conduct to instill a sense of self-discipline in learners.
6.6.5.2. Solves problems

Women principals were able to use to use their informed knowledge and senses to detect areas that prevent teachers to fully commit themselves, and find out morale of teacher is low and therefore must be supported. Women participants were also able to use their professional knowledge to understand the existing culture which contributed to the school being dysfunctional in the past years, thus before they took upon the leadership of the school as principals. They were able to identify problems in their schools and then later use their knowledge, sense and practical wisdom to come up with solution in order to create a positive working environment for teachers and learners.

The following extracts indicate the problems identified by women participants:

sometimes I will be in my office after break, and be alerted by learners’ noise that they are not attended to. So, I go and check on them, it’s my job. When learners continue to be noisy for more than ten minutes, surely there is no effective teaching and learning taking place, so I have to check and yes, I asked learners what period is it?

Late coming was a big problem at this school here, teachers and learners the same. I was worried because more time for teaching and learning was lost….

Staff members were even late for staff meetings, and admin staff not different. when you call them to a formal meeting to discuss more important issues they seem not to be interested. They do not come in large numbers as I would expect. Well, at first but now it has changed for better. They majority of parents do not come to parents’ meeting, (Violetta).

When I arrived at the school, I found that the school is operating with two HODs. The two departments, science and humanities were not operating effectively, because there had no one to lead them, learners’ discipline was a big problem, with regard to how they presented themselves. (Norah).

The above extracts indicate the problems women participants found upon their arrival in their schools which are leaner discipline, unequal treatment of girl learners, late coming of both staff members and learners, teachers not honouring their lessons, and untidy classrooms. It is evident from these extracts that no effective teaching and learning would take place while these problems continue to exist. In order to make the environment conducive, women participants were able to establish working relations with others by offering support. Based on these identified problems, women principals were also able to take a step towards improving the working conditions in their schools, and the first step taken by women was to offer support in various ways to different stakeholder in the school.
Narratives also reveal women principals to be problem-solvers, in solving problems in their respective schools. “Good problem solving does not emerge from knowledge of method or strategy per se; good performance in problem solving requires a substantial knowledge base integrated with knowing how to use knowledge in wide range of problem contexts” (Leithwood, 2006:285). Women principals were able to solve real problems in the context of staff meeting. They had the ability to facilitate staff meetings and deliberations that took place effectively; in a sense they were more “open to alternative formulation of problems”, and “seek out interpretations of others” (Leithwood, 2006). The extract shows women principals solving problems in their school, and that they did not want treat these problems in isolation, they involved others. They managed to do that because they were good facilitators and also consulted with the relevant stakeholders.

Women principals were able to use their knowledge and problem-solving skill to bring learner discipline to be it was supposed to be. Through her influence and managerial skills, Norah also inspired parents to approve the new clause in the learners’ code of conduct. It is also evident from the narratives that women principals were able to solve school problems related to human resources such as learner discipline, as well as curriculum matters. They are able to use their “sense, imagination and thought” to solve complex school problems. In this case, they protected the teaching time so that there is effective teaching.

6.6.5.3. Provides Learning and Teaching Support Material (LTSM)

The South African Schools Act of 1996 and Norms and Standards (1996) stipulate that 60 percentage of the funds should be utilized for curriculum purposes. The question for this study is” the freedom to use school funds shall be based on the utility fund and other means that the school use to achieve the stated aims and goals. “Schools may achieve the stated goals or objectives not because they have better resources, but rather the way in which they manage and make better use of these resources, (Simkins, 1997:164)”. Norah was able to utilize financial resources for improving teaching and learning in school. This is noted in the following extract

I strategize well in my planning, and made sure all problems were eradicated, for example if learners were short of textbooks, stationery for teacher and everything the teachers demanded; I request the SGB to purchase every item that teachers needed is provided. I knew it in my heart that when their demands are all met, they would have no reason whatsoever not to produce good results (Norah).
The extract shows that Norah as the school principal ensures that both learners and educators are fully provided with Learning and Teaching Support Material (LTSM) for effective learning and teaching to take place. The extract also reveals that the principal knows (financial prescripts) how school finances are managed in the school, though she is the accounting officer, and part of the Finance Committee, a Sub-committee in the School Governing Body, it is the responsibility of the SGB to approve and authorize the LTSM requisition. Sen (1991: 11) argues that school principals should not be “passive recipients” of the government utility fund who receive government assistance; school principals should be seen as “individuals who can with adequate social opportunities efficiently shape individual schools and to help each other through the principals’ forums and SGB (Cheng, 2003: 22). Cheng (2003) posits that the way in which to acquire resources depend on the principals’ potential influence on the SGB. If the principal is influential enough, then the school is likely to achieve its stated goals and objectives.

6.6.5.4 Mobilizing human resources

According to the Employment of Educators’ Act (1998), one of the core duties and responsibilities of school principals is to lead and manage school resources for effective teaching and learning. For school principals to be successful in their leadership and management role, it means that they should be able to utilize resources at their disposal to improve both teaching and learning in their schools. Emery and Flora (2006:21) conceptualize Human capital,” refers to the skills and abilities of people to develop and enhance their resources and to access outside resources and bodies of knowledge in order to increase their understanding, identify promising practices, and to access data for community –building”. In this study, the need for strong human capital is on the part of the school principals, SMT, SGB, and other stakeholders as critical in identifying and mobilizing resources for improving teaching and learning. Women principals were able to secure personal commitment with teacher in their school. This was emphasized in section 6.5.1 in which women principals function as inspirational leaders, setting high goals and expectations for all stakeholders with the purpose to achieve the school vision. By setting high expectation for staff members, they encouraged teamwork which promoted staff dedication and hard work. This is noted in the following extract:

Our school starts at 7:30 in spring and summer and finishes at 14h30, then 30 minutes break and then study time from 15h00 to 16h30, and 8h00. In autumn and winter, the school starts at 8h00 and finishes at 15h00. In summer, some
teachers opted for morning lessons especially with senior classes, just to support learners in areas they find challenging to comprehend. Successful school is all about the educators who are highly committed and dedicated to their work. Teachers here know how to work from nothing, they know how to utilize the little resources at hand to produce good results. I am grateful for that (Norah).

I offer support throughout the year, monitor grade 12 afternoon and weekends duties. I did not go home this weekend; I will see my family on Monday afternoon.

Sen (2009:289) focuses on the “concept of advantage” of agency freedom and achievement which shifts the focus away from seeing teachers as just vehicle of well-being. Focusing on teachers’ freedom made visible ways in which teachers use agency to improve the lives of learners at the expense of their own well-being. For example, teachers in Norah school are seen spending lunch and other break times teaching than socializing, monitoring learners on weekends. The focus on teachers’ agency also demonstrates that teachers are also located in the broader social environment in which the specific needs of these environments are often seen focused beyond the limits of their personal well-being (Sen, 2009:289).

6.7. Constraints of women principals

There are external conditions within the workplace which can prevent women principals from functioning effectively. Nussbaum (2000a) refers to capability as basic, internal and combined capabilities. The basic capability is the innate capability that a person needs for developing more advanced capabilities. The internal capability is a “more mature condition of readiness” that is possessed by a person which develops with the support of the environment in which one is reared. (P.84). The combined capabilities are the internal capabilities with the external conditions for the “exercise of the function” (P.85). Though women principals function as school leaders and managers, they also work within external school context which may constrain their functionings as successful leaders and managers. In this section, I discuss how women principals experience combined capabilities in their leadership functioning.

6.7.1. Gender discrimination and stereotypes

Previous studies have shown that when a woman takes a leadership position in what was previously a male domain, whether in primary or secondary school, this is seen as an intrusion that leaves her exposed and vulnerable (Graig, 2017:90). Inevitably, she faces challenges based on gender stereotypes and the uneasiness about women in leadership positions. Moreover, principalship was not a visible career move for women principal, in a sense that they replaced male principals, and
this could be a reason for gender discrimination women principals had to face a variety of challenges upon resuming their leadership roles (Graig, 2017). This is also noted in the following extracts:

I can see how people treat me, they treat me as a woman principal and not as a school principal. The way they think about me, how they treat me, I some time feel that if I were a man, they would have treated me differently. The way they even challenge me, when I first came here, you’ll feel that it was intended to make me feel worthless. They doubted my leadership (Norah).

My male colleagues did not take me seriously. Maybe, because I was the first woman principal to be appointed in the school, they were not used to work under the authority of female leader. They looked down at me as competent and naïve; as if I am not capable of doing the job. I was surprised by how people think about women leaders, honestly already they judge me for just being a woman, that I am young woman and therefore cannot lead and manage the school. It was never easy, it took me years of hard work and commitment, shoo…. sleepless nights to make it this successful. I have no mentor me ((Violetta).

The SGB members started threatening me and telling me to leave their school. Indeed, when principalship post were advertised the SGB chairperson told me not to bother applying the principal’s position in their school, because their school needs a male principal (Violetta).

The worst part is that sometimes people do not want to take instructions from a woman, to my surprise even women teachers were insubordinate. All these have changed, when the school produce good and excellent results people start changing the tune, they comply, support and respect you as a leader.

My relationship with my deputy- principal is not good at all. He acted as school principal in the same school but was not appointed the principal. I won the post and he lost. I think that he is not healed from losing the post especially to a woman, and also because I was externally appointed to the post. The deputy-principal here is supposed to deputize me, but he is slow in doing assigned tasks. Whenever I delegate him work to do, he always drags his feet. He never says no to me, but I could see with actions that he does not want to carry the duties assigned to him willingly.

(Norah).

Narratives show that Violetta was discriminated against when acting as principal on the basis of her gender in a sense that both her professional and knowledge capabilities were undervalued by male principals in her circuit. Narratives show the impression she got from male colleagues that because she is a woman; therefore, she is perceived as incompetent and incapable, also by female staff members as result of an entrenched culture of male dominance which resonates with Craig (2017), and Khumalo (2017) findings.

Violetta’s narrative indicate that she was the first woman secondary school principal in her circuit area. Violetta was discriminated against because of her gender by the SGB chairperson. When she was told that she must not bother to apply for a principalship post at the school she was acting
as principal. This suggests that women still face gender discrimination in their attempt to advance into senior leadership position in secondary schools. The phrase, “our school needs a male principal”, suggests that the recruitment process still favours male candidates, and affirms that, despite Affirmative Action and Employment Equity Act of 1998 which are just acts, and are not effectively implemented. Hence, the number of women occupying principalship positions are still few. From a capability perspective, women principals must be judged on what they are able to do and to be. According to SASA of 1996, the SGB has super power in the recruitment system, so they play a huge in recommending to the department of education who to appoint in their school. I find that senior departmental officials to corrupt the recruitment system by showing favoritism to certain candidates, this is noted in the extracts below:

I received a call from my circuit manager (the new one) to come to the circuit office in the afternoon. When I asked for what?... she told me I will know when I get there… when I arrived there, she told me that she needs a favor from me ……… I was so quiet and listening…… then she continues talking… there is Mr. X who applied for the deputy-principalship post at your school, I am going to propose that you convince your interview panelist to recommend him for the post, because Mr. X is good maths teacher, he will help improve matric results. I was taken by surprise…. I didn’t know what to say to her (Violetta)

Narratives also show that women principals are aware of gender stereotypes levelled against them as school leaders, this is noted when she saying the deputy principal is not cooperative, and could be because he lost against her as woman candidate, who is now his senior could be his reason for not cooperating with Norah as a women school principal. The extracts below are examples:

there will be some teachers who always remind you that they have long been in the school. When I suggest something new, they try to counter that saying we used to do this in this way, stating whatever they used to do in the past the way they say it … It is as if I am not competent on how to handle some problems or projects in the school. I felt like … they were dictating to me … what I must do and not do. What bothered me most was, they liked showing off especially during meetings. (Violetta)

Sometimes when you delegate some duties to them, and are not well executed, everyone will be looking at you… blaming you. Again, if you delegate task to them to do, they are slow and drag their feet, and I always step in to do them myself, they complaint to say why did I delegate them those duties in the first place. (Norah).

Then one day I was scheduled to join the HOD for languages for a class visit, when I get there, I found myself alone with the teacher and learners, the HOD was not there. I spend the whole period there, and topic the teacher presented was interesting and well planned. Then in the same week, the HODs were also scheduled to submit their report on written work audit from teachers, she submitted late. I also recorded that in my journal. When I check her management plan, I realized that she only attended one class visit, but reported
that she had visited all classes as per plan. I wanted to confront her for giving a false report during SMT meeting, I produced some evidence that she could not deny;

Upon my arrival at the school, I found that there were two camps in the school, consisting of the stronger and weaker camps. I experienced more problems from the stronger camp members because they were not cooperative at all. Always against anything good I try to do for the school on days when I have to attend departmental meetings or workshops; members from the stronger camp always released learners before the scheduled time (Violetta).

When I joined the school in 2010, the school had two deputy-principals. Unfortunately, the two had to leave the school because of the R and R process. I had spent many years without a deputy principal (Violetta).

I had problems with an accounting male teacher who was on regular basis absent from work, even when present he will not attend learners. This teacher was teaching grade 10 to 12. Commerce learners were fewer than those in both science and humanities (Norah) during my first year of leadership, I never had a peaceful staff meeting… there will a lot of interruptions from teachers, any suggestions proposed some asking many irrelevant questions but the very same people do not offer solutions, but they act as opposition…. There will be long discussions without resolutions (Norah)

Late coming was a big problem at this school here, teachers and learners the same. I was worried because more time for teaching and learning was lost…. Staff members were even late for staff meetings, and admin staff not different. (Violetta).

Parents sometimes want to show off that they know the higher level of structure in the education department. When I decided to change the code of conduct for learners, I knew that it was not going to be easy but I never suspected that parents will report me to provincial education legislature. It took me by surprise that I was called to a meeting to explain why I violated learners right to express themselves in doing hairstyles they want (Norah).

I have been running the school for three years with acting HODs for maths and humanities. It was never easy for me because sometimes when teachers go an extra mile in their work they must be appreciated, words only are not enough they want some incentives especially in a school like this (Norah).

These extracts indicate some of the administrative challenges women principals often face in their leadership and management roles. These range from unprofessional behaviour by HOD who gives a false report of her work, cliques in the school contributing show how women principals’ reception in the school, with the other camp not cooperating and for example, releasing learners before the scheduled time, dragging their feet when assigned tasks, and showing off during meeting that they have been in the school longer that her, Violetta in this case. All this show insubordination which could be due gender stereotypes.

Narratives also show that women principals were sometimes challenged on the decisions they take in the school. Norah was challenged by parents for changing the learner code of conduct, and
Violetta when saying teachers always say “they used to do things differently from what she does”, which suggests that they undermined their capability of knowledge, professionalism, and practical reason. I also find that the challenges women principals identified were those in their early years of principalship were mainly human resources, and are indicators of poor performing schools. This is noted in phrases like, “during my first year of leadership by Norah, and upon my arrival by Violetta. This suggests that a myriad of challenges women spoke of occurred in early years of leadership and management roles, hence they are successful leaders because they were able to address existing challenges they found in their schools. I also find that women principals in this study are challenged whenever they come up with any strategy to create a positive teaching and learning environment. For example, Norah was found herself reported by some parents to department of education for violating learners’ rights.

Narratives reveal that the “male domination of society and culture is also applied in the schools. it is evident that some males cannot accept women as equal, because “they have been conditioned with the stereotype of women being mothers, wives or at the very best secretaries (Davison & Cooper, 1992: 10). I find that in this case women principals were unable to establish meaningful relationships with various stakeholders in the school because of gender discrimination and stereotypes., this shows the women principal’s weak capability I find that the women principals’ capability of affiliation was constrained. Findings also reveal that women principals did not succumb to these contracts that were formed in the interactions, they were able to resist the pressures they felt and acted with dignity in the process.

6.7.2. Leadership too demanding

Narratives in this study reveal that women principals sometimes find the leadership role more challenging and too complex. This is noted in the extracts below:

To become a school principal is not an easy job; especially of a secondary school. The basic education system gives more attention to secondary schools than primary schools, because you know matric results count. The pressure is too much for secondary school principals than for primary. I was excited when appointed the principal here, but to get the job done in the first years was a nightmare for me. As a leader, you are not able to predict how your day will turn up, good or bad. Besides, hours are longer than I thought, because I come early and leave late after everyone has left the school yard. Sometimes, when I sit down alone, I can see that the hours I spent at work as well as the sacrifices I make, do not match they salary I get monthly. Yes, it’s tough. It a calling and I love it… anyway (Norah).
Leadership is not as easy as many people think, it is too demanding. I learned that as a woman leader, high expectations…. There is too much pressure because you want to prove a point, that I am capable leader (Violetta).

The phrases in the extracts above indicate how complex school leadership, women principals use phrases such as, not easy, too demanding, the pressure is too much, nightmare, unable to predict their daily schedule, it’s tough, are evidence that indeed women principal though successful in their leadership roles they sometimes find it difficult. In order to understand how women principals function on a daily basis, they were requested to make entries of their roles. The brief journal entries of women principals indicate the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Entries</th>
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| 7, September (Violetta) | 6:30 - arrives at school (starts preparing for staff briefing  
7:30 - Staff briefing  
Period 1: Class visit for Maths grade 12  
Period 3: Class visit for grade 10 accounting  
Period 4: Meeting with support staff (monthly meeting as school plan)  
During break time: Check schedules before submission  
Period 5 & 6: Submission of quarterly schedules to circuit office  
14h00: Meeting with SGB Finance committee (Budget)- finished at 18h00  
18h00: Leaves school premises |
| 8h30: left school for shortlisting of principal post at circuit  
14h00: scheduled to conduct staff meeting (delegated the deputy to continue with the meeting)  
15h00: Came back and join the meeting  
16h30: left school premises due personal matters |
| 10 September (Violetta) | 6:30: Arrives at school  
7:30: SMT briefing (Analysis of results)  
8h30: leaves for SGB induction workshop  
15h30: came back from workshop; then join subject heads meeting until 16h30  
17-18h00: remain at school preparing for staff meeting |
| 12 September (Norah) | 6:30: arrived at school  
7:30: could not attend assembly (had to collect grade 12 exam papers)  
8:30: must be at exam venue just to check that everything is ready  
9:30 I take rounds around the school  
12h00: open day to attend parents who wanted to see me  
14h00-16h30: SMT meeting  
18h00: left school premises |
| 11 September (Norah) | 6:30: arrival |
| 16 September (Norah) | 6h30: arrival  
8h30: had to leave for QMS workshop (got the message in the morning) & had to attend with my deputy, so first HOD was in charge of the whole school.  
15h30: came back  
15h40-16h30: Briefing session with RCL executive members and events committee (preparation for matric farewell party).  
18h00: left school premises |
My findings indicate that both women principals are constrained in terms of time. Their daily schedules are heavily packed, because most of their days are occupied with meeting, for example conducting meeting or attending workshops. Journal entries of women principals show that they meet with various stakeholders regularly. For example, with SGB, SMT, teaching and support staff, parents, RCL as well as events committee. It is also evident that women principals have other obligations that they must fulfill, such as attending workshop, in this case; Quality Management System (QMS), and SGB induction. In some cases, they have to collect question papers and do submissions as per departmental circular. Norah ‘s daily schedule does not indicate class visits. Narratives also reveal that they are in and out of the school, and as result they miss some of the activities within the school, for Norah missed assembly because she had to collect grade 12 examination question papers in time. Their interaction with learners and individual staff members is too minimal. I find that although women principals are seen as successful school leaders of their schools and teams, they are often challenged by time constraints. However, their journal entries indicate that to keep the school running they delegate some duties to other members of the staff, especially in the case of Norah. Research by Ng’ambi (2015) and Graig (2017) reported on the demanding role of principalship especially the complexities of the rural principal role. Some participants confirmed as principals that they were sometimes forced to out of necessity to fill more than one job role which could result in an inferior performance at either or both roles, which increase stress level for high school principals. Beside the above-mentioned contextual factors that that women principals experience, narratives reveal that women principals were confronted with personal challenges in their leadership roles. The following is an example:

I had to admit that balancing the two is nightmare, because for one to run a school of this magnitude, I compromise myself and family. I have four kids, one is working, two are at tertiary and the last-born doing grade 10 and staying with me. Now Due to covid-19 lockdown restriction all my children are home and I hardly see them. My last-born daughter the one who is in grade 10, said to me one day; “mommy, do you know that I don’t know you, when I woke up you are gone, when you arrive home, I am asleep”. You can just imagine how painful this was to me, … it was the truth; I am never there for my kids. To some extent I sometimes try to substitute my presence with material things and it not healthy for my children. Honestly speaking, I am never home with my family, this year it’s even worse (Norah).

The extract show that confirms that Norah struggles to balance her two roles; being a mother and a school manager. Norah says “I hardly see them, I am never home”, This suggest that Norah was there as a mother but unavailable to her family. She has liberated herself from social and cultural stereotypes of being a homemaker, instead she wants to accelerate or sustain her leadership
performance; thus she says, I compromise myself and family suggests that her focus is more on her leadership role, and therefore she has to do well to meet the expectations she sets for herself as well as those of others. Moreover, this is noted when saying “for one to run the school of this magnitude” suggests that she is under pressure to fulfill the expectations of the community she serves. This concurs with other studies when saying women principals experienced a lot of pressure as they are expected to perform well in career and as mothers, wives, as well as performing well as school manager (Ng’ambi, 2015; Ndebele, 2018). However, narratives also show that women principals were able to offset the weak capabilities and lead their schools using the capability of assurance and confidence in both their leadership and management roles.

6.8. Strategies to offset weak capabilities

6.8.1. Modelling behaviour

The narratives indicate that women principals in this study adopted various strategies to overcome the challenges they encounter in schools they lead. Through the capability of affiliation, Violetta is able to lead others by modelling the behaviour of her colleagues. This is noted in the following extracts:

I used to wait for late comers at the school gate every day alone, and then some male colleagues volunteered to help control late coming. Everyone on the school premises is time conscious now and I am happy that teaching and learning time is no longer compromised (Violetta).

The extract above shows that in order for Violetta to change some practices at her school, she had to lead the way in order to instill time management among various stakeholders. This is noted when she says that she used to wait at the school gate to monitor late coming. She did this so as to express her displeasure about teaching and learning time lost due to late coming. I find that she modelled expected behaviour on time management in her school. This is noted when she says that some of her male colleagues volunteered to monitor late coming. This suggests that some teachers were supportive of the changes she wanted to make in the school. Furthermore, the narratives of women principals in this study show that they are data driven in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their schools. I find that a woman principal is able to change the mindset of some other staff members. This is noted when Violetta says that some of her male colleagues volunteered to monitor late coming. This suggests that some teachers were supportive of the changes she wanted to make in the school, and on the other hand, this demonstrates that the woman
principal was able to win respect and trust of others. Being able to change the mindset of followers, suggests that women principals function as transformative leaders. This was achieved through the capability of voice which show assurance and confidence in leadership and management roles. Furthermore, the narratives of women principals in this study show that they were data driven, and this assisted them to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their schools. The extracts below indicate:

So, I call him to my office on a regular basis, sit him down and show him his Accounting results in comparison to other subjects. I did it every term, until the teacher changed, and in the end he was seldom absent (Norah)

I tell the parent to come and see me in a week’s time. I know that I would have enough time to investigate the matter, checking on the teacher concerned, checking their progress, requesting learners’ work books and interviewing some learners in the same class, just to get my facts right as well as talking to the teacher about the allegations (Norah).

average pass percentage was 52. I called teachers to a staff meeting… displayed the results…. I got the same feeling that I got from the SGB and SMT meeting …. I still remember the exact words I said to the entire staff; Well done… you did your best… however, this year we must obtain position one in the circuit and district (Violetta)

In the first extract, Norah is seen meeting with the Accounting teacher regularly to show him his poor results. This suggests she collected all the information she needed to encourage the Accounting teacher to improve his performance. “Regularly” in this case, means meeting every term with the same teacher to check his progress. Before passing any judgements, Norah also uses her critical thinking to investigate allegations levelled against teachers by some parents. This is noted when she says, “collect learners’ work books and interview some of them to get all the details of the matter.” This suggests that Norah does not make quick decisions about what the parents report, but she relies on the facts collected. The third extract shows that Violetta displayed learners’ results during the staff meeting in order to sway teachers to work hard. The extracts also suggest that she is strategic in her approach, and this is noticed when she says, “you did your best, however”. These are some of the strategies women principals in this study resorted to in order to improve and change their schools for the better. I find that women principals were able to communicate professional knowledge in an accessible way (Walker et al., 2010).

6.8.2. Rely on religion

The findings in this study reveal that women principals rely on their religion to overcome some of their challenges. The following extracts are examples:
I prayed a short prayer… I needed that because I felt that I was put on a test… I asked God to give me the wisdom to respond to the circuit manager. (Violetta).

I am a Christian by religion, and I believe that God has carried me throughout my life and career journey. My faith gives me strength especially in difficult times (Norah).

I always have a simple answer for them; that whoever sent me here will make me succeed, there is someone above me who has sent me here for a purpose, my God. Indeed, I just see things happening, I don’t sweat, I just work smart (Norah).

The above extract shows that women principals in this study draw their strength from their faith. Narratives indicate that women principals were raised by families which are religious, and shows that they still believe in their faith. They rely on God for wisdom and overcoming some of the challenges they face in their roles as school managers. I find that women principals attach their leadership advancement to their faith, phrases such as “God has carried me throughout my life and career journey”, and Norah saying, “Whoever sent me here will make succeed”. This suggests that women principals believe that their becoming school principals was God’s purpose. This resonates with Faulkner (2015) when indicating that women participants in her study had a combination of powerful forces and beliefs, personal agency and a deeply held belief that they were doing “God’s work” which enabled the four women to achieve principalship, emphasising that manifestation of their personal agency was also clearly interwoven with their deep spiritual faith.

6.8.3. Delegation

Narratives of women principals in this study indicate that to overcome the challenge of not having a deputy principal and HODs. They resorted to delegation as their strategy. This is noted in the extracts below:

I had to rely on HODs in the school, it was stressful for me at first, because I wanted to lead the way; When I performed some duties, I always make sure that there were two or three teachers to see how some tasks are performed. Then, at a later stage I started delegating staff members those duties. That is how I have survived without a deputy principal (Violetta).

Only two ladies stepped forward to assist in the School Management Team., but they told me that they were afraid and when I looked at them, I could see that indeed they were scared…. I mentored them throughout until one day one of them said to me: “thank your ma’am, for your guidance and help (Norah)

Violetta resorted to empower other staff members in her school. Firstly, she demonstrated how certain duties were executed, that’s empowerment of others because she was able to share information and knowledge that she acquired in her profession to benefit others. This resonates with Miller, Graham and Al-Awiwe, (2014: 23) when saying that women participants sought to
empower all stakeholders in order to foster collaboration that produced changes to improve student learning. They circumvented their communities’ practice of maintaining the traditional status quo by employing a “power with” instead of “power over” leadership structure. However, the first extract indicates that the other reason for Violetta to delegate duties to others was to ease the pressure of being overburdened. This is noted when she says that it was stressful to operate without a deputy principal, therefore she had to relieve herself from performing certain duties, thus delegating some duties to HODs. This is how women principals overcame the challenge of working without deputy principals and HODs.

6.8.4. Dealing with unprofessional practices

The narratives reveal that women principals survived some of the daily challenges at their workplaces through personal confrontation with individual teachers who behaved unprofessionally. This is noted in the extracts below:

I then indicated to her that she was not doing her work as an HoD, she had to lead by example… indicating that she could not draw a plan and then not follow it, soon teachers would do the same because they would be emulating their senior. I told her that if she was not careful and rectified that she would soon be a dysfunctional HoD… which I would not allow. From that day she followed her schedule and even stopped her negative attitude towards me. I was very assertive yet polite when talking to her, reminding her of what her job description states and I also quoted the code of ethics as stipulated in SACE (South African Council for Educators), just to remind her how she is expected to relate to others, her colleagues including me as the principal of the school, learners and parents (Violetta).

I always say to staff; I want all of us to work amicably, including him. I told him I just wanted to recognize him as my deputy, …. I did not delegate tasks to him because I do not know how to perform the tasks. Anyway, I am happy that staff members are supportive and the school is moving in the right direction (Norah).

On that day I told them this; it’s time to change, I know that change sometimes can be difficult, let’s start on new page so that we can move to the next level. I also realized that they so much clang to the old ways of doing things, that was … at least according to me why the school was stuck on the same level. I told them humbly and appealed to everyone to be ready to try some new systems (Norah).

The extracts above show that women principals were able to deal with some unprofessional behaviour. I find that women principals in this study used the capability of knowledge and voice to confront their colleagues. They were able to rectify the wrong practices by expressing themselves to the concerned parties. This is noted when Violetta says, “from that day the teacher followed her schedule and changed her behaviour. Violetta, for example, quoted SACE to validate her confrontations. I find that women were able to express their concerns with various teachers irrespective of gender and their status in the school; and this noticeable in the phrases such as; I
told them, staff member, I told him, the deputy principal, I told her, referring to the HOD”. I find women principals also speak with convictions whenever they address their concerns with others. Their voices reflect courage, boldness and courage. Women principals were able to speak up and solve some of the challenges in their schools. The narratives confirm that women principals used their capability of assurance, and confidence to counteract their weak capabilities in their leadership and management roles by becoming resilient leaders. I find that they were able to express and maintain their own professional goals and expectations (Walker et al., 2010).

6.9. Conclusion

In this chapter, I concentrated first on the development of capabilities of women principals from their formative to adulthood years; how women principals acquired their basic capabilities. I found that women principals operated within different contexts. Firstly, the school context where the capabilities of sense, imagination and thought, knowledge and practical reason, affiliation, social and collective struggles, assurance and confidence, and practical reasoning emerged. Secondly, I found that women principals were able to acquire capabilities of affiliation, emotions as well as resilience, even though within the social and educational contexts there were barriers attached to a family context such as financial and educational resources. The conclusion made in this regard is that women principals’ capabilities were either constrained or developed.

Moreover, findings indicate that women principals within their educational and professional context were able to counteract adversity placed on them, such as teenage pregnancy and sexual harassment. Women principals emerged successfully in a sense that they were able to remove obstacles in their way and transformed their lives to a state of wellbeing and achievement. Women principals were able to interact within the social and educational contexts due to the childhood and adulthood capabilities which were developed, and further developed over a period of many years. This enabled them to function as successful secondary school principals, thus building and sharing vision with all stakeholders, setting goals and higher expectations not only for stakeholders but also for themselves. They managed to do these because of informed vision, knowledge, and practical skills. They were able to understand, respect, develop and work with others because of the acquired capabilities of affiliation, assurance confidence, social and collective struggles and practical reasoning. This study therefore concludes that there are relational features that exist among the professional capabilities of Walker et al. (2010), Nussbaum’s (2000) list of central
human capabilities and Successful School leadership, which I refer to as the Successful School Leadership Capabilities (SSLC). This study concludes that women principals are able to function as transformational agents in their schools, hence they are successful in their leadership and management roles. In the next chapter, I present key findings, summary of chapters, recommendations as well as the limitation of the study.
CHAPTER 7
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I draw conclusions on my study about the capabilities of women participants and how these capabilities enable them to function as successful secondary school principals in rural schools. I used the theory of Capability Approach of Sen (1999), Nussbaum (2000), Walker, McLean, Dison and Vaughan (2010), as well as the successful school leadership theory of Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999). I described how the capabilities they developed early in their childhood have enabled women principals to function as successful secondary school principals in their careers later in life. From the point of view of women secondary school principals, the study intends to understand what makes them successful school leaders. The research questions are as follows:

The main question is:

How do women secondary school principals become successful in their leadership role?

The following are the sub-questions:

(a) What are the contributing factors to women principals’ successful leadership?

(b) What is the perception of women principals of successful school leadership?

(c) What are the challenges of successful women principals?

(d) How do women principals overcome the challenges they encounter?

(e) How do women principals know that they are successful?

(f) What can be done to assist women to succeed?

7.2. Summary of study chapters

In chapter one, I presented the problem statement for this research which is that a lot of studies have been conducted on women principals in secondary schools, however literature review indicates that little has been documented on successful women principals in rural secondary schools. More has been written about theories of successful school leadership, leadership and management challenges of women principals in primary schools in the South African context. My
study is an attempt to respond to the literature gaps mentioned above. It fills the literature gaps by providing empirical evidence on what enabled women principals in rural secondary schools to succeed in their leadership and management roles.

In chapter two, I discussed the roles of school principals as guided by the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM), which is included in the Employment of Educators Act of 1998. I did this with specific reference to the South African Education Policy framework. I also reviewed the literature of successful school leadership theories.

In chapter three, I used the narrative inquiry as my research methodology to explore how women principals succeed in their leadership and management roles. I selected the narrative inquiry because the methodology offers women a privilege to narrate their own stories through semi-structured interviews, letter writing, curricula vitae and reflective journals as the narrative text. Then in chapter four I discussed the theoretical framework for this study, the Capability Approach (CA), reviewing Sen and Nussbaum and other related literature on CA, such as Goerne’s five conceptual building block of capabilities approach. In my analysis, I indicated how women’s developed capabilities in their formative years were useful later in their leadership and management roles.

In chapter five, I presented women principals’ narratives verbatim according to six categories guided by the research question of my study. The categories also guided and helped me to identify themes for chapter six which helped me analyse and interpret women principals’ narratives and narrative texts using the CA and Goerne’s building blocks.

In the first section of chapter six, I discussed how women principals were able to develop as human beings, as guided by the CA which maintains that human development is the key aspect in its implementation. Thus, women principals narrated about their formative years until adulthood and so on. These basic capabilities acquired during childhood serve as foundation for the development of other capabilities in adulthood. The findings of the study reveal that women principals were able to develop basic capabilities which enabled them to function as successful school managers later in their careers. Based on Nussbaum’s central list of basic capabilities of senses, imagination and practical reason, affiliation, emotions, and bodily integrity, the findings also reveal that through the development of these capabilities, women principals were able to form a capability set for leadership and management.
7.3. Key findings

From the capability perspective women principals are regarded as “quintessentially social creatures” (Sen, 2002:22), because they were shaped by their family, as well as the society in which they live. They interacted mostly with family members and society when attending school and church services. They learnt from their families to be hard working, responsible, and helpful. They also learnt to be concerned and caring for others, especially towards their mother parents.

The findings in this study indicate that women principals were able to develop their emotional well-being. Thus, through the emotional security and insecurity, especially in the case of Violetta who learnt that emotions had to be dealt with through communication with others, she was able to confront her emotional insecurity through a dialogue with her father. The findings, in this case, indicate that some family interactions and relations may contribute as barriers towards emotional security. The findings further show that a strong sense of emotional security and stability, which affected strong levels of functionings and that of capability set. this study reveal that the capability of freedom from bodily harm and integrity were violated; thus woman principal’s capability of affiliation, and emotional well-being, because she was not treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others (Nussbaum, 2003:41).

Furthermore, the findings reveal that even through women principals in this study were faced with barriers and unfreedoms to the development of emotional security and affiliation, they managed to be educated. They were able to acquire formal education, attending both primary and secondary schools and were able to obtain matriculation certificates. The “capability to be educated” is a basic capability when it corresponds with certain elementary and crucial functionings (Sen, 1999). It can also expand other capabilities, for example, that of leading a good life (Terzi, 2007). The findings of the study reveal that women principals were afforded opportunities to be educated by their families against all odds, which expanded their freedom to be able to choose a career they have reason to value.

The findings also indicate that women principals developed educational resilience, for example, Violetta, who many times had to be out of school because of the unfreedoms and barriers. She never gave up on her education despite having failed and repeated grade 10, and experiencing two unplanned pregnancies. She persisted on completing her secondary education regardless. By obtaining their secondary education, the women principals were able to expand other capabilities
such as sense, imagination and practical reasoning. In this way, they way able to choose a career on their own and based on the various reasons they had. The other finding also indicates that women principals were inspired by others to choose their careers. For example, Norah, whose mother was a primary school teacher, and Violetta, had children and family to provide for. Both were able to pursue careers in education and their well-being developed as they were able to live the kind of life they had reason to value. Thereby making a difference in the lives of children they would be teaching. This reflects the practical reason in Nussbaum’s (2000) central list of basic human capabilities. The other findings also indicate that women principals were able to act because they believe they can produce desired outcomes by their actions, (Bandura, et al., 2001).

However, the findings also reveal that women principals encountered conceptual or internal barriers in the act of choice. According to Burkhardt (2001:37), if no one in one’s family has ever been to university, it is much likely that one would set their objective of obtaining a degree. The act of choice “determines which objective opportunities are visible to the person, that which are considered to be consistent with her conception of value and practical reasoning. The findings reveal that for both women principals, the option of going to university was ‘objectively available’, but was simply not within their imagined horizon of possibility” (p.113). The findings further indicate that women principals were able to conceive what was good by pursuing teaching as their career, because they considered it consistent with their conception of value and practical reasoning. Furthermore, these findings also indicate that by pursuing teaching women principals were able to be employed and function as professional teachers in their respective schools.

Women principals completed their teaching diplomas and were able to function as professional teachers recognised by the South African Educators’ Council (SACE,2000), so did the findings reveal. A profession is associated with qualities such as specialised knowledge, for example, Violetta was a Mathematics teacher, while Norah was a language specialist. Also revealed by the findings was that women principals were able to be responsible and accountable in their teaching profession. It is also indicated in this study that women principals were able to progress from one level of their profession to another; from level one teacher to HOD, then deputy principal and, lastly, a school principal. The added indication of the findings was that women principals were able to advance to leadership positions in their careers because of external influence such as
availability of a mentor. Norah, for example, was mentored by her former male principal who encouraged and supported her in her career.

However, the findings also show that by focusing on values, agency and achievement, women principals as teachers sometimes did not manage their professional responsibilities. For example, Violetta developed a weak capability set because of her unprofessional behaviour early in her career. The CA is interested in what a person is able to do and to be. Also revealed by the findings was that through her capability of practical reason, senses and imagination, Violetta was able to turn her unprofessional situation into positive one, thus furthering her studies and obtaining PGCE and B.Ed. qualifications. This served as an advantage for her when advancing to leadership positions. Women principals were also found to rely on their personal strength such as self-determination and self-confidence.

CA emphasises that the “sole measure of development is more on the person’s real freedom or capability that on what she or he achieves” (Sen, 1999:18). The findings indicate that women principals were able to help themselves and influence the world. Findings indicate women principals as agents of their own lives and were able to make their own decision freely and impact positively on lives. Women principals were able to exercise their agency through their level of motivation and self-determination and confidence, as well as having passion for learners and leadership. They were able to apply for various promotional posts until they were finally able to function as school managers. Moreover, the findings reveal that several resources played an important role in women principals’ career progression. This include parental support, role models and mentors, credentials and management experience as well as community support. Not only that, women principals’ had resources that supported their career progression. Women principals in this study were shown to be able to convert resources at their disposal into achieved functionings. They were able to get educated, pursue a career, and function as professional teachers and progressed from a teaching post level 1 to level four (principalship) and function as school managers. It is also indicated in this study that women were able to remove obstacles and barriers they encountered in order to advance to leadership positions.

The general conclusions for this study are guided by the CA which takes into account the well-being of individuals. Sen (1999) argues that people are able to reflect on their lives and active agents in pursuing the lives they have a reason to value. The purpose of this study was to explore
factors that contribute to women principals’ successful school leadership and management in rural secondary schools. Sen argues that people need to have access to opportunities and freedoms to choose the lives they have a reason to value which in turn promotes development. From the perspective of the CA, the study sought to address what opportunities and freedoms enabled women principals’ capabilities to exercise their agency in choosing and deciding what they needed to be successful school leaders as well as managers. In the next paragraphs, I discuss a summary of the major research findings in this study.

7.4. Summary of research findings

The findings indicate that the way women principals function as school managers and leaders depended on capabilities acquired and developed throughout their personal and professional lives. To answer the main research question, “How do women secondary school principals become successful in their leadership role?”, the following sub-questions were asked. The first one is:

7.4.1. What are the contributing factors to women principals’ successful leadership?

The findings reveal that there are external and internal factors which enable women principals to function as successful school principals. They also indicate that women principals function as transformative agents in their schools by being visionary and collaborative leaders who are able to build vision and goals for their schools, redesign schools they lead by changing some systems that are not effective, and create a positive environment and understand and develop their colleagues.

Gereluk (2015:181) argues, “it is true that limited affiliations with one another will have an inverse effect on our well-being”. Nussbaum (1996:37) argues that the emotion of compassion is an essential bridge to justice because it makes us to see the importance of the person’s lack and considers with keen interest the claim that such person might have”. The findings show that women principals through the capability of affiliation were able to show concern and care for other stakeholders in the school.

Mentoring is about professional development, and professional development is about growth and advancement. It enables adults to explore their own thinking and contradictions that enhance self-development (Drago-Severson, 2004). This, according to capability is to exercise a strong sense of the own effective agency (Nussbaum, 2000a).
The findings in this study reveal that women principals are “able to demonstrate the ability and consider a range of ethical possibilities for action, in terms of what is the right action to follow, and to perform the chosen action. Findings indicate that women principals were confident with their leadership, and knew when to display their confidence, they are able to speak their minds, exercising authority where necessary as well as demonstrating their passion for leadership, dedicated and work hard; thus are contributors to the success of the women principal in this study.

The professional capability and of resilience of women principals enabled to function as persistent an optimistic leader, for example when Norah says, I banked on the support of the majority of the parents, she was optimistic, that she will succeed.

The capability of voice is regarded as important in education, because it helps in the development of other capabilities such as critical thinking and confidence (Walker, 2015). In addition, the ability to express one’s opinions build on the capability of being respected, treated with dignity and respected by stakeholders in and outside the school.

Women principals in this study were found to demonstrate integrity and dignity as school principals, by being “ethically and professionally competent”. They refused to compromise the standards of their leadership. Again, both women principals, both Norah and Violetta, are seen exercising the capability of practical reasoning by conceiving what was good for them, personally and professionally. Narratives show that women principals were able to choose to be treated with respect and dignity when they turned their schools into excellent performing schools; from being dysfunctional to functional. Nussbaum (2000a:131) argues that, “even though it is the actual function of affiliation which matters, such as living with and towards others, being treated with respect and dignity, showing concerns for others, the capability of such states of “being and doings” would be purely political goals”.

The findings reveal that women participants are able to open channels of communication, they respect everyone and have compassion. Women secondary school principals promoted professional development through various ways such as delegating tasks to teachers and allowing them to attend subject workshops.
Through the capability of informed vision women participants in this study were able to improve the social interactions within their schools, thus they were able to establish working relationships, with various stakeholders to ensure that everyone within the school campus felt confident and fully committed to their teaching roles.

The findings further reveal that women principals in this study were able to develop their colleagues through their strong sense of their own effective agency, by leading by example, showing dedication and hard work, as well as empowering them. The capability of practical reason and collective struggles enabled them to function as role models and mentors to various stakeholders and support others by listening, being patient, respecting as well as embracing all stakeholders. As a result, they were able to use their capability of affiliation, knowledge and practical reason to build productive working relations with parents, teachers and the community at large through team work and support.

Sen (2009:335) also argues that “if someone has the power to make a change that he or she can see will reduce injustice in the world, then there is a strong social argument for doing that. This social reasoning obliges anyone to use this power to help others. Findings indicate women principals were able to solve real problems in the context of staff meeting (Leithwood et al., 2006). They had the ability to facilitate staff meetings and deliberations that took place effectively, in a sense that they were more “open to alternative formulation of problems”, and “seek out interpretations of others” (Leithwood et al, 2006).

Women principals were able to use their knowledge and problem-solving skill to bring learner discipline to be what it was supposed to be. Through her influence and managerial skills, Norah also inspired parents to approve the new clause in the learners’ code of conduct. It is also evident from the narratives that women principals were able to solve school problems related to human resources such as learner discipline, as well as curriculum matters. Women principals are able to use their “sense, imagination and thought” to solve complex school problems. In this case, they protected the teaching time so that there was effective teaching. The findings also show that women principals function as inspirational leaders, setting high goals and expectations for all stakeholders with the purpose of achieving the school vision. By setting high expectation for staff members, they encouraged teamwork which promoted staff dedication and hard work.
Sen (2009:289) focuses on the “concept of advantage” of agency freedom and achievement which shifts the focus away from seeing teachers as just vehicles of well-being. Focusing on teachers’ freedom made visible ways in which they use agency to improve the lives of learners at the expense of their own well-being. For example, teachers in Norah’s school are seen spending lunch and break times teaching than socialising or monitoring learners on weekends. The focus on teachers’ agency also demonstrates that teachers are also located in the broader social environment in which the specific needs of these environments often seen or make them focus beyond the limits of their personal well-being (Sen, 2009:289).

7.4.2 What is the perception of women principals of successful school leadership?

This question was meant to understand successful leadership from women’s view point.

The findings reveal that women principals in this study understand successful school leadership to involve many factors such as shared responsibility and decision making, working together as a team, committed and dedicated staff, creating a positive climate, strategic planning which reflect characteristics of collaborative leadership style. Secondly, findings indicate that women principals’ understanding of successful school leadership consists of personal and leadership qualities such as being consistent in their leadership, modelling behaviour, self-confidence, hard work and dedication as well as being reflective in their leadership and management roles.

7.4.3. What are the challenges of successful women principals?

Nussbaum (2000a) refers to “capability” as basic, internal and combined capabilities. The basic capability is the innate capability that a person needs for developing more advanced capabilities. The internal capability is a “more mature condition of readiness” that is possessed by a person, which develops with the support of the environment in which one is reared. (P.84). The combined capabilities are the internal capabilities with the external conditions for the “exercise of the function” (p.85). Although women principals function as school leaders and managers, they also work within external school context which may constrain their functionings as successful leaders and managers.

Findings reveal that women principals are faced with cultural, administrative and personal challenges. These challenges were mostly identified in the early years of principalship and are indicators of poor performing schools. Findings indicate that Violetta was discriminated against
when acting as principal on the basis of her gender in a sense that both her professional and knowledge capabilities were undervalued by male principals simply because she is a woman. She was, therefore, regarded as incompetent and incapable, even by female staff members as result of an entrenched culture of male dominance. This created a barrier for women principals to establish meaningful relationships with various stakeholders in the school. This was due to gender discrimination and stereotypes which resulted in insubordination and negative attitude of other staff members. From capability perspective this shows the women principals’ weak capability because women principals’ capability of affiliation is constrained. However, findings also reveal that through the capability of resilience, women principals did not succumb to these constraints that were formed in the interactions, they were able to resist the pressures they felt and acted with dignity in the process.

Furthermore, findings indicate that both women principals are constrained in terms of time. Their daily schedules are heavily packed, because most of their days are occupied with meetings, for example, conducting staff meetings or attending departmental workshops. However, this study reveal that women principals are able to offset weak capabilities and lead their schools using the capability of assurance and confidence in both their leadership and management roles.

Beside the above-mentioned contextual factors that that women principals experience, narratives reveal that women principals were confronted with personal challenges in their leadership roles.

7.4.4. How do women principals overcome the challenges they encounter?

This question is intended to find out the strategies women principals employ to overcome challenges in their schools.

The findings indicate that women principals in this study adopted various strategies to overcome the challenges in the schools they lead, and that they applied the capabilities of affiliation and of voice, which shows assurance and confidence to address and overcome some of the challenges. Firstly, these findings reveal that women principals are data driven so as to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their schools., and were able to communicate professional knowledge in an accessible way (Walker et al., 2010).

The findings in this study reveal that women principals rely on their religion - on God for wisdom to overcome some of the challenges they face in their roles as school managers. Moreover, these
findings also indicate that women principals attach their leadership advancement to their faith through phrases such as “God has carried me throughout my life and career journey”, and Norah saying, “Whoever sent me here will make me succeed”. The findings further indicate that to overcome the challenges of not having a deputy, assistant manager and HoDs, they resorted to a strategy of delegating duties to junior staff members.

The findings continue to show that through the capability of voice, voices reflect courage, boldness and courage. Women principals were able to speak up to solve some of the challenges in their schools. The study also found that women principals use their capabilities of assurance and confidence to counteract their weak capabilities in their leadership and management roles by becoming resilient leaders. Thus, women principals were able to express and maintain their own professional goals and expectations (Walker et al., 2010).

7.4.5. How do women principals know that they are successful?

The findings of the study indicate that women principals know that they are successful when learners’ academic performance improves from good to excellent, when there is order in the school and learners disciplined and they receive the support from parents and former learners who have become professionals who plough back into the school. In addition, the recognition from the department of education and the entire community was stated as another indicator of being successful. This has, to an extent, led to high learner enrolment in these schools, with the findings revealing that parents become supportive and other parents in the community seeking admission for their children in the school, especially when they see change in learner performance and overall discipline in the school.

7.4.6. What can be done to assist women to succeed? This question intends to advices both women in leadership and those aspire for leadership position.

The findings indicate that women advise other women to be aware of the gender stereotypes and discrimination in schools and society. However, they advise one another not to pay too much focus on them. Women principals and women teachers aspiring for leadership positions are also advised to support each other, and not to pull each other down. Those women are also encouraged to attend as many women leadership forums, conferences and workshops as possible, and to have mentors in their career journey. “Mentors are very important, because I have learnt so many things about
leadership from them., such as strategies to deal with challenges; and unwritten rules of schools. So as women leaders we cannot survive without mentorship” (M silica, 2015: 11).

Women principals are advised to be confident in themselves and never doubt their leadership. In addition, women must familiarise themselves with educational policy and legislation and use it as their weapon to run the schools they lead. Moreover, women leaders must be courageous and brave and believe in their faith in order to draw their strength, especially during difficult times.

In order to succeed, women principals are advised to acknowledge their shortfalls. If they want to be successful, they have to learn to understand the people they work with and embrace them. Leadership is about sacrifices for the learners. Women principals must take leadership as a calling.

Women leaders must be professional in every way possible and at all times, lead by example, and demonstrate what they also want to see happening in their schools. They must open channels of communication, respect everyone and have compassion. Women principals must never compromise the culture of the school.

The findings also reveal that women principals are advised to establish relational trust with stakeholders in their schools, to show concern and indicate that they value them and are dependent on them to be successful. These findings further reveal that the advices women principals give to other women are similar to contributing factors to them being successful in their leadership and management roles.

7.5. Recommendations of the study

The recommendations for this study are based on the last research question on successful women principal’s advice to other women teachers aspiring for leadership positions. This is also informed by the gaps that show that little has been documented on the strategies utilised by women principals to succeed in their leadership and management roles. There is more literature available on leadership and management challenges and reasons for underrepresentation of female teachers in leadership and management positions. I, therefore, propose that other women principals should consider the following capabilities that enable successful women principals in South African schools:
• Induction of novice principals - this is the responsibility of the department of education to induct newly appointed principals. that they have appointed.

• More educational leadership seminars, workshops, conferences - successful women principals are invited to encourage and coach other women leaders, such as HODs and deputy principals, on how to get appointed as school principals. This enables them to give training and tips on how to do well in leadership interviews because most successful women principals usually serve as interview panelists.

• Establish women principals’ forums where successful and experienced women school principals are invited to adopt novice women principals and share their successful leadership strategies with them. Thus, mentoring other women principals especially those who are still struggling in their leadership roles.

7.6. Limitations of the study

This study was limited by the scope and sample size. If given more time, the study could be conducted to include other districts in the province. Furthermore, the fact that there a few successful women principals in secondary schools also limited the scope of the participants, thus decreasing the validity of the research findings. In addition, the major findings of this study cannot be generalised because of the nature of the research design. However, the study can inform practice and policy on issues relating to successful school leadership in the South African context, and also contributed to empirical evidence in gender studies.

7.7. Conclusion

This study has used the Capability Approach of Sen (1999), Nussbaum (2000) and Walker et al. (2010) professional capabilities to understand how women principals in rural secondary schools’ function successfully in their leadership and management roles. I found that the capabilities have a similarity to the Successful School Leadership dimensions and behavioural components of Leithwood et al. (1999), being leadership behavioural components such as inspirational motivation, building and sharing school vision with all stakeholders in the school, setting goals and higher expectations for everyone in the school, understanding, developing and modelling behaviours as well as building a positive school culture. Based on my analysis of the two women principals, I found that women principals’ management capabilities align with SSL functionings
which are, to redesign and direct the school, as well as developing and using knowledge to effectively manage their schools. Women principals were able to develop leadership and management capabilities needed to lead and manage their schools successfully; which serve as a foundation for them to be successful. From this analysis, I suggest a Successful School Leadership Capabilities Theory (SSLCT).


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APPENDIX A: ETHIC CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE
Date: 2020/03/11

Dear Mrs KP Makgoka

Decision: Ethics Approval from 2020/03/11 to 2025/03/11

Researcher(s): Name: Mrs KP Makgoka  
E-mail address: kpmakgoka@gmail.com  
Telephone: 073 3426 144

Supervisor(s): Name: Prof. T. Netshitangani  
E-mail address: Netsh1@unisa.ac.za  
Telephone: 011 425 4261

Title of research:
Successful school leadership: Narratives from women secondary principals in rural schools

Qualification: PhD Education Management

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2020/03/11 to 2025/03/11.

The low risk application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2020/03/11 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:
1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.
Research title: Successful School Leadership: Narratives from women secondary principals in rural schools

Date:

Head of Department
Limpopo Department of Education
Polokwane
0700

MS Mutheiwana

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I, Kolobe Philliah Makgoka am doing research under supervision of Prof. T. Netshitangani, a Professor in the Department of Education towards a D.Ed. degree at the University of South Africa. I hereby request to conduct a study entitled Successful School leadership: Narratives from women secondary principals in rural schools. in Limpopo province. The aim of the study is to explore how women secondary principals become successful in their leadership endeavor. Two women principals will be selected because the school they lead are recognized as successful schools.

The study will consist of four categories of 60 minutes’ interview for each category, conducted at a convenient time and location for the participants. Interviews will be audio-recorded and all answers and names will be kept confidential to study. Other researchers and school principals in South Africa will learn success lessons from women principal participants’ contribution. The only risk is that of breach of confidentiality. The study is voluntary and therefore, no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research. For any queries please contact me at 079 423 7042 & kpmakgoka@gmail.com.

Yours sincerely

Kolobe Philliah Makgoka
UNISA student researcher
APPENDIX C: INVITATION LETTER TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

Research title: Successful School Leadership: Narratives from women secondary principals in rural schools

Date:
School Principal
Sekhukhune Secondary School

INVITATION LETTER TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

Dear

I, Kolobe Philliah Makgoka am doing research under supervision of Prof. T. Netshitangani, a Professor in the Department of Education towards a D.Ed. degree at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled Successful School leadership: Narratives from women principals in rural secondary schools. The aim of the study is to explore how women secondary principals become successful in their leadership endeavor.

You have been selected because you are a woman principal of a public secondary school in a rural community which is successful. Prior to the interview, you will be requested to send me your curriculum vitae to help me gain some understanding of your background. The interview is divided into four sections with sub-questions which will take 60 minutes each. The interviews will take place at a location and time convenient for you. If you participate you will be one of the two participants in this study. Anonymity and confidentiality will be respected throughout the research process.

The benefits of this study are that other researchers and school principals in the South African context will learn success lessons from your contribution. Potential risks are minimal. There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research. Feedback procedure will entail provision of a final copy of the dissertation presented to you personally. If you have any queries, please contact me at 0794237042 or kpmakgoka@gmail.com

Yours sincerely

Kolobe Philliah Makgoka: UNISA student researcher
Research title: Successful School Leadership: Narratives from women secondary principals in rural schools

Date: 14 January 2020

Dear prospective participant

My name is Kolobe Philliah Makgoka and I am doing research under the supervision of Prof. T. Netshitangani, a professor in the Department of Education towards a D. Ed. degree at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled, Successful School leadership: Narratives from women principals from secondary rural schools.

You are invited because you are a secondary school principal of a public school, which is also regarded as one of the successful schools in rural community. I obtained your contact details from district office, HR department, through the permission granted by the district by the District director. Only two women school principals will be interviewed.

You will be asked to respond to some interview questions about your leadership experiences. The interview sessions will be approximately 60 minutes long and will be audio-taped. You will also be requested to respond to some biographical questions which will be expected to be returned within two weeks’ time.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. You have the right to say No, if you decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving any reason. Furthermore, you may choose not to respond to specific questions or stop participating at any time without penalty of loss of benefit.

The purpose of the study is to explore the leadership experiences of successful women principals in secondary rural schools; how do they become successful school leaders as well as investigating the leadership strategies they employ in response to leadership and personal challenges. You will not directly benefit from contributing in this study, but your contributions may benefit the South African society by providing insight into some factors that shape the experiences of women school principals. Your contribution the study could also benefit women educators and women principals in a sense that recommendations given may help minimize the gender gaps in school leadership and in general.
No risk is anticipated. As a matter of confidentiality, I will minimize the risks by using pseudonyms for your name and the school’s name. in addition, I will modify your ethnicity, age as well as years of experience.

Your name will not be recorded anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give. Your answers will be given a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings.

Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the language and technical editors, and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

Your responses may be used for other purposes, such as a research report, journal articles and/or conference proceedings. Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet at University of South Africa; College of Education for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. Furthermore, please be informed that hard copies will be shredded and/or electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software programme).

Your participation in this study is purely on voluntary basis, thus there are no financial benefits or reward attached.

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the CEDU, UNISA. A copy of the approval letter is attached. (Please see Appendix A).

A final copy of the findings will be given to each participant. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Kolobe Philliah Makgoka at kpmakgoka@gmail.com or 013 265 1074( tel); 013 265 1087( fax).

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Prof. T Netshitangani at Netsh1@unisa.ac.za or 012 429 4261.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you

_________________________
Kolobe Philliah Makgoka
APPENDIX E: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY (Return slip)

I, __________________ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.
I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).
I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.
I agree to the recording of the interviews.
I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.
Participant Name & Surname (please print) _________________________________

____________________________________  __________________________
Participant Signature                                                      Date

Researcher’s Name & Surname (please print): Kolobe Philliah Makgoka

____________________________________  14/01/21____________________________________
Researcher’s signature                                                      Date
APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Title: Successful school leadership: Narratives from women secondary principals in rural schools.

I. Kolobe Philliah Makgoka am doing research under supervision of Prof. T. Netshitangani, a Professor in the Department of Education towards a D.Ed. degree at the University of South Africa. Thank you for consenting to participate in this study. This is a voluntary activity; you are free to refrain from answering some question you are uncomfortable with, or withdraw your participation from the research project any at time.

Thank you again for taking part in this study. Do you have any questions before we start?

Childhood

1. Can you tell about your family of birth? Siblings, parents and grandparents.
2. How was your growing up days like? Do you still remember some of the activities you engaged in?
3. Was religion important aspect in your family?
4. What do you remember most about your family or other family members during your childhood? How do you feel?
5. How would you describe your social class of your family to that of your neighbours or community members?
6. Who do think had an influence in your leadership development?

Schooling

1. How was your primary school life like?
2. How about your secondary school life?
3. What do you remember most about tertiary life?
4. Who or what did you look up to during your school life?

Marriage and work-life

1. Did you marry before or after college?
2. How old were your kids when you start working?
3. Please tell me about your professional life before you became a principal.
4. How did you become a principal? Did you aspire to become a school principal and at what stage of your career?
5. Is your deputy a male or female? How is your relationship?
6. How does it feel to be a woman principal? What are the benefits?
7. Do you experience any particular challenges to your leadership in your school?
8. Do you have challenges to your leadership in your school community?
9. How do you think gender has affected your working life?
10. How do you overcome these challenges? Do you have strategies you employ to overcome these challenges?

Leadership and management

1. How do you feel to be described as a successful school principal?
2. How do you define/perceive successful school leadership? Name some of your successful ways of leading and managing your school.
3. What makes you outstanding in your leadership? (What key factors do you attribute to your success as a leader?)
4. How do you know that you are successful in your leadership and management roles?
5. Who provided mentorship or inspiration to become a leader, and how did they help?
6. Please tell me about the development of your school’s vision and goals.
7. How do you make consensus around your school vision and goals?
8. What type of a leader are you?
9. What are the most imaginative things you have done in your present position?
10. What do you think you have learned from your leadership experiences?
11. Do you think stakeholders in your school and community benefit from your learning experiences?
12. If you could do things over again, what would it be and how different would you do them?
13. Is there anything you would like to share about experiences that have contributed to your success as the secondary school leaders?

Closing

Thank you again for your time and energy, I really appreciate this. Is there something about women principals that you want to share that perhaps I haven’t asked you?

Researcher’s Name & Surname (please print): Kolobe Philliah Makgoka

_________________________ _________________________
Researcher’s signature Date