A FORMATIVE INTERVENTION FOR DEVELOPING LEARNER REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL (LRC) VOICE AND LEADERSHIP IN A NEWLY ESTABLISHED SCHOOL IN NAMIBIA

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LINDA AMADHILA

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Declaration

I, Linda Amadhila (student number: 15A8711), declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously, in its entirety or in part, been submitted to any university for a degree. References to works by other people have by all means been acknowledged according to the Rhodes Referencing Guide.

Signature_____   Date_____

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my one and only daughter, Twapandula Simon; who accepted to be without a mom for the whole year. You are the reason for my resilience throughout my studies – just to make you proud. Thank you for understanding and enduring the neglect of your mother's love. I further dedicate this study to my two lovely super women, my mother Victoria Niithete Kalume and my aunty Selma Paulus. You are the greatest pieces of the puzzle to be reckoned with. Thank you for supporting me and taking good care of my daughter while I was away. You guys are a blessing to me!

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- A very big thank you to all the staff members of the case-study school and all the LRC members, for dedicating your quality time to make this study a success. If it was not for you, I believe I would not have completed this thesis. May God Bless you!

Abstract

In Namibian schools, learner voice and leadership are being promoted through the policy document entitled the *Education Act 16 of 2001* which provides an opportunity to establish Learner Representative Councils (LRCs) in secondary schools. However, recent studies have found that this body of learner leaders do not function all that effectively and sometimes exist for the sake of adhering to the policy. This prompted me to conduct an activity theoretical interventionist case-study within the critical paradigm, to develop LRC voice and leadership in a newly established Namibian school.

Framed by Cultural Historical Activity Theory, the study was divided into two phases to answer the over-arching question: *How can LRC voice and leadership be developed in a school?* Phase one was largely interpretive, the contextual profiling phase, where document analysis, individual interviews, questionnaires and observations were used to generate data to answer the following research sub-questions: *How is learner leadership understood in the school? What leadership development opportunities for the LRC currently exist in the school? What underlying factors constrain the development of LRC voice and leadership in the newly established school?* Phase two of the study was the expansive learning phase, which consisted of three intervention workshops. The Change Laboratory method and a focus group interview were used to generate data in response to the last research sub-question: *In what ways can LRC participation in a Change Laboratory process contribute to their leadership development?*

Data generated were inductively and deductively analysed, using the activity theoretical principles of contradictions and double stimulation. Data revealed that learner leadership was largely understood as managerial roles carried out by the LRC in the school. Unlike many schools in Namibia, this case-study school offered numerous leadership development opportunities for the LRC. The community networking events such as: School Exchange Programmes, Town Council breakfast and Junior Regional Council, were opportunities offered to the LRC to solicit information, exchange ideas and discuss matters of common interest with the LRCs of the fully

established schools. However, there were a number of challenges that constrained LRC voice and leadership development, the major one being the fact that this was a newly established school.

Of significance was that LRC participation in the Change Laboratory process contributed positively to the development of voice and leadership in learners. During this Change Laboratory process, the LRC developed a new artefact – the vision and mission statement of the school – this signified that the learners expansively transformed the object of their activity. Recommendations emerging out of the study included that the School Management Team see the 'newly established' status of the school as an opportunity for development, rather than a limitation, and therefore invite the LRC to participate in the different leadership practices as the school becomes established. A significant recommendation for school leadership research is to use the third generation of CHAT to expand the unit of analysis, in order to understand the leadership relations and power dynamics between multiple activity systems in schools as complex organisations.

Acronyms

CHAT - Cultural Historical Activity Theory

HoD - Head of Department

LRC - Learner Representative Council

MBESC - Ministry of Basic Education Sport and Culture

MEC - Ministry of Education and Culture

SDP - School Development Plan

SMT - School Management Team

SRC - Student Representative Council

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CHAPTER ONE
CONTEXT OF MY STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This introductory chapter outlines the aim of the thesis and at the same time explains my perspective on this research study. My study seeks to develop the Learner Representative Council (LRC) voice and leadership in a newly established school in Namibia. The chapter begins with the background and the context of this study. This chapter further describes the significance of this study, including some of the reasons why the research is relevant. The goal and the research questions are also introduced. The chapter continues with brief explanations of the research design, and the methods used to collect and analyse data. Lastly the chapter provides the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Context and background

In Namibia, prior to independence in 1990, the right to freedom of expression and the right to be heard in schools was restricted amongst the majority of learners (Namibia. Ministry of Basic Education Sport and Culture [MBESC], 2001). During this time, there was a learner representative body, called the 'prefects', which consisted of senior students in secondary schools (Uushona, 2012). Shekupakela-Nelulu (2008) and Uushona (2012) claim that this prefect body was not a legitimate representative of learners because it was not democratically elected by the students. As a result, prefects served as the representatives of school management rather than representatives of learners. Pomuti and Weber (2012) assert that apartheid education was characterised "by racial inequality, undemocratic participation, low levels of bureaucratic accountability and transparency, top-down policy implementation with power largely centralised to protect white privilege" (p. 2). These undemocratic principles would also have extended to learners. There were limited opportunities for democratic participation in decision-making amongst these learners under the

South African Bantu Education system in Namibia (Namibia. Ministry of Education and Culture, 1993). This means learners were hardly ever given opportunities for their voices to be heard and were forced to accept all rules imposed on them (Namibia. MBESC, 2001). This does indicate that learner leadership has a long history in the Namibian schooling system. However, this history is one where learner leadership was understood within a strong hierarchical system of control; a culture of distributed leadership, where all stakeholders, including learners, parents and community members could participate in the practice of leadership, was not the norm (Shekupakela-Nelulu, 2008; Uushona, 2012; Strydom, 2016).

After gaining independence in 1990, Namibia was faced with the immense task of reconstructing its education system. Soon after independence, the prefect body of learners was substituted with the Student Representative Council (SRC) (Namibia. Ministry of Education and Culture, 1993). The SRC continued to serve as representatives of school management, just like the prefect system, rather than being an authentic representative body of learners. As a result, the SRCs in schools still had little influence in the decision-making process (Uushona, 2012). As a solution to this problem, *Education Act 16 of 2001* was legislated in an attempt to involve all stakeholders in education and ensure broad participation for learners in the decision-making process (Namibia. MBESC, 2001). *Act* 60(1) of 2001 stipulates that "every state secondary school must establish a body of learners to be known as the Learners Representative Council (LRC)" (Namibia. MBESC, 2001, p. 33). It is also stated in *Education Act 16 of 2001* that the LRC should be the highest body of elected leaders of learners and must liaise between learners and the School Management Team (SMT) (Namibia. MBESC, 2001, p. 19). Moreover, the policy states that the role of the LRC is to provide a voice and to promote learner leadership in schools, since LRC members are also to participate in decision-making bodies, such as the school board and SMT meetings (Namibia. MBESC, 2001). This, in other words, meant that the SRCs in school were replaced with LRCs which is the current representative body of learners in Namibia.

1.3 Rationale and significance of the study

From my experience as a high school teacher for nine years, I have observed little leadership opportunities within the structure of the LRC. This means that LRC members are still seldom consulted in decision-making, and teachers often speak and decide on behalf of the learners (Grant

& Nekondo, 2016). Consequently, the elective learner body – the LRC – at some Namibian schools exist purely for the sake of adhering to the *Educational Act 16 of 2001*, but authentic inclusion of learners in organisational decision-making does not often happen. This contradiction between policy and practice interested me, and it was the stimulus to carry out a study to explore the underlying factors constraining LRC voice and leadership in the school and, in so doing, expand my knowledge on learner leadership.

Findings of other studies on learner leadership, provided additional motivation for me to conduct a study of this kind. In a study of learners' participation in leadership in a Namibian school, Uushona (2012) found that "schools do not represent the interests of learners as [the learners] are not part of important decision-making platforms" (p. 105). Uushona (2012) argues that learners are not empowered and accepted as leaders who are able to act responsibly and maturely. In another Namibian study of learner leadership, Shekupakela-Nelulu (2008) found that "learners in our society are essentially viewed as children who should not have a voice in decision-making" (p. 1). In much the same way, a South African study conducted by Sithole also supports the above argument. Sithole (1998) found out that on cultural and traditional grounds, elderly people do not discuss important matters in the presence of children, and "to do that now would tarnish the respect which children must accord their elders, and bring about decay and morass in the traditional value system" (p. 93). This again roused my interest to carry out research in a newly established school in my region to learn more about the significance of learner voice and leadership. As other international studies have found, school leaders can make a difference in school and learners' performance, if learners are granted autonomy to be part of the decision-making process (Leithwood, as cited in Swaffield & MacBeath, 2009, p. 12). Hence, it was my hope that this research would also develop a strong foundation of learner leadership practice at a school which was newly established.

It is because of this background and in the light of my experience that there is a need to enhance learner voice in school leadership. In much the same way, Grant (2015) suggests that there is a "need for research on learner voice" (p. 96) because, although research on learner voice has been growing internationally, it is very limited in South Africa and other African countries including

Namibia. This literature further aroused my interest to carry out a study exploring learner voice and leadership in a Namibian school. Through this study I wished to contribute to the body of knowledge on learner leadership, an "under-researched area in Namibia" (Uushona, 2012, p. 112). This is primarily because much of the school leadership literature has conventionally focused on those in formal management positions, particularly principals (Bolden, 2011).

1.4 Goals and research questions

The main purpose of this research was to develop learner voice and leadership within the structure of the LRC in a newly-established school. At the same time, this study explored the underlying factors constraining the development of LRC voice and leadership in a newly established school. The over-arching research question for this study therefore was: *How can LRC voice and leadership be developed in a school*? To address the above over-arching question, the study sought to answer the following sub- research questions:

1. How is learner leadership understood in the school?
2. What leadership development opportunities for the LRC currently exist in the school?
3. What underlying factors constrain the development of the LRC voice and leadership in the newly established school?
4. In what ways can LRC participation in a Change Laboratory process contribute to their leadership development?

1.5 Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative case-study design to get a holistic picture of learner leadership in the school. A case-study is a "systematic and in-depth study of one particular case in its context" (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 42). This study fulfils the requirements of a case-study as it examined a single case of developing learner voice and leadership within the structure of the LRC in a newly established school. In order to explore, and to bring about transformation of learner voice and leadership in the school, this was an interventionist study, using an activity theoretical formative intervention methodology (Sannino, Engeström, & Lemos, 2016) within a critical paradigm.

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The study was divided into two phases; phase one was largely done for contextual profiling purposes, whilst phase two was interventionist and consisted of a series of Change Laboratory workshops, guided by the steps of the expansive learning cycle (Engeström, 2001). In the first phase, interpretive methods were used to gather participants' understanding of the phenomenon of learner voice and leadership in the school. The second phase involved a Change Laboratory process used to bring about expansion and/or transformation of LRC voice and leadership in the school.

1.5.1 Data generation methods

The data generation processes for this case-study involved two phases for the duration of an eight-week period.

Phase one of the study was done over a period of four weeks. This phase was largely interpretive in nature and I sought to develop a deep understanding of current leadership development practices and to provide answers to my first three sub-research questions. *How is learner leadership understood in the school? What leadership development opportunities for the LRC currently exist in the school? What underlying factors constrain the development of LRC voice and leadership in the newly established school?*

Data was generated through document analysis, individual interviews, questionnaires and observation. Documents such as, the *Educational Act of 2001, School Development Plan [SDP] of 2008, Regulation for Educational Act of 2001* were used to gather and triangulate information, specifically on how learner leadership was promoted in the policy documents. Individual interviews were conducted with a HoD who was the former acting principal, the principal, and one LRC guardian teacher to find out their understanding of learner leadership in the school, as well as leadership development opportunities for the LRC. Questionnaires were administered to LRC members and the LRC guardian teachers. This was done because I needed to understand the current condition of leadership development opportunities for the LRC in the school, from the LRC themselves. To get a holistic picture of LRC voice and leadership in the school, observation was

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also very useful in this study because it enabled me, during the eight-week period I spent in the school, to look afresh at everyday behaviour that otherwise might be taken for granted.

Phase two of the study: During this phase, a formative intervention method called Change Laboratory was conducted with the LRC members and one LRC guardian teacher. This phase aimed to transform LRC voice and leadership in the school through the steps of the expansive learning cycle, central to Cultural Historical Activity Theory (Engeström, 2015). The Change Laboratory method was then conducted and used to collect data for the last sub-research question of the study: *In what ways can LRC participation in a Change Laboratory process contribute to their voice and leadership development?* This activity theoretical method of Change Laboratories will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two and Three of this thesis, but a brief overview of the process is provided here.

Three Change Laboratory sessions were carried out over a period of three weeks. The first Change Laboratory workshop was done for introductory purposes, and also to create a relationship between me (the researcher-interventionist) and the participants; it also allowed the participants to make a well-informed decision about joining the process (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013). The second Change Laboratory workshop aimed to mirror the data generated in the first phase of the study. During this Change Laboratory session, participants found solutions to some of the challenges and contradictions which the researcher-interventionist then presented as mirror data. The last Change Laboratory workshop engaged the participants to identify what mattered to them most in their newly established school. Lastly, a focus group interview was conducted with LRC members at the end of the research process after the Change Laboratories had been concluded. This was done mainly to reflect on and find out participants' (the LRC) experiences during the sessions.

Data were analysed using content analysis and second generation of CHAT. This means, I analysed the data by noting themes and categories emerging from the data generated in both phases. After identifying these themes, I then arranged them into meaningful segments and used them to frame my narrative (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Thereafter, second generation CHAT was used to surface the contradictions which rose within and between various elements of the activity system.

For validity and trustworthiness, the study instruments were piloted with my supervisor, as well as with one teacher and a few learners from the research site who were not part of the study. Different sources were used for triangulation purposes. Moreover, I also employed member-checking to verify the accuracy of responses from participants.

1.6 The structure of the thesis

This study is presented in six chapters:

Chapter One	Introduction
Chapter Two	Literature review
Chapter Three	Methodology
Chapter Four	Data presentation and discussion of the finding: phase one
Chapter Five	Data presentation and discussion of the finding: phase two
Chapter Six	Conclusion and recommendations

Table 1.1: Structure of the thesis

Chapter One acknowledges what is covered in this thesis. Here I include the research goal and questions, background and context of the study, as well as the rationale for conducting this research and lastly the methodologies used.

Chapter Two covers a discussion of literature pertaining to learner leadership. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of the historical background of leadership theories which includes distributed leadership, the conceptual framework for this study. The chapter further reviews the literature on learner voice and leadership, and finally it offers a brief overview of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as the theoretical and analytical framework for this study.

Chapter Three discusses the research design and methodological framework that guided the study. The chapter gives a full description of how I generated data, including the research orientation, research site, methods used to collect the data, and how I managed and analysed the data. The chapter concludes with a discussion on steps taken to ensure validity and trustworthiness as well as research ethics.

Chapter Four and Five of this study present and discuss the research findings for phase one and two in the form of analytical statements. Data are presented and discussed in two phases in relation to the theory and concepts outlined in Chapter Two. The discussions in these chapters aim to address the study's research goal which was to develop the LRC voice and leadership in the newly established school.

Chapter Six presents a summary of the research process, specifically in relation to the research questions. This concluding chapter finally makes recommendations to improve LRC voice and leadership in the school based on the analytical statements provided in Chapter Four and Five. This chapter also includes suggestions for further research and it concludes with a reflection on my research experience.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the study by giving reasons why it was necessary to conduct such a research project. The chapter briefly introduced the research questions, the paradigm adopted, and the methods used to collect data, as well as how data was analysed in the study. Finally, a brief summary of each chapter of the thesis was outlined.

The next chapter discusses the literature reviewed relating to the phenomenon under study, which is learner leadership.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the literature on the phenomenon of learner voice and leadership. As asserted by Grant (2015), research on the topic of learner voice, whilst growing internationally, is very limited in South Africa and other African countries, including Namibia. This chapter begins by distinguishing between the concepts leadership and management and explores briefly how they are interrelated. Like many concepts in the field of education, the concepts of 'leadership' and 'management' are contested terms and used differently in different professional cultures (Grant, 2009). Ribbins (2007) also explains that some academics interpret leadership and management as the same activity, which they are not.

The chapter further presents an overview of leadership theories: starting with the traditional views of leadership (trait, situational and contingency theory) to alternative, more contemporary views of leadership (distributed leadership). Discussing the traditional views of leadership helps one to understand how leadership theories have evolved over the years, from trait theory to distributed leadership theory which is is "currently in vogue" (Harris, 2004, p. 13). Afterwards, the chapter examines the concept of learner leadership. The discussion of this section comprises literature on what learner leadership is, the benefits of learner leadership, how learner leadership can be developed as well as factors that constrain the development of learner leadership in schools. The final section of this chapter discusses Cultural Historical Activity Theory as the theoretical and analytical framework for this study of learner leadership.

2.2 Leadership and management

I begin this section firstly by examining the two concepts; leadership and management. As Christie (2010) warns, the two concepts "are often used interchangeably in the context of schooling" and every day speech (p. 695). This is to clear the mistaken belief that the two concepts are

synonymous, which they are not. This discussion aims to help the reader to understand how the two terms are conceptualised for the purposes of this thesis, and its exploration of learner leadership.

2.2.1 Leadership

The literature does not present a common agreement on the definition of leadership, but writers make related statements. Christie (2010) defines leadership as an exercise of influence and that leadership, unlike management, can take place outside and inside of formal organisations such as schools. The author additionally claims that leadership in schools is not a preserve of any position; therefore, leadership can be found and built throughout the school (Christie, 2010). Bush (2007) advocates leadership as the ability to influence other people's actions toward a certain goal. Though leadership is often framed in terms of individual qualities, it may more usefully be framed in terms of a social relationship of power, whereby some are able to influence others (Christie, 2010). For example, in the school context, leadership is seen as the "collective capacity to do useful things and where leadership responsibility is widely shared beyond the principal" (Senge, 1990, p. 575). In much the same way, Mullins (2010) maintains that different definitions make it difficult to generalise about leadership, but essentially leadership is a relationship through which one person influences the behavior or actions of other people.

In addition, Grant, Gardner, Kajee, Moodley and Somaroo, (2010) understand leadership as the process which brings about change in an organisation. At the same time, Donaldson (2006) adds that "leadership mobilises members to think, believe, and behave in a manner that satisfies emerging organisational needs, not simply their individual needs or wants or the status quo" (p. 7). In other words, leadership helps the school adapt to its changing function in society (Donaldson, 2006, p. 8). This in the education context, includes ensuring that the school achieves its vision based on values which are shared by the entire community of the school (learners, parents, teachers and the principal), by guiding the schools through various challenges they may come across.

Having defined the concept of leadership, I now move on to explore the term management.

2.2.2 Management

Although the two terms are often used interchangeably, management is more usually viewed as getting things done through other people, in order to achieve the stated organisational objectives (Mullins, 2010). It is further stated that, "Management, in contrast to leadership, is an organisational concept because it relates to structures and processes by which organisations meet their goals and central purposes" (Buchanan & Huczynski, as cited in Christie 2010, p. 696). In short, management is more likely to be tied to formal positions than to persons (Christie, 2010). For example, principals and heads of departments (HODs) in schools are always making sure that teachers and learners are provided with syllabi and textbooks for effective teaching and learning to take place. This represents a task of management.

In much the same way, Bush (1995) claims that management has to do with maintaining an activity that is brought about by the change (leadership). For Bush (1995), management is "a continuous process through which members of an organisation seek to co-ordinate their activities and utilise their resources to fulfil the various tasks of the organisation as effectively as possible" (p. 1). Similarly, Mushaandja (2002) has the view that "leadership is about change while management should come in to maintain and administer the change" (p. 4).

It was important to me to have some distinction between leadership and management and to understand what these terms mean as I investigated the understanding of leadership from different stakeholders in the school. However, looking at the above definitions of leadership and management, many authors claim that there is a close relationship between the two terms, which I briefly discuss next.

2.2.3 Relationship between leadership and management

Having distinguished between the concepts of leadership and management, Christie (2010) argues that the two concepts are inseparable and should come together in schools. The author asserts that "ideally schools should be replete with good leadership, at all levels; they should be well managed in unobtrusive ways; and principals should integrate the functions of leadership and management and possess skills in both" (Christie, 2010, p. 696). This means that both terms are important and

needed in an organisation for it to prosper. For example, in schools, teachers should manage their classrooms and, at the same time, lead and influence learners to perform leadership roles such as running a leadership club with them. Thus, it is again highlighted by Strydom (2016) that a principal in the school could be seen as both a leader of the school and also a manager. It is worthy to note here that leadership in schools should be dispersed throughout the school and not just be located in the position of the principal; while management activities should be delegated with proper resources and accountabilities, argues Christie (2010). Although, both leadership and management are crucial in an organisation, Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004) however, fully support that leadership compared to management is "critical to innovation in schools" (p. 1). Because leadership in schools is so critical, particularly in the African context, this study is primarily interested in leadership of learners in schools, rather than their management.

In the following section, I discuss the various approaches to leadership as they have been theorised over the years. This is important to trace the roots and the origin of how organisations have been leading and managing.

2.3 Leadership theories

I start this section by briefly discussing the traditional view of leadership which is focused more on "bureaucratic structures with a hierarchical division of labour" (Mullins, 2010, p. 375). I then discuss an alternative view of leadership, the contemporary view, which focuses on "social activities shaped by the interrelationships and interactions" (Spillane, 2006, p. 3) and this includes the present theory of distributed leadership which is favoured by many.

2.3.1 Traditional views of leadership

Early approaches to organisations believed in one best form of structure and tended to concentrate on limited aspects of the organisation and at the same time studied the organisation in isolation from its environment (Mullins, 2010). This view of leadership emphasised the importance of a leader in an organisation, in order to achieve its goals (Mullins, 2010). For example, in the education context, for the school to achieve its mission and vision, the principal is considered to be the only driver (the leader), with teachers and learners as followers.

2.3.1.1 Trait theories

Traced back to the late 19th century, leadership studies focused on a leader's characteristics (**traits**). The trait approach assumed that "leaders are born" (Mullins, 2010, p. 375). Yukl (2000) asserts that "the trait approach defines leadership chiefly as a function of individual personality, ability, traits and style" (p. 6). At the same time, Yukl (2000) additionally points out that trait leaders were believed to have "qualities such as self-confidence, sociability, adaptability and co-cooperativeness to inspire others to follow" (p. 7). This means people who possess the above-mentioned qualities or traits were believed to be good leaders. This approach focused its attention on the formal structure of the organisation, in terms of specialisation and hierarchy of authority. Perruci and McManus (2011) argue that "The Great Man Theory, as this focus came to be called, is an example of the intellectual challenges that the field faced in its infancy when it equated leadership with characteristics of the leader" (p. 49). Consequently, Dalin (1998) warns that this approach belongs to "a bygone era" (p. 33). Perruci and McManus (2011) explain that scholars from this period focused on development of a list of traits that characterised successful leaders and despite considerable efforts, scholars could not come up with an agreed upon list – as a result, this approach became discredited. Hence, leadership scholars shifted away from trait theories and instead turned to a leader's desirable behaviours, which I discuss next.

2.3.1.2 Situational theories

As an answer to the trait approach, situational leadership drew attention to the kind of behaviours of people in leadership situations. It considered establishing trust, mutual respect and rapport with the group and whether leaders showed concern, warmth, support and consideration for subordinates (Mullins, 2010). In much the same way, Mullins (2010) stresses that situational leadership theory advocated that, "leaders are made and not born" (p. 375). In other words, this approach focused attention on the psychological and social needs of people at work. It is again understood that this theory is associated with the human relations approach to leadership (*ibid.*). However, this over-emphasis on human relations tended to downplay task-orientation and was replaced by a theory which emphasised both traits and situation (Perruci & McManus, 2011).

2.3.1.3 Contingency theories

The contingency approach was introduced after the search for universal characteristics of leaders was abandoned and to address the lack of attention to situation. Spillane et al. (2004) agree that "contingency theory assumes that there is no one best approach to organising, that organisational structure matters when it comes to organisational performance, and that the most effective method of organising depends on the organisational environment" (p. 452). This means that, the success of an organisation depends on its structure. However, "with the focus on the thinking of individual leaders, this work continues the tradition of seeing leadership chiefly as a function of individual personality, ability, cognition, and style" argue Spillane et al. (2004, p. 452).

Next, I discuss the shift to viewing leadership as a "social dynamic that exists within an organisation emanating from the collaboration of many" (Spillane, 2006, p. 4) and not from one individual as the above-mentioned theories believed. Therefore, the next section explores more literature on why distributed leadership theory is significant to schools.

2.3.2 An alternative view of leadership: A distributed perspective

In contrast to traditional notions of leadership premised upon an individual managing hierarchical systems and structures (Mullins, 2010), distributed leadership is characterised as an alternative view of collective leadership in which organisational members develop expertise by working together (Spillane, 2006).

2.3.2.1 What is distributed leadership theory?

There are competing and sometimes conflicting interpretations of what distributed leadership actually means. This means there is no universally accepted definition of distributed leadership in a comprehensive review of the literature on distributed leadership. Harris and Spillane (2008) emphasise that distributed leadership recognises that there are multiple leaders in an organisation and leadership activities are widely shared within and between organisations (p. 31). Distributed leadership is primarily concerned with the practice of leadership rather than specific leadership roles or responsibilities (Spillane, 2006). It equates with shared, collective and extended leadership practices that build the capacity for change and improvement. In the school context, this means

that leadership does not reside within principals' offices, but schools require multiple leaders including teachers, parents and learners. The current favoured framework of distributed leadership moves away from hierarchical structures of organisational leadership, where one individual provides the leadership and visions for a school. Within this study, distributed leadership is seen as a model or lens to develop individuals (learners) so that they can be agents of change, because it has shifted the focus from a leader to leadership as a property of the organisation.

I will now discuss the distributed perspective of leadership based on the 'three key features' which are summarised from different definitions by different writers, on the concept of distributed leadership. These three features explain that, distributed leadership is understood as:

- An emergent property of interaction;
- Recognition of expertise;
- Openness of boundaries (Bennet et al., as cited in Bolden, 2011, p. 257).

Distributed leadership as an emergent property of interaction; according to Bennet et al. (as cited in Bolden, 2011), one of the characteristics of distributed leadership is "an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals" (p. 257). This implies that the essence of teamwork is the most important aspect of distributed leadership. Literature on teamwork shares the view that working together produces results over and above what would be expected from individuals working alone (Spillane, 2006). Leadership of and within the teams may vary, thus providing opportunity for the emergence and development of leadership across a number of people, whether or not they are in formal positions of leadership (Bolden, 2011). In the education context, distributed views of leadership shift from the school principal and other formal management positions such as Heads of Departments, to a web of leaders, followers and their situations that give form to leadership practice (Spillane, 2006). In post-independent Namibia, schools have adopted a "strategy to increase school autonomy and devolve decision making to teachers and sometimes to parents, students and community leaders" (Pomuti & Weber, 2012, p. 1). This implies that opportunities for distributed leadership are provided to those who are close to the school so as to be included in decision-making when the need arises – this indicates distributed leadership as

an emergent property of interaction. However, Gunter and Thomson (2007) contend that, "within the emergent field of school leadership, children are a virtual absence" (p. 23).

Distributed leadership as recognition of expertise is another distinctive characteristic of distributed leadership (Bennet et al., as cited in Bolden, 2011). This means that numerous responsibilities within the school require different expertise and all expertise does not belong to one person at the top of the organisational hierarchy – that is to those who are in formal management positions such as the principals and School Management Team. Schools nowadays are complex and require assistance from all the stakeholders such as teachers, learners and community members in the activity of leading (Uushona, 2012). This extending of leadership practice beyond the school principal position does not in any way undermine the vital role of the principal and School Management Team in the school, but instead shows that leadership is often a collective rather than an individualistic endeavour (Spillane, 2006).

 Recognising leadership within various individuals in schools can also motivate entire stakeholder groups, such as learners, teachers and community members, to feel valued. In the Namibian context, Pomuti and Weber (2012) highlight that in Namibia *School-Based Management* was implemented on the assumption that school management would improve through sharing resources, experiences and expertise. This reform assumes that sharing resources, experience and expertise will be achieved through shared, collaborative leadership and collaborative learning networks among learners and teachers. This notion is supported by Elmore (2000) who states that in any organisation people will have "different skills and competencies that are related to their predispositions, interests, aptitudes, prior knowledge and specialised roles" (p. 14).

Distributed leadership suggests openness of boundaries; the third distinctive characteristic as identified by Bennet et al. (as cited in Bolden, 2011) is that distributed leadership suggests openness of boundaries. While distributed leadership is generally explored from the perspective of the principal and Heads of Departments, it could also include all stakeholders in the school, as stated earlier. Distributed leadership theories on this point emphasise that trust and support are crucial in any organisation (Bolden, 2011). In the school community, learners are the majority

group making up membership of school organisations (Woods, 2012, p. 75). It is therefore important to include them in all the school leadership activities, as in the end, this can develop agency by expanding opportunities for learners to work in participatory ways with their peers on issues that are of concern to them" (Woods, 2012, p. 16). Hence this is a more democratic way of working, where learners feel trusted and supported by their school's authority and, in the process, develop leadership. This in short means leadership should be open to all people in formal and informal management positions, as Spillane (2006) argues that the distributed perspective of leadership involves both mortals and heroes.

2.3.2.2 Benefits of distributed leadership

First, MacBeath, Oduro and Waterhouse (2004) claim distributed leadership "creates opportunity for all members of an organisation to assume leadership and it does not necessarily give any particular individual or categories of persons the privilege of providing more leadership than others" (p. 13). Bolden (2011) also agrees that distributed leadership is important in any organisation since, "there are no limits built into the concept in terms of who might be included" (p. 162).

Second, distributed leadership is viewed as a "multiple source of guidance and direction" (Bolden, 2011, p. 162). Sourcing different guidance from different people within the organisation is part of distributed leadership, which is a powerful tool for transforming the leadership practice in the school. Since leadership is fundamentally about influence, then within any school there are many sources of influence, both formal and informal. It is unrealistic to expect any school principal to know everything about leading a complex organisation (Spillane, 2006). This means, distributed leadership is not done by an individual such as a principal, but rather it is an emergent property of a group of individuals in which group members pool their expertise. In this sense, different people may learn from each other (different people possess different expertise) and leadership may be developed across a number of people whether or not they are in school formal leading positions. Harris (2004) similarly supports that "distributed leadership concentrates on engaging expertise wherever it exists within the organisation rather than seeking this through formal position or role" (p. 13).

Third, distributed leadership maximises human capacity in an organisation (Harris, 2004). This means, distributive leadership is again found to be a developing process in which leadership is multifaceted and not hierarchical, although sometimes the accountability remains with the head of the institution (MacBeath, 2005). The current interest in 'distributed' leadership underlines the tendency of working together as a team, both learners and teachers, towards achieving the vision and goal of a school or an institution. In every high-performance team, investigated by Spillane (2006), leadership is shared. Likewise, leaders from some professions, when asked about how they managed to succeed, always said; "You cannot do it alone. Leadership is not a solo act; it is a team effort" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 241). Getting beyond the heroic plot is imperative in a school situation too, where leadership can also be exercised by individuals and groups other than the principal (Grant & Nekondo 2016, p. 14). Consequently, distributed perspective makes it possible for the work of leadership to be manageable, thus different people work together through collective leadership (Spillane, 2006).

2.3.2.3 Critiques of distributed leadership

Power and influence: a number of authors have suggested that much research on distributed leadership takes "insufficient consideration of the dynamic power and influences in which it is situated" (Bolden, 2011, p. 260). Within schools, Hatcher (2005) concludes that while leadership may be distributed, power often is not (p. 254). For example, even if leadership is distributed in schools, the fact remains that it is still the principal who holds power. It is therefore clear that the notion of power and influence is absent within the literature of distributed leadership (Bolden, 2011, p. 261). As Lumby (2013) argues, it is naive to think leadership can be distributed when literature fails to show how power can be distributed, hence power as a central tenet of leadership cannot be distributed.

Organisation boundaries and context: A further limitation within much work on distributed leadership is the tendency to "confine studies within organisational boundaries" (Bolden, 2011, p. 261). It is highlighted that studies of school leadership tend to explore the contribution of various actors within the school, however studies hardly show how leadership practices within one school may have impact upon those within other schools. As Bolden (2011) suggests, the network itself offers an important level of analysis which often goes neglected, yet is essential to our

understanding of how leadership occurs within and between organisations. It is therefore significant to investigate how leadership is distributed between organisations, such as schools. This in Namibian education system was prioritised through a policy document called *School Development Plan [SDP] of 2008* which stipulates that there should be clear "links with other schools and the region" (Namibia. Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 2) to establish an effective cluster system. I have to mention this, since Spillane (2006) argues that it is essential that policy creates opportunities for school leaders and other leadership teams to work together to improve leadership practice.

Formal positions: Most researchers on distributed leadership tend to focus on the holders of formal positions only. Bolden (2011) claims that "six cases of distributed leadership presented in Spillane et al. (2004) focus particularly on the role of the principals (p. 261). Such situations may also limit opportunities for recognising the contribution of informal leaders such as learners in schools. This, in the end, shows that the distributed leadership perspective is confined to those who are in formal roles or positions. Leadership as being confined to only those in positions of authority then, wilfully ignores the leadership talent and capability of many others. Hence, more studies of distributed leadership, including informal positions need to be developed.

For the purpose of this study, distributed leadership is a form of collective agency incorporating the activities of many individuals in a school. I now turn to discuss learner leadership, the focus of this study, from a distributed leadership perspective.

2.4 Learner leadership

There is no generic definition in literature of the concept learner leadership, (Uushona, 2012) as research regarding learner leadership is under-researched (Whitehead, 2009). According to Theron and Botha (as cited in Uushona, 2012), "learner leadership is a system of pupil leadership found in every school by means of which pupils take an active part in activities in a directive capacity" (p. 22). The above definition alludes to learners' participation in a directing capacity, which may sometimes imply a management aspect, but does not extend to the outcomes or purpose of learner leadership (*ibid.*). However, learner leadership in this study can be understood as leadership that

is distributed to include those who are not in formal positions, learners. This implies that learner leadership within the distributed perspective is typically viewed as being "less hierarchical and more collective, dispersed down and across hierarchies" (Coleman, 2005, p. 7). In Namibian schools, learner leadership is being promoted through the policy document Education *Act of 2001*. As Spillane (2006) advises, the "education policy makers must acknowledge that the work of leading schools involves more than the leadership of the principal" (p. 101). The *Education Act of 2001* states that schools must "establish a body of learners to be known as the Learners' Representative Council" (Namibia. Ministry of Basic Education and Culture, 2001, p. 33). Through this Act of 2001, it became compulsory for all secondary schools to have a Learner Representative Council democratically elected by learners at a school (*ibid.*). The Learner Representative Council in turn elects two learners who have to represent them in the School Board (*ibid.*). Hence assigning learner leaders in the school leadership ensure that the skills and expertise of different leaders complement one another, by this, leadership is distributed.

2.4.1 Learner leadership through learner voice

International literature refers to the voices of learners as 'student voice' and the concept is used to describe the range of ways in which learners can share in decision-making in schools (Mitra & Gross, 2009). However, because Namibia uses the term learners to refer to school going youth, I have chosen to use the concept 'learner voice' in this study rather than student voice. In the context of this study, learner voice is about true democracy within a school and is also a "potential catalyst for learner agency" (Grant, 2015, p. 95). The prime purpose of learner voice is to capacitate learners for leadership roles while they are still in school. This means that allowing learner voice equally allows learners to take part in the overall leadership of the school. The rationale for this research is the absence of learner voice in schools. It is for this reason that this study aims to develop agency in those who are largely silent in school, learners. To develop agency in learners, this study uses Mitra and Gross's (2009) pyramid of learner voice to illustrate learner leadership development that is possible, as learner voice increases in a school. The pyramid as depicted in Figure 2.1 is designed as a three-level structure to illustrate youth opportunities possible as learner voice increases in the school by:

- Being heard;

- Collaboration with adults, and;

- Building capacity for leadership.

```
                    /\
                   /  \
                  / Building \
                 / capacity for \
                /  leadership    \
               /------------------\
              / Collaborating with adults \
             /----------------------------\
            /        Being heard            \
           /--------------------------------\
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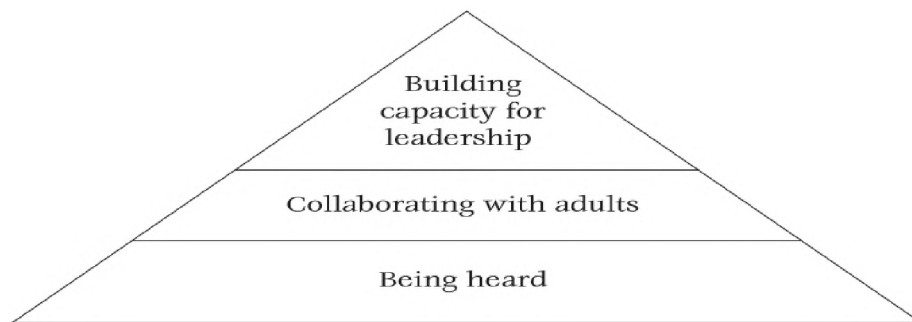
Figure 2.1: Types of student voice (Mitra & Gross, 2009, p. 523)

According to Mitra and Gross (2009), the pyramid starts at the bottom with the basic form of learner voice which is "being heard" (p. 523). This level implies that the school management team, teachers and administrators learn to listen to learners in order to learn about their experiences in school. At the grass roots level of being heard, learners are encouraged to voice their opinions in matters of concern to them in and around the school (*ibid.*).

'Collaborating with adults' is the next level. This form of learner voice describes "instances in which students work with adults to make changes in the school" (Mitra & Gross, 2009, p. 524). This may include collecting data or information about the school and implementing solutions. Teachers and the School Management Team may partner or work together with learners to identify school problems and develop possible solutions. This, in return, can simply remind the School Management Team and teachers that, "students possess unique knowledge and perspective" (Mitra & Gross, 2009, p. 524).

The last level, which is at the top of the pyramid and is believed to be the smallest and the least type of learner voice is "building capacity of leadership" (Mitra & Gross, 2009, p. 524). At this

level, learners can "serve as a source of criticism and protest in school by questioning issues such as structural and cultural injustice within school" (Mitra & Gross 2009, p. 525). Mitra (2004) further supports that such "participation also can increase youth attachment to school, which in turns correlates with improved academic outcomes" (*ibid.*, p. 525).

Therefore, my study advocates that learner voice is important in schools as it allows learner leaders to speak for themselves and to share in school decisions that will shape their lives and the lives of their peers (Mitra & Gross, 2009; Grant, 2015). Hence, school authorities need to be cognitive of the fact that learner voice can equally contribute to the development and growth of the school.

2.4.2 The benefits of learner leadership in schools

Learner leadership is not common as a concept or a practice in the majority of schools in African countries such as Namibia (Grant & Nekondo, 2016, p. 26). However, within the limited studies done on learner leadership, researchers have found it beneficial to learners and to the school at large. Next, I discuss the benefits of learner leadership.

2.4.2.1 Developing a sense of ownership in learners

Developing a sense of ownership in learners is considered as one of the most important aspects of practicing learner leadership in schools (Mitra & Gross, 2009). If learners are accepted as important people who can positively contribute to the development of their school, learners feel valued, and as a result, they can freely express themselves in matters around the school; this is democracy (Thomas, 2006). Thus, learner leadership promotes learner democracy in practice. Similarly, Mitra and Gross (2009) substantiate the fact of democracy through learner leadership, by asserting that learner voice will "transform schools into democratic settings in which young people can gain necessary skills in understanding how to participate in pluralistic communities" (p. 530). Therefore, learner voice is seen as a mechanism of fostering relationships in which both youth and adults have the potential to contribute to decision-making processes, as significantly this gives everyone a sense of ownership and accountability (Mncube, 2008, p. 84; Mitra & Gross, 2009, p. 530).

2.4.2.2 Calm turbulence in the school

Apart from democracy and the sense of ownership in learners that can be achieved through learner voice, Mitra and Gross (2009) additionally suggest that the other benefit of learner leadership is to "help in increasing the tension and focus on pressing issues when needed" by means of "calm turbulence in areas that need solution" (p. 538). This means learners are equally positioned in identifying and finding solutions to pressing matters that might be somehow overlooked by the SMT and teachers; they can also help in calming disorder, as well as stimulating teachers to act upon such issues. This is supported by Osberg, Pope and Galloway (2006) who argue that "student data can galvanise otherwise sceptical teachers to make changes" (p. 329).

2.4.3 Factors hindering learner leadership in schools

In this section I explore the factors that are likely to hinder learner leadership development in schools.

2.4.3.1 Adult power relations

One of the major challenges hindering learner leadership in schools is the issue of authority and power being hierarchical, 'given' to learners through the perception of teachers being in control. Osberg et al. (2006, p. 339) assert this phenomenon as follows:

> The act of 'giving' implies that the power or authority is the adults' to give, and therefore, something that the adult can reclaim at any moment. However, because students so rarely have any real voice in shaping school policies, and because the traditional hierarchical structure of schools still assumes that students will defer to adult authority, the act of 'giving' seems not only appropriate, but also critical to legitimise any transference or redistribution of power within the school context.

The word 'giving' as used by Osberg et al. (2006), connotes that adults or those in formal management positions (principal and head teachers) still have the full power of determining to what extent learners are able to exercise their voice. As Strydom (2016) claims, even if a teacher tells a learner in the class that he/she is in control of the class, as soon as something happens (a learner falls or bumps his/her head), the teacher immediately takes back the power in the relationship and tends to act. The possible reason for this phenomenon could be that teachers do not trust learners; they therefore fail to give them full authority when deciding and acting on

matters. Teachers are afraid that if learners are left to decide and act on their own without strict supervision, things will fall apart at the school. Thus, teachers do not realise that it inspires learners when they are given control and responsibility and are placed in the driving seat (Flutter, 2006). Legitimating how much authority or power learners are allowed presents a challenge, as it limits them from fully exploring ideas and expressing what they feel would be best in certain situations.

2.4.3.2 Silence of learner voice in decision-making

As mentioned in Section 2.4, the Namibian Education Act of 2001 mandates that secondary school learners who are members of the Learner Representative Council should be part of the school governance through the participation in the School Board (Namibia. Ministry of Basic Education and Culture, 2001). Research carried out in South Africa and Namibia, shows that the LRC are often not afforded full opportunities to participate in crucial decision-making processes by adult members of the School Board, directly or indirectly (Mncube, 2008; Uushona, 2012; Strydom, 2016). As a result, learner voice in decision-making is silenced in schools, because "arguably learners lack experience in the education matters" (Mncube, 2008, p. 78). Silencing the voice of the learners implicitly affects learner leadership development in schools (Mncube, 2008). Whilst learners are made to believe that they have an equal contribution in school affairs, in reality when it comes to actual decision-making and a final say, their views are mostly not considered. By this I mean learners are not given fair chances to air their opinions and concerns on what matters to them, and, as a result, learner voice is silenced in the school.

2.4.3.3 Gender stereotypes

In many organisations, there is an indication that males are still seen as dominant (Strydom, 2016, p. 69). This portrays that gender stereotyping remains one reason for the under representation of female leaders in schools (Chabaya, Symphorosa, & Newman, 2007). A study by Mncube (2008) found that female learner leaders tend to be less vocal than male learner leaders, and relinquished decision-making activities to their male counterparts. Power relations also play a significant role in relation to gender issues, as the learner leadership studies of Uushona (2012) and Strydom (2016) have shown. Often there are suggestions that even learners at school hold on to the notion that males are seen as dominant (Strydom, 2016). Arguably, this deprives learner leadership development within female learners in a school.

2.4.3.4 Limited studies on learner leadership

Limited studies on learner leadership development are another challenge that has the potential to constrain learner leadership in the schools. Whitehead (2009) argues that most leadership studies focus on adult leadership development, with very few studies focusing on the development of learners as leaders. From this literature, it is clear that focusing on adult leadership could be one of the reasons learner leadership is not prioritised by school authorities.

2.4.3.5 Lack of effective training

Training is believed to be the best means for organisation empowerment (Uushona, 2012). Schools needs training programmes or induction programmes to prepare learner leaders for their new responsibilities (Shekupakela-Nelulu, 2008, p. 56). However, many researchers found an absence of leadership training for learners, as a challenge to learner leadership development in the school (Ipinge, 2003; Shekupakela-Nelulu, 2008; Uushona, 2008; Strydom, 2016). If training equips learner leaders with leadership skills needed, then a lack of training has the potential to constrain learner leadership, as learners do not always have the necessary leadership skills.

To conclude this section, my study was informed by the distributed perspective of leadership and it focused on the leadership activities of learners. Distributed leadership as conceptualised by Spillane et al. (2004) and Spillane (2006), is underpinned by a theory called Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), and it is this theory which I used as the theoretical and analytical framework for my study. I elected to use CHAT as the theory, to understand the development of learner leadership in the school since it shifts the focus from individual development to human development (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Next, I discuss CHAT, the framework for this study.

2.5 Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

In this section, I introduce Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as the theoretical and analytical framework used in this study. After tracing its origin to Vygotsky's work of mediation action, I describe how other theorists further developed it up to the third generation. I further explain why CHAT in this study is employed up to the second generation, where I introduce the

elements of the study's activity system. Thereafter, I describe the relevance of CHAT to this study, and lastly also acknowledge some of the main critiques of CHAT.

2.5.1 Development of Cultural Historical Activity Theory

Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) has three generations, which draw from the work of different theorists. CHAT has its origins in Vygotsky's work of the 1920 and early 1930s (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). This means that the first generation draws on Vygotsky's work based on "mediated action which involves an interaction between the individual and mediated tools" (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, p. 16). The first generation is grounded on how the relationship between human agents and their environments are mediated by the cultural means of tools and signs (Engeström, 2001). The idea of mediation is presented in the triangular model as shown in Figure 2.2.

MEDIATING ARTEFACTS/TOOL
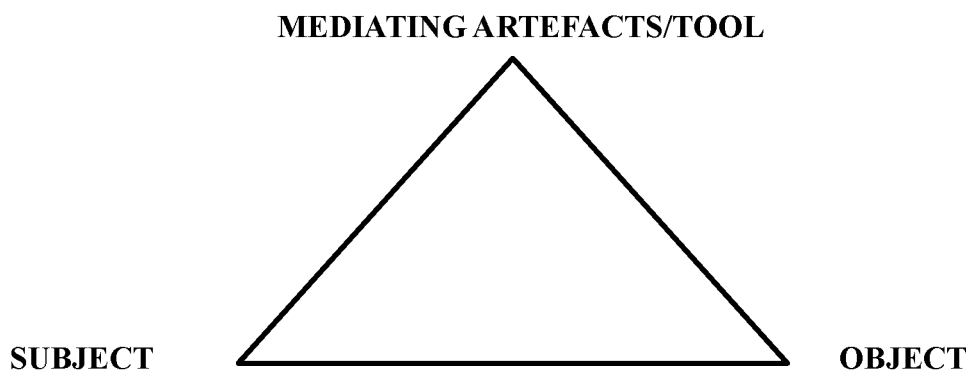
SUBJECT   **OBJECT**

Figure 2.2: Vygotsky's basic mediated action triangle (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, p. 17)

The subject in this triangular model portrays an individual or a group of individuals engaged in an activity (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Here an activity is "realised by goal-directed actions subordinated to conscious purposes" (Engeström, 2015, p. 54). The mediating artefacts can include tools, "social others, and prior knowledge that contribute to the subject's mediated action experiences within the activity" (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, p. 16). The object is the goal of the activity, in other words it is the reason why individuals or groups of individuals choose to participate in an activity (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, p. 16). The limitation of this first generation

was that the unit of analysis remained individually focused rather than on an individual within the community (Engeström, 2015). For that reason, the second generation was developed and was inspired by Leont'ev's work (*ibid.*).

 The second generation of CHAT is characterised by the expansion of the unit of analysis from individual action to collective activity (Sannino, 2011, p. 573). This movement (expansion) shows a transition which implies the transformation of both the action and the activity (*ibid.*). Leont'ev's examples show only how historically evolving division of labour has brought about the crucial differentiation between an individual action and a collective activity (Engeström, 2015). In addition, Leont'ev never expanded Vygotsky's original model depicted in Figure 2.2 into a model of a collective activity system (Engeström, 2001, p. 134). For that reason, Engeström (2015) developed a second generation model of activity theory, based on Leont'ev's work, and extendend the triangle adding other elements; that is the rules, the community and the division of labour. Engeström presents it with a simple triangle highlighting the features (elements) of the activity system as depicted in Figure 2.3.
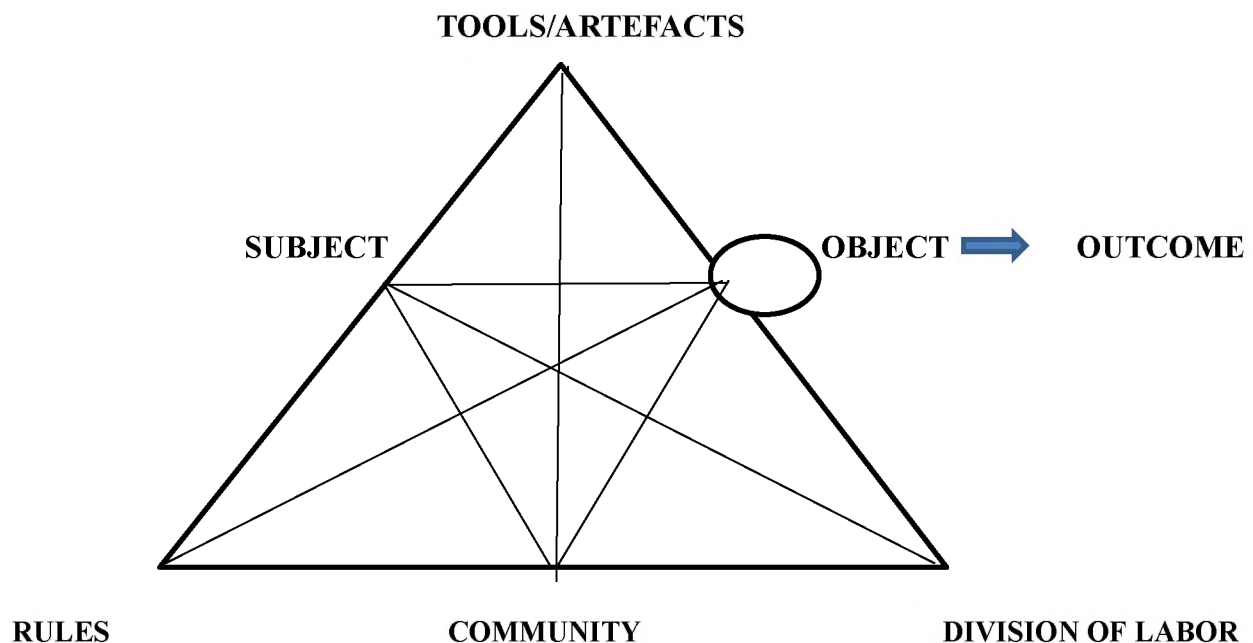
Figure 2.3: Second generation of CHAT developed by Engeström (adapted from Engeström, 2015, p. 63)

In the second generation of CHAT, subject, tools/ artefacts and object mean the same as I explained them earlier in the first generation. This means, the elements of the first generation exist in the second generation and are similarly defined. The additional elements include the rules, community and the division of labour. Here, the rules refer to regulations that can either be formal or informal (Sannino, Daniels, & Gutierrez, 2009). For example, rules can include policies, cultural values and norms. Significantly, the rules provide the activity with guidance on correct procedures. The community is a social group with which the subject identifies while participating in the activity (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). This is a setting where the activity takes place, for example, the group of individuals in an organisation who share the same object. Division of labour refers to how the tasks are shared among the community (Sannino et al., 2009). These can be individual or shared roles.

The importance of the second generation of activity theory is that it brings into focus interrelations between the individual subject and his/her community (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). At the same time, it empasises the importance of internal contradictions caused by tensions which arise when conditions of an activity put the subject in contradictory situations that can hinder the subject's participation in the activity. However, the limitation within this second generation remained that "the relationship between the object orientation production and communicative exchange between people remained unclear" (Sannino et al., 2009). This in other words meant that the second generation did not address questions of diversity and dialogue between different traditions. Hence, this limitation opened the opportunity for the development of the third generation.

The third generation of CHAT was also developed by Engestrom to "understand networks of interacting activity system, dialogue, and multi perspectives and voices" (Engestrom, 2001). This expands to include at least two interacting activity systems with a common object (*ibid.*). This means that the third generation of CHAT was developed to understand the networking of interacting activity systems with a partially shared object (Engestrom, 2001). However, my research study only employed CHAT up to the second generation as an analytical famework, with its emphasis on individual action and collective activity. This means my study focused on a single activity system (the activity of the LRC), because it allowed me to explain human learning as a

series of object-oriented activities (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Moreover, looking at the single activity, helped me to not treat the organism and the environment as isolated entities (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010) as I explain next.

2.5.2 Relevance of Cultural Historical Activity Theory to this study

First, the relevance of CHAT to this study is its belief of its **"central role of contradictions/tensions as a source of change and development"** (Engeström, 2001, p. 137). The term contradictions and tensions are used interchangeably in the literature; however, this study uses the term contradictions (Karanasios, Riisla, & Simeonora, 2017). Here contradictions are "historically accumulated structural tensions" within or between the elements of the activity system (Engeström, 2001, p. 137). There are four levels of contradictions namely: primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary contradictions (Engeström, 2009). However, this study works with the primary and secondary contradictions since the study employs CHAT up to the second generation.

According to the second-generation CHAT framework, primary contradictions occur within one element of a single activity system; for example, a contradiction within the subject element only. Secondary contradictions take place when two elements of a single activity system are in conflict with one another; for example, contradictions between the rule and the division of labour. Contradictions are important for this intervention study because they "have the power to reveal opportunities for creative innovation for new ways of structuring and enacting the activity and learning" (Karanasios et al., 2017, p. 2). This means as contradictions arise or are observed, they can be used to expose the dynamics, inefficiencies and most importantly opportunities for change and action. In other words, contradictions are used because they have transformative power and significant effect on organisational change (Engeström, 2001).

Secondly, CHAT is applicable to this study due to its **"principle of historicity"** (Engeström, 2001, p. 136). This means that the work needs to be analysed against the history of the organisation or against the global history of learner leadership, in other words identifying the past cycles of the

activity system. Histories provide a powerful socio-cultural lens (Daniels, 2004) through which I analyse the activity of the LRC as an activity system in order to understand its practice.

The other reason for using CHAT in this study is that it provides the **"possibility of expansive transformation in activity systems"** (Engeström, 2001, p. 137). In other words, the process of using contradictions to promote learning and change in an activity system is referred to as expansive learning. Expansive learning in this study should be understood as "construction and resolution of successively evolving contradictions"; said slightly differently, it is about "learning what is not yet there" (Engeström, 2001, p. 74). To create expansive learning the Change Laboratory method, which I discuss next, can be a useful tool as Engeström (2015) connotes that a Change Laboratory is typically conducted in an activity system that is facing transformation.

2.5.2.1 The Change Laboratory method

The Change Laboratory is an interventionist method developed within the framework of activity theory (Sannino, 2011, p. 571) and is used in this study to transform learner voice and leadership within the LRC structure. The Change Laboratory method is suitable for this study as it has also been used in different countries in workplaces, communities and educational institutions to manage challenging situations (Engeström, 2015). Figure 2.4 below depicts the layout and instruments used in the Change Laboratory process.
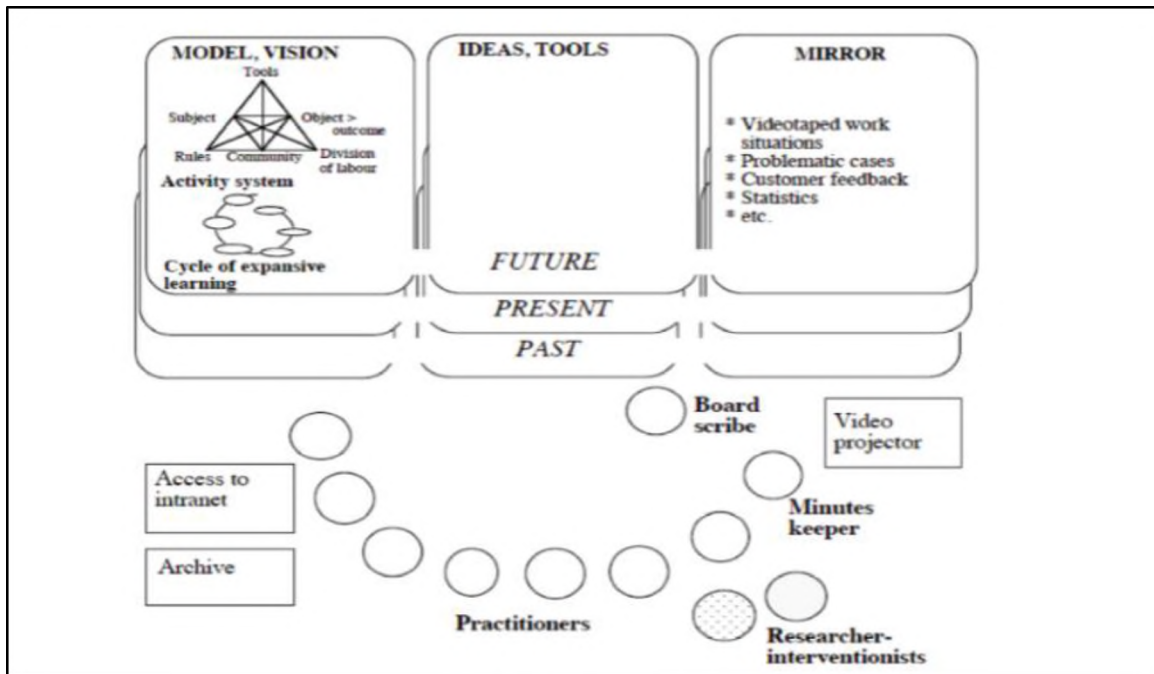
Figure 2.4: Layout and instruments of the change laboratory space (adapted from Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013, p. 16)

The central tools used in the Change Laboratory sessions are set in three parts. The first part on the right-hand side represents the mirror; the mirror surfaces are comprised particularly of the historical data generated (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013, p. 16). Videotaped work, as well as photographs, stories, interviews, quotes, narrative accounts are used as mirror data.

The second part, the model and vision on the left hand, are kept for modelling the past, present and future structure of the activity, as well as the inner contradictions in the current activity system (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013, p. 16). In this part, a triangular model of the second generation of the activity system is used to analyse the development of the activity. In addition, the expansive learning cycle is also used as it enables practitioners to analyse current and projected stages of their activities and design new models.

The third part in in the middle, is reserved for ideas and tools in analyses of problem situations. Moreover, practitioners represent the participants, which, in this case, are the LRC members. The

board scribe in front signifies the chair of the activity, which is also one of the LRC members, with me at the back as the researcher-interventionist. The principle of double stimulation derived from CHAT is used in the Change Laboratory workshops. This is a suitable principle for this study and is chosen because "it can show how an individual can gain the power to use outside resources to determine his or her own behaviour" (Sannino, 2011, p. 585). In double stimulation, "the first stimulus is the problem itself" (Sannino, 2011, p. 585). The external artefacts employed by human beings to control actions and construct a new understanding on the initial problem or contradiction is used as second stimuli (*ibid.*). For example, the instruments used in Change Laboratories, portrayed in Figure 2.3 are referred as the external artefacts – second stimuli (Sannino, 2011). The Change Laboratory method is therefore used to create expansive learning, by following the steps of the expansive learning cycle to enable participants to analyse their current situation and project to the next stages of the activity and design new models (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013). This is discussed next.

2.5.2.2 Expansive learning

According to Engeström (2009), expansive learning is the process in which participants search for solutions to contradictions (p. 97). In other words, expansive learning is a creative type of learning in which "learners join forces to literally create something novel, essentially learning something that does not yet exist" (Sannino et al., 2016, p. 7). This means that expansive learning involves the "creation of new knowledge and new practices of emerging activity generated to carry future-oriented visions loaded with initiatives and commitments by learners" (Daniels, 2008, p. 78). For that, this study emphasises expansive learning because it has the "quality of transformative agency" (Sannino et al., 2016, p. 7), thus the study aims for transformation of learner voice and leadership in the school. Learning expansively requires breaking away from the given frame of action and taking the initiative to transform it (*ibid.*). The new concepts generated in an expansive learning process carry future-oriented visions loaded with initiative and commitment by the learner.

This kind of learning is used by following the logical steps of expansive learning as presented in Figure 2.4. It is essential here to note that various authors name this cycle differently: Virkkunen & Newnham (2013) label the diagram in Figure 2.4 as "the phases of a change laboratory process"

(p. 17), while Engeström, Virkkunen, Helle, Pihlaja and Poikela (1996) label it "steps of expansive learning" (p. 4). With this in mind, this study referred to Figure 2.5 as 'steps of expansive learning'.
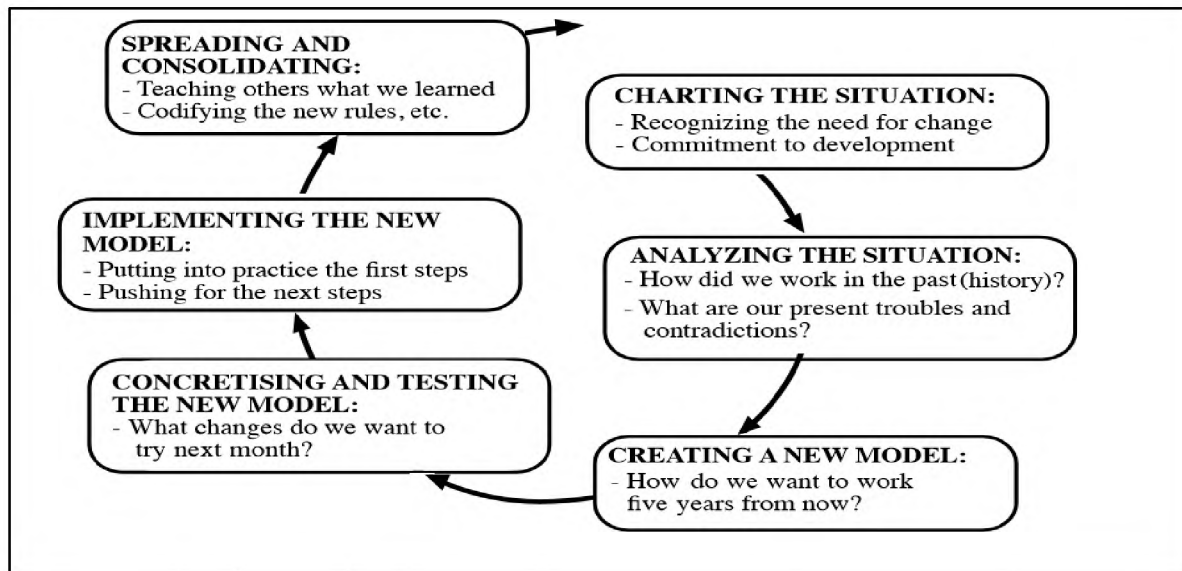
Figure 2.5: Steps of expansive learning cycle (Adapted from Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013, p. 17)

These six steps are clear and self-explanatory and were used as described, however due to time constraints of the MEd degree, my study ended at the fourth step. In my study, the four steps included the following: first, participants recognised the need for change. Second, participants analysed the situation in order to identify the causes by tracing the history of the object. Third, participants engaged in modelling new solutions to the problematic situations. Last, participants concretised what mattered to them most. These steps of the expansive learning cycle were therefore used as a "vehicle of time travel to construct a vision of the past and the future of the activity system" (Engeström et al., 1996, p. 8). Significantly, through these steps participants generated new concepts (reconceptualising) and practices of their own activity system in relation to the object of the activity (Engeström, 2001).

2.5.3 Critiques of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

In this section I acknowledge the limitations of using CHAT as a framework in this study. It is acknowledged that two important principles of CHAT, contradictions and tensions, are used interchangeably in some literature. Karanasios et al., (2017) argue that literature has failed to give a clear meaning of the two terms, and it is left for the readers to resolve. This means the definition of the two concepts are left vague and unclear to the readers. Therefore, the application for these concepts may be limited and researchers may surface or identify contradictions or tensions simply as problems, conflicts or flaws, which they are not. With this in mind, I limit my study to the definition of contradictions used by Engeström (2001), as he defines contradictions as "historically accumulated structural tensions" (p. 137).

A second critique of CHAT, pointed out by Young, is that the "expansive learning is a theory of learning for learning organisations" (as cited in Masilela, 2017, p. 40). Since it is a learning theory, it is difficult to use or apply to workplaces where learning does not take place, in other words where knowledge, skills and qualifications are not considered (Masilela, 2017, p. 40). However, this did not affect my study because a school (the site of my study) is considered to be a workplace for learning.

Another limitation of CHAT, according to Nunez (2013), is that "CHAT is functioning with an implicit ontology" (Mukute, as cited in Price & Lotz-Sisitka, 2016, p. 218). This suggests that CHAT might lack adequate ontological depth in much of its research. This, in other words, means CHAT alone can only shallowly unpack the underlying mechanisms. An alternative way to offer one a greater chance of understanding ontological depth can be to underlabour CHAT studies with critical realism. For Mukute, critical realism provides an "ontological framing that permits one to delve beyond the current and surface into the history and the underlying to find 'real reality' that lies beneath the empirical and the actual" (p. 218). My study is not underlaboured by critical realism however, it was conceptualised within a critical paradigm, because critical researchers also aim at "unpacking the structural, historical and political aspects of reality in order to understand and arrive at change of an emancipatory nature" (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 28).

2.6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this chapter begins by distinguishing between leadership and management, which I found important as I investigated the perception of learner leadership. At the same time, the chapter discusses traditional views on leadership, starting with the trait theory that placed emphasis on a general set of principles, while the situational theory gave little attention at all to structure. The contingency approach showed renewed concern with the importance of structure as a significant influence on organisational performance (Mullins, 2010). These approaches to leadership are understood as a traditional view because they focus more on a leader than on leadership. In contrast to the traditional thinking, distributed leadership theory is considered to be a contemporary form of leadership world-wide. This is because a distributed perspective of leadership shifts focus from a leader to leadership practice; in other words, it involves both formal and informal leaders as a network of leaders, followers and situations to give a form to leadership practice (Spillane, 2006). The chapter further discussed what learner leadership is, and argues for leadership development of leaners in school as a part of leadership which is distributed. Finally, the development, relevance and the limitations of the Cultural Historical Activity Theory as an analytical framework for this study was also discussed.

I now turn to the following chapter to describe the methodology I have used in my research process.

CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is set to discuss the research design and the methods used in the research process. Data was generated in June and July 2017 at a newly established school in Namibia. The chapter begins with a description of the research paradigm and approach used in the study. The chapter further discusses how data was generated and analysed, beginning first with the site and sampling procedures. The chapter concludes by discussing the possible limitations, measures taken to ensure validity and trustworthiness of the study, and also how research ethics were applied in the research process.

Prior to my discussion on the methodological approaches embraced, it is important to alert the reader to the goals and research questions of this study, to which my attention now turns.

3.1.1 Goals and research questions

As introduced in the first chapter, this study attempted to develop learner voice and leadership within the structure of the LRC in a newly established Namibian school. Simultaneously, this study explored the possible generative mechanisms that enabled or constrained the development of learner voice and leadership in the school. The over-arching research question for this study is: *How can LRC voice and leadership be developed in a school*? To address the over-arching research question, the study sought to answer the following sub-questions:

1. How is learner leadership understood in the school?
2. What leadership development opportunities for the LRC currently exist in the school?
3. What underlying factors constrain the development of LRC voice and leadership in the newly established school?
4. In what ways can LRC participation in a Change Laboratory process contribute to their leadership development?

3.2 Research paradigm

In the context of this study, "a paradigm is a set of assumptions or beliefs about fundamental aspects of reality which gives rise to a particular world view" (Nieuwenhuis, 2007, p. 47). A paradigm addresses fundamental assumptions taken on faith such as belief about the nature of reality (ontology), knowledge (epistemology) and assumptions about methodology (*ibid.*). The study used one of the formative intervention methods within a critical paradigm. The critical paradigm sees reality as "shaped by social political, cultural, economic and other dynamics" (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 27). Within this paradigm, critical researchers aim at unpacking the structural, historical and political aspects of reality in order to arrive at change that is emancipatory in nature (*ibid.*, p. 28). This, in other words, means critical researchers aim to critique and transform society to be equal and fair by revealing, for example, hidden power relations. This was the appropriate paradigm for this study since the study was concerned not only with understanding and describing but also with intervening in order to promote change in the school (Engeström, 2016). This means that to develop learner voice and leadership within the structure of the LRC, I have used interpretive methods first to gather participants' understanding of the phenomenon of learner leadership in the school; this was also done to give me a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

Thereafter, in order to explore and bring about transformation of learner voice and leadership in the school, this interventionist study used one of the formative intervention methodologies called Change Laboratory. A formative intervention is defined as "purposive action by a human agent to create change" (Engeström & Sannino, 2010, p. 15). The Change Laboratory is a formative intervention method used in "developing work activities by the practitioners in collaboration with researcher-interventionists" (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013, p. 19). The Change Laboratory was desirable in this study to bring about changes to the structure or circumstances of the school's learner leadership because it is used normally to promote change in a work place such as a school (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013). Thus, a formative intervention enables participants to work on and improve their own practice (Sannino, 2008). Developing learner voice and leadership in this newly established school was crucial because it could create opportunities where "young people

can learn democratic principles by sharing their opinions and working to improve school conditions for themselves and others" (Mitra & Gross, 2009, p. 522).

3.3 The case-study method

A case-study is a "systematic and in-depth study of one particular case in its context" (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 42). This study fulfils the requirements of a case-study as it examines the single case of developing learner voice and leadership within the structure of the LRC in a newly established school. In a case-study, the researcher gets in touch with a real situation and engages with the people in that situation, so as to listen to what they are saying or to observe what they are doing in relation to the phenomenon in question (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 11). This implies that a case-study enables the researcher to develop a broader understanding of a particular phenomenon through interacting with people in such a case. As Nieuwenhuis, (2007) stipulates, "a case-study is a systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest" (p. 75). A case-study was the most appropriate approach to this interventionist study because it focuses on "practice, intervention and interpretation with the aim of improving the situation" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 182); hence, this study aimed to interpret and intervene in order to develop learner voice and leadership within LRC members.

Within the framework of the above assumptions, this study adopted a qualitative research design, and within this design a case-study method was employed to get a holistic picture of learner voice and leadership in the school. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010), qualitative researchers believe that the "researcher's ability to interpret and make sense of what he or she sees is critical for understanding any social phenomenon" (p. 135). A qualitative design was suitable for this study as it assisted me to make sense of how participants viewed learner voice and leadership in the school.

3.3.1 The case-study school

In January 2017 I did a contextual profiling for the case-study school as part of the pre-course assignment requirements for my Master of Education degree (MEd). The purpose of the assignment was to identify a site for my research which was not my work place, and to do a

contextual profiling of leadership development opportunities at the school. For that I chose to carry out my research study at one of the newly established public schools in Namibia. I conveniently and purposely chose this school. Omazeketo (pseudonym) High School was conveniently selected due to its close proximity to my house; it did not cost me a lot in terms of travelling to collect data. I also purposely chose this school as I strongly believed that the newness of the school would open up great possibilities for research and generate interesting data, since no one had yet conducted a study of learner leadership at this new school. Conducting a learner leadership study at this newly established school would develop a strong fundament for learner voice and leadership in the school.

Omazeketo High School only opened its doors in January 2016 and teaches learners from Grade 7-12. From the contextual profiling of the school, this school appears to have come into existence to accommodate children who moved with their parents in search of work (Amadhila, 2017). This is because the school is situated in a harbour town where many people migrate with their children to find jobs (*ibid.*). As a result, the region struggles every year to find place for all the children in other schools around town, as they have reached their full capacity. Most parents of the learners at this school are working class families and live in a nearby informal settlement. Parents do not pay school fees, since all public schools in Namibia offer free education. At the time of my study, the school was comprised of 724 learners, a principal, two Heads of Departments, 24 teachers, one secretary and three support staff. The school offers three fields of study, namely: Commerce, Social Science, and Science; Mathematics, Biology, English, and Afrikaans are compulsory for all the learners. The school has a functioning School Board which was endorsed in January 2017, a School Management Team, a Staff Development Programme, as well as the LRC.

3.4 Sampling procedure

Sampling strategy refers to the way a researcher selects a sample from the population under study (Kumar, 2014, p. 382). Nieuwenhuis, (2007) recommends that sampling decisions are made for the explicit purpose of obtaining the richest possible source of information to answer the research questions. For this study, I purposively chose a sample of 18 participants who provided me with information to answer my research questions because case-study research often involves a smaller

sample size (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Purposive sampling means that the "researcher makes specific choices about which people, group or objects to include in the sample" (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 60).

The entire LRC of the school, all 13 members, and all three LRC guardian teachers participated as main participants in this study. These participants were chosen because they were in the best position to provide me with the information on leadership development opportunities existing for the LRC at this new school. During phase one of the study, a HoD who was the former acting principal, the principal, and one LRC guardian who was also a School Board member participated, and were all chosen purposely because they are in school management positions. As a researcher, I wanted to know their perceptions of learner voice and leadership.

For the second phase of the study, the 13 LRC members and one LRC guardian teacher participated voluntarily in the Change Laboratory sessions. The LRC members were chosen purposively, thus the study aimed to develop learner voice and leadership in these 13 LRC learners. The LRC is the learner body which is selected to represent other learners in the school (Namibia. MBESC, 2002). The LRC guardian teachers were chosen to participate in the study so that they could also be aware of the importance of learner voice in the leadership of the school.

Next, I present the data gathering methods used to answer the research sub-questions which helped me to answer the over-arching research question for my study.

3.5 Data gathering techniques

The data generating process for this case-study involved two phases, for the duration of an eight-week period. Next, I elaborate on the data gathering tools used in phase one of this study.

3.5.1 Phase one of the study: contextual profiling

This first phase was done over a period of four weeks. The first week of this phase was set aside for logistics work: this meant seeking permission from the office of the Inspector of Education as well as the participants' consent, while at the same I piloted the study tools with non- participants.

Thereafter, the research began with my need to develop a deep understanding of LRC voice and leadership in the school, and to provide answers to my first three research sub-questions as presented earlier: *How is learner leadership understood in the school? What leadership development opportunities for the LRC currently exist in the school? What underlying factors constrain the development of LRC voice and leadership in the newly established school?* This phase was largely interpretive in nature. As this was an interventionist study, intended to develop the LRC voice and leadership in the school, it was crucial to first understand the current status-quo of learner voice and leadership before intervening in practice. The following methods were used to collect data to understand the phenomenon under study.

3.5.1.1 Document analysis

Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents – both printed and electronic materials (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). Initially, document analysis during this study was used to help me to understand the current practice with regards to LRC voice and leadership in the school, by verifying the phenomenon through records. Document analysis in this study was used mainly for triangulation purpose – to check if the data that I got using other methods, such as interviews and questionnaires, supported what was written in the school documents, for the purpose of credibility. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) argue, that the rationale for using different data generating techniques, a process known as triangulation, is to ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the data generated. Bowen (2009) reminds us that document analysis "can serve a variety of purposes as part of a research undertaking" (p. 29).

Documents such as the *Educational Act of 2001*, *School Development Plan [SDP]* of 2008, and *Regulation of Educational Act of 2001* were analysed to gather information on how learner leadership for the LRC was promoted in the school. This meant that I recorded what I came across concerning the phenomenon of learner leadership in a document analysis schedule that I designed (see appendix A). According to Cohen et al. (2011), document analysis allows the researcher to gain insights from inaccessible persons or subjects and historical stories. However, document analysis does not always provide sufficient detail because often documents are produced for some purpose other than the research (Bowen, 2009). My study used document analysis because it is "less time-consuming since it requires data selection rather that data collection" (Bowen, 2009, p. 31). To confirm the information that I came across from the documents analysed, I conducted individual interviews with participants. I will now discuss this below.

3.5.1.2 Individual interviews

Following the document analysis, I conducted individual interviews with one HoD, the principal, and a LRC guardian teacher who was currently serving as a School Board member. An interview is "a conversation between the researcher and the respondent" (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 80). Individual interviews were done to find out how learner leadership was perceived in the school. In working toward the purpose of the study, the individual interview was a useful method because it allowed me to ask probing and clarifying questions, to gain in-depth data from participants about LRC voice and leadership. A semi-structured interview schedule, (see appendix B) which "requires participants to answer a set of predetermined questions" (Nieuwenhuis, 2007, p. 87), was adopted for this study. This was because qualitative studies often use open-ended questions (semi-structured) in interviews (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 148). To illustrate, a semi-structured interview schedule, whereby I asked questions and participants expressed themselves using their own opinion on the phenomenon, was used in this research study to allow for probing and clarification of answers. Although interviews generate "large amounts of textual data which can be overwhelming" and time consuming (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 83), this was not a limitation to this study since I had a very clear idea on how data would be analysed (*ibid.*). Moreover, I also asked permission to use a voice recorder to record the conversations and transcribed the recordings immediately after the interviews.

3.5.1.3 Questionnaires

A questionnaire is a "list of questions which the respondent answers" (Bertram & Christiansen, 2015, p. 73). Questionnaires are often useful tools for collecting survey information, but to gather data for this qualitative case-study, a questionnaire was used because it allowed me to gather large amounts of data in a short period of time (*ibid.*). I administered questionnaires to 13 LRC members and all three LRC guardian teachers. This was chiefly done to find out from these adult participants about the leadership development opportunities which existed for the LRC in the school. I distributed the questionnaires myself to these participants and expected them to answer the questions during their free time. The questionnaires were collected back from the participants after two days. This was done to give them enough time to answer the questions and also to give them assurance that their responses would be anonymous. This anonymity was given in the hope that they would be more truthful than during a personal interview.

I used semi-structured questionnaires (see appendix C). A semi-structured questionnaire asks more open-ended questions than a closed questionnaire (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 76). A semi-structured approach with open-ended questions was used because open-ended questions allow the respondent to give authentic and detailed information (Cohen et al., 2011). Although using questionnaires does not allow the researcher to probe like in an interview, using semi-structured questionnaires with open-ended questions assisted me in getting some detailed information to attain the purpose of the study. In addition, questionnaires were piloted first with my non-participant learners in the case-study school, to ensure that respondents did not require any explanations when answering. This was important, because I was not present to answer questions when participants answered the questionnaires.

3.5.1.4 Observation

Nieuwenhuis (2007) defines observation as a "systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of participants, objects and occurrences without necessarily questioning or communicating to them" (p. 84). In other words, observation means that the researcher goes to the site of the study which may be the school, a classroom, a staff room or a community meeting space and observes what is actually taking place (Cohen et al., 2011). I conducted observations during

my entire period of eight weeks at the research site, and both formal and informal observations were done. The purpose of using observation in this study was to get a holistic picture of learner voice and leadership in the school.

I officially observed one LRC meeting and this gave me an opportunity to observe how LRC members took ownership of and conducted their meetings; of particular interest was who chaired the meeting and how the LRC voiced what mattered to them and other learners in the school. I also planned to observe if LRC members were also allowed to attend the School Board meetings and have an authentic voice during the meetings. However, the principal did not allow me to attend to the School Board meeting as some confidential matters about the school were going to be discussed. Using observation during the entire data gathering process, was useful as it enabled me to look afresh at everyday behaviour that otherwise might have been taken for granted (Cohen et al., 2011). Although it was impossible to capture everything that was happening, observations provided me with first hand data which is more trustworthy.

Moreover, I informally observed two break-times, looking specifically at the interaction of LRC members and other learners in the school, as well as the LRC roles during the break-time. I also got a chance to observe how the LRC trained participants (other learners) for the Miss Mazeketo High beauty pageant. I was interested to observe this event in order to get a picture of how LRC members interacted with other learners after school hours and also how they lead the training process themselves, without adults being present (teachers).

Observation is believed to change the dynamics of the situation (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 95); by this I mean my presence during these meetings, might have caused people to behave differently. However, since I spent time at the school in January and then spent a further eight weeks at the school in June/July 2017, it is envisaged that participants got used to my presence. With time, I hoped that any potential disruption as a consequence of my presence in meetings would be reduced. I used an unstructured observation schedule (see appendix D), which means that "researchers do not go through a checklist ticking off boxes or rating particular activities, but write a free description of what they observe" (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 89). To

demonstrate this, I did not have an observation checklist but wrote down a short description of what I observed in the observation schedule that I designed (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

Significantly, data collected during the first phase of the study was immediately analysed and served as a stimulus to continue to the second phase of the study, which I discuss next.

3.5.2 Phase two of the study: intervention workshop

The data in this second phase was generated during the three Change Laboratory workshops with 13 LRC members and one LRC guardian teacher, as well as from a focus group interview conducted after the Change Laboratory, with the LRC members only. The aim of this phase was to intervene in order to promote change in school leadership through the steps of the expansive learning cycle. The Change Laboratory method was used to provide an answer to the fourth sub-research question: *In what ways can LRC participation in a Change Laboratory process contribute to their leadership development?*

3.5.2.1 Change Laboratory workshops

I conducted three Change Laboratory workshops over a period of three weeks with the 13 LRC members and one LRC guardian teacher, as stated earlier.

In the first change laboratory workshop, I introduced the activity system and explained the Change Laboratory process to participants. I discussed the exact number of Change Laboratory workshops, and the time and duration of the sessions; I introduced myself as the researcher and discussed my role. I also facilitated the introduction of the participants and invited them to nominate the secretary and chairperson for the sessions. All the aforementioned was done to allow the participants to make a well-informed decision about joining the process (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013). The objective of the activity was to develop voice and leadership in the participants who were the LRC members.

The second Change Laboratory workshop aimed to mirror data generated in the first phase. During this session, my role as researcher-interventionist was to present the challenges and contradictions experienced by the LRC in developing their voice and leadership in the school. After I mirrored data about the problematic aspects of the LRC's current learner leadership practices, participants

were given time to identify the most important area that needed a solution. Participants suggested or searched for possible ways to overcome these challenges and contradictions by using flip charts and posters as tools.

The third and last Change Laboratory session engaged participants to select one challenge or contradiction that was appropriate for them to work on.

Significantly, these Change Laboratory sessions created an opportunity to invoke learner voice and leadership within the structure of the LRC in the school, through the steps of the expansive learning cycle. Here, expansive learning is referred to as a "creative type of learning in which learners join their forces to literally create something novel, essentially learning something that does not yet exist" (Sannino et al., 2016, p. 7). Moreover, the Change Laboratory workshops were learner-driven and I was the facilitator in the role of researcher-interventionist, with the task of "[intervening] by provoking and supporting the process led and owned by the learners" (Sannino et al., 2016, p. 3). During these Change Laboratories I also observed how participants behaved, interacted and, more specifically, led these sessions themselves. To reduce the impact of unequal power relations between adults and learners, only the three LRC guardian teachers were allowed to attend the Change Laboratory workshops, since learners were used to working with them. However, only one guardian teacher volunteered to attend all three sessions. I made the conscious decision to exclude the principal, HoDs and other teachers from these Change Laboratory sessions as their presence could have influenced learner participation. All Change Laboratory sessions were video recorded with participants' consent. As Simpson and Tuson (2003) encourage, "if we are dealing with people, video recording can be a great help as it allows the same observation to be reviewed many times, with each viewing having the potential to elicit additional information" (p. 48).

3.5.2.2 Focus group interview

A focus group interview was conducted at the end of the research process after the Change Laboratory sessions were concluded. This meant that I conducted an interview with several participants simultaneously in a group (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 148). A focus group interview

was conducted with nine LRC members; these are the learners who attended the third and final Change Laboratory session. As Cohen et al. (2011) stipulate, group interviews can be useful with children because it encourages interactions between the group, rather than simply a response to an adult's questions (p. 433). A focus group interview was done as a reflection and mainly to find out participants' experiences during the Change Laboratories. However, Nieuwenhuis (2007) highlights that "information collected through a group process may be biased since less assertive participants may be dominated by more outspoken individuals" (p. 91). The pitfall referred to was over-come by the rapport I created between myself and LRC members during the research process, as I stipulated earlier. I again used a semi-structured interview schedule (see appendix E) for this focus group interview and, with the permission of participants; I used a video recorder to record the conversations.

3.6 Data analysis

Data analysis is the process of making sense of and finding meaning in the data, interpreting what has been seen and what has been said (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006, p. 205). Data generated were inductively (using content analysis) and deductively (using CHAT theory) analysed.

Inductive analysis was used to identify multiple realities potentially present in the data (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). This inductive process used content analysis where I looked for similarities and differences in the data that would corroborate or disconfirm the theory. With this, data from both individual and focus group interview transcripts, questionnaires, and both observation notes for phase one and phase two (in the Change Laboratories) were analysed inductively. This meant that I used inductive reasoning to analyse data I generated using the aforementioned methods. By using content analysis, I analysed data by noting themes and categories emerging from the data. After identifying these themes, I then arranged them into meaningful segments and used them to frame my narrative (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). See the Figure 3.1 below.

Figure 3.1: Inductive analysis of data; coding and categorising

Thereafter, deductive analysis was applied. I used a set of predetermined categories to further analyse data using the second generation of CHAT. The second generation of CHAT was used here to surface the contradictions within and between the elements of the activity system under study (the activity of the LRC) because of its principle of the "central role of contradictions as a source of change and development" (Engeström, 2001, p. 137). To remind the reader, an activity system is understood as a systemic view of the relationships between different elements, that is, the **subject/s** and the **object of activity** mediated by cultural means (**tools/artefacts**) and by **division of labour**, **rules** and **communities** (Engeström, 2015), as explained in Chapter Two.

ARTEFACTS/ TOOL (language, minutes of meetings)

SUBJECTS
(LRC members)

OBJECT
(Develop LRC voice and leadership)

**OUTCOME (improved learner
leadership)**

RULES
Policies, school rules
Culture, history

COMMUNITY
SMT, Teachers
Researcher-interventionist

DIVISION OF LABOUR
Individual/shared roles

Figure 3.2: Second generation of CHAT as a unit of analysis (Engeström, 2015)

Figure 3.2 depicts different elements of the activity system for this study. All these elements of the activity system are important as they can mediate changes that may lead to an outcome of not only the object but between each other (Sannino et al., 2009). The *subjects* in this activity system were the LRC members. Their relationship with the object was mediated by four elements which carry cultural meaning and historical development, namely: tools, rules, community and division of labour. The "*object* [my emphasis] is the goal or the motive of the activity presented" (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, p. 78); in other words, this is the reason the subjects (LRC members) were engaged in the activity. In this case-study, the object of the activity was to develop the LRC voice and leadership within the school. The *tools or artefacts* here refer to mediated tools that contributed to the subjects' mediated action experienced within the activity (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Language as a tool was used for action, so that within this study language was a means of communication (Roth & Lee, 2007). Members of this activity system interacted through a language. In addition, this study used minutes of LRC meetings as a tool. *Rules* refer to the way in which actions are structured (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Policy documents such as *Educational Act of 2001*, school

rules, *School Development Plan [SDP]* of 2008, and *Regulation of Educational act of 2001* were used as guidelines for the activity. Significantly, historical conditions, cultural values, and norms constituted part of the rules. The *community* referred to the setting in which the action takes place (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). The community for this activity system was therefore people who shared a common object with the subjects in the school (*ibid.*). The community members for this activity system were the SMT (principal & HoD) and teachers (three LRC guardian teachers), who were engaged in answering interviews questions and questionnaires to help the researcher-interventionist in understanding why things are the way they are in their school. In other words, these members provided me with the cultural and historical background of learner leadership in the school. The *division of labour* is the way tasks were divided within the group within the subject and the community (*ibid.*). This was made up of individual and shared roles.

3.7 Validity

Gray (2004) explains that validity is ensured if the research instrument measures what it is intended to measure. This means that "validity of an instrument refers to the extent to which it measures what it is supposed to measure" (Nieuwenhuis, 2007, p. 216). For validity of this research I used the following methods.

3.7.1 Piloting study tools

A pilot study is "the preliminary stage where the research instruments are trialled or tested with people who are similar to the actual study participants" (Bertram & Christiansen 2014, p. 49). For this study, the questionnaires and interview questions were piloted first with my supervisor, and also with one non-participant teacher and a few non-participant learners from the research site before data collection began, to check if the questions were understood in the intended way.

3.7.2 Triangulation

The rationale for using different data generating techniques, a process known as triangulation, was used to ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the data generated (Cohen et al., 2011). The idea of triangulating data as a validation strategy means that data drawn from different sources and at different times in different places, are compared in search of common themes to support the

findings (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). In this study, different data gathering tools such as: document analysis, individual and focus group interviews, questionnaires, and different observations were used to ensure adequate coverage in addressing the sub-research questions and the research goal. I expected in this way to find and be able to follow themes emerging from the different data sets.

3.7.3 Validation by research participants

I also employed member-checking to verify the accuracy of responses from participants. Member-checking is when the respondent validates information in order "to assess intentionality, to correct factual errors, to offer respondents the opportunity to add further information or to put information on record; to provide summaries and to check the adequacy of analysis" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 136). I also did this by checking my interpretation of key events with the participants at the end of each of the data collection processes.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Ethics have to do with behaviours that are considered to be right or wrong (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 65). When working with individuals, it is important that the researcher follows and abides by the ethical guidelines (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). The following are the ethical measures I under-took to ensure the ethical issues of the study were addressed.

3.8.1 Informed consent

Although I received permission from the principal of the school in January 2017 to collect data for the contextual profile, (see Appendix F) I still went to confirm permission at the principal's office and the office of the Inspector of Education (see Appendix G), since I intended to include learners in the study. The participants, as well as parents/guardians of the learners who agreed to participate in the research, were also issued with consent forms that they were required to sign and return to be part of the study (see Appendix H & I). This was to fulfil the recommendation in the literature that a researcher should "get the consent of the legal guardian when working with children" (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 66). I also explained what the research was all about and made it clear to participants that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were also informed that all sessions were to be conducted after school, to ensure that

the learners did not miss out on their formal academic lessons. Moreover, during data collection, I asked permission from the participants to video record the Change Laboratory sessions, focus group interview and audio record the individual interviews conducted. Transcribed interview scripts were shared with participants, to ensure that data was appropriately and ethically collected and reported.

3.8.2 Right to privacy

All participants were ensured of anonymity and informed that this would be respected and retained throughout the entire study. According to Neumann (2003), we need to treat all participants with dignity, reduce discomfort, and protect the confidentiality of data. I explained to the participants that they should feel free to answer the questions however they wanted, as I would not expose anyone's responses shared during this study. The results of the study were presented in an anonymous manner in order to protect their identities (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). This means I used pseudonyms and codes when reporting back; with this in mind, they may have answered my questions more truthfully, knowing that nobody would know what each one had said.

3.8.3 Data management

Data generated were to be stored in two filing systems: electronic soft copy and two hard copy files. To illustrate, transcribed interview scripts were filed on my personal computer and I also printed hard copies of these transcripts and kept them in hard copy file one. Since questionnaires were in hard copy format, they were stored in hard copy file two. Photos as well as video and audio recordings were kept in the electronic filing system. This was done to "ensure an easy and flexible data storage system" (Masilela, 2017, p. 55).

3.9 Positionality

The school (research site) is located in the circuit and region where I teach, although I do not teach at this school. The principal and most of the teachers knew me as we normally meet at cluster and regional meetings. In contrast, learners, including the LRC members, were not familiar with me as a teacher and viewed me more as an 'outside' researcher who wanted to develop an understanding of how LRC voice and leadership can be developed in a newly established school. However, given

that I spent time in the school collecting data for my pre-course assignment in January 2017, the learners had met me and so accessing LRC members and building their trust had already started at the beginning of the year. This meant that there were likely to be less unfair power relations with my study participants.

3.10 Limitation of the study

Time was one of the main limitations that this study encountered. The time to carry out all the planned activities was not enough, since the school also had extramural activities such as sport that sometimes needed to be carried out in the afternoons. However, I negotiated with the school management to include me in their term plan, so that I could conduct interviews with participants.

3.11 Conclusion

In a nutshell, in this chapter, I described the processes involved in gathering the data that I used to answer my research questions. During my stay at the research site, I was always welcomed by my study participants, except for the secretary who, at first, denied me entry to see the principal. My data gathering journey almost went as proposed; as a novice researcher I did not experience any hiccups as I was always open to the dynamic environment in which I found myself.

In the following chapter, I present and discuss the analysed data I generated.

CHAPTER FOUR
PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS - PHASE ONE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The focus of this chapter is to present, discuss and make sense of the analysed data gathered to answer the over-arching research question for this study: *How can LRC voice and leadership be developed in the school?* My research study was in two phases: the contextual profiling (interpretive phase) and the intervention workshops (expansive learning phase). This signifies that Phase One was done to generate data for contextual profiling, where I developed a deep understanding of the current leadership practices of the Learner Representative Council in the school and to provide answers to my first three sub-research questions *How is learner leadership understood in the school? What leadership development opportunities for LRC currently exist in the school? What underlying factors constrain the development of the LRC voice and leadership in the newly established school?* Document analysis, individual interviews, questionnaires and observation were used to gather data for this phase.

Phase Two of my study was then done to intervene in order to invoke voice and leadership within the LRC structure through an expansive learning cycle. During this phase, Change Laboratory workshops with the LRC and one guardian teacher, as well as a focus group interview with the LRC members after the Change Laboratories, were used as tools to provide answers to the fourth sub-research question: *In what ways can LRC participation in a Change Laboratory process contribute to their leadership development?* The different data gathering tools used in both phases triangulated the information and allowed data to speak to each other. Because of the size of my study, I decided to present and discuss my findings across two chapters. In this chapter I discuss my findings in relation to phase one of my study and Chapter Five is given over to the findings of phase two.

Firstly, this chapter starts by giving a short description of codes and profiles of participants.

Thereafter, the data analysed are presented and discussed under the following sub-sections:

- Understanding of learner leadership in the case-study school,
- Current leadership development opportunities existing for the LRC in the school,
- Factors constraining the LRC voice and leadership development in the school.

4.2 Coding and profiles of research participants

It is important to present the codes and profiles of participants because it helps the reader to understand the data sources based on data presented (Uushona, 2012, p. 48). Codes were used for all study participants and, for ethical reasons, the school's name was withheld and a pseudonym (Mazeketo High School) was used. Below are codes and profiles for all participants used during data presentation.

4.2.1 LRC members (L1-13)

Thirteen LRC members participated in this study. Out of the LRC, 11 out of the 13 members were 20 years old. They were all in Grade 12 and had served as LRC members since 2016 because of the newly established status of the school. This also meant that they only started schooling at this school when they were in Grade 11. They held different portfolios such as: head boy, head girl, deputy head boy, deputy head girl, treasurer, public relations, entertainment, sports and neatness. The codes are as follows: head boy: participant 1 (L_1); Head Girl; participant 2 (L_2); Learner participants 3 - 13 (L_3 - L_{13}).

4.2.2 The Head of Department (HoD)

An individual interview was conducted with the HoD of the Science Department, who was a former acting principal from the inception of the school. She has been a Mathematics teacher for more than 32 years, and holds a Bachelor of Education Honours Degree. She was transferred to this school from a neighbouring school where she was serving as an HoD for more than two years.

4.2.3 Principal (P)

Another individual interview was conducted with the principal. He was appointed as a principal for this new school later in 2016, from the 1[st] of September. He transferred from a nearby school where he was serving as a HoD. He has more than 20 years of teaching experience with an Advanced Diploma in Education.

4.2.4 LRC guardian teachers (GT 1-3)

Guardian Teacher 1 (GT1) is a Biology and Life Sciences teacher, a LRC guardian teacher, as well as a member of the School Board. I conducted an individual interview with her. She also completed a questionnaire for this study and also voluntarily attended the Change Laboratory sessions. She has nine years teaching experience and holds an Advanced Diploma from North-West University, South Africa. She transferred to this new school in March 2016, from a private school in town.

Guardian Teacher 2 (GT2) has been a Biology teacher at this school from the first day it opened and is a LRC guardian teacher. She transferred from a school in the northern region and has 10 years teaching experience. She holds a Diploma in Education from the University of Zimbabwe. She participated in this study by completing the questionnaire only.

Guardian Teacher 3 (GT3) is a languages teacher, as well as a LRC guardian teacher. She holds a Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Namibia (UNAM). She has 20 years teaching experience and she also transferred from a school in the northern region. She also only participated in this study by filling out a questionnaire.

Data gathering instruments used in this study are coded as follows:

Phase one: Contextual profiling:

- Documents: D_1, *Education Act, 2001*
  D_2, *School Development Plan [SDP]* of 2008
  D_3, *Regulation of Educational Act of 2001*
- Individual interviews: (I)
- Questionnaires; $Q_1 - Q_{16}$

- Observations; observation schedules: (OB);

Phase two: Intervention workshops (Chapter Five)
- Change Laboratories (CLW1, CLW2 & CLW3)
- Focus group interview (FGI)

4.3 Phase one of the study: contextual profiling

This phase was done over a period of four weeks, to develop a deep understanding of the current leadership practices for LRC voice and leadership and to verify the phenomenon through records. It is important again here to remind the readers that document analysis, individual interviews, questionnaires, and observations were used to answer the first three sub-research questions: *How is learner leadership understood in the school? What leadership development opportunities for the LRC currently exist in the school? What underlying factors constrain the development of the LRC voice and leadership in the newly established school?*

Next, I present and discuss participants' understanding of the concept, learner leadership.

4.3.1 Understanding of learner leadership in the case-study school

Across all the data sets, learner leadership was repeatedly understood as the structure of the Learner Representative Council in the school. The HoD understood learner leadership as the way of giving authority to a group of learners to represent others in the school and to act as leaders. She indicated that learner leadership is constituted within those *"learners who are in the capacity as LRC members"* (I). With similar understanding, the principal expressed the idea that, *"LRC members are regarded as learner leaders in our school, they are involved in all leadership activities that take place in the school"* (I). An LRC member also showed in his questionnaire that learner leadership was *"the state of being an LRC in the school"* (Q_1). This meant that learner leadership was viewed as officially authorising LRC members to represent other learners in the school as stipulated in the *Educational Act of 2001* – where it states that leadership of learners in a school should be formalised through the "formation of Learner Representative Councils in every secondary school" (D_1). One question asked of Guardian Teacher 1 was: "How are learners in their

school involved in leadership?". She also confirmed that, *"leadership of learners in this school is the LRC which was established and accredited to represent other learners"* (I).

Within this restricted understanding of learner leadership, as confined to the leadership of the LRC, two themes were evident: voice of the voiceless; and a policing role.

4.3.1.1 Voice of the voiceless

Some respondents mentioned that learner leadership was about the LRC being the voice of other learners in the school. Guardian Teacher 1 stated that learner leadership is *"when learners who are LRC members are involved in many decision-making, voicing on behalf of other learners in the school"* (Q_{14}). Correspondingly, learner leadership here was understood in relation to developing agency in learners (Grant, 2015) as the HoD also responded that the function of the LRC in the school is to liaise with teachers, and other management members, to bring forward the interests of the learners. She further emphasised that: *"The LRC should be the channel of communication that all learners in the school must communicate to. They are the authority of the school as stipulated in the Education Act of 2001"* (I).

A few LRC members understood learner leadership in the same way as Guardian Teacher 1 and the HoD, as they also mentioned that learner leadership involved learners that stood up for other learners in the school and being their voice for them (Q_1; Q_5; Q_9). One LRC member stated in her questionnaire that learner leadership in a school was *"to allow LRC to have a voice in decision-making as a way of representing other learners who are not LRC members"* (Q_8). With similar understanding, Guardian Teacher 2 indicated that learner leadership in the school is *"a platform of learners such as the LRC to exercise their democratic rights by voicing out the grievances and how they want things to be"* (Q_{15}). Within this view, Fielding (2001) and Mitra and Gross (2009) support learner voice in schools, which they describe as the range of ways in which learners have opportunities to share in decision-making, to represent themselves and others.

4.3.1.2 A policing role

The majority of the participants across the data sets understood learner leadership as a policing role that the LRC have, in helping the teachers to maintain order and discipline in the school. The

principal and the majority of LRC members had a mutual understanding of the concept learner leadership, as being the LRC's role of supervising, controlling and monitoring other learners to maintain discipline in the school. The principal shared his understanding of learner leadership as the *"roles given to learners in the school community to supervise their compatriots"* (I). Roles such as supervising, controlling and monitoring, resonate with the traditional thinking of leadership (Tng, 2009). Similarly, eight out of 13 LRC members stated in their questionnaires that learner leadership has to do with controlling and monitoring other learners in the school, to keep discipline. One LRC member further stated that they practice learner leadership in their school when they *"stand at the gates and make sure other learners are not late for school"* (Q7). In addition, Guardian Teacher 3 also defined learner leadership as being about *"the LRC roles to maintain order in the school like keeping learners quiet at the assembly and also in the classrooms when teachers are not around, for example when teachers are called up for an urgent meeting"* (Q16). This showed that leadership of learners in this school was viewed in a managerial way, where learners were strictly adhering to and following a set of rules (Mullins, 2010) This, as Uushona (2012) rightly argues, is not leadership.

During my stay at the school, the policing roles of the LRC became obvious. I observed that some of the LRC members during break-times used to *"stand at the gate supervising other learners not to sneak out of the school premises"* (OB, 08.06.2017).

This policing role was again evidenced when *"an LRC member was seen frightening another learner with a broom"* (OB, 28.06. 2017). This happened during the rehearsal of the school beauty pageant, where some of the LRC members were training the contestants (learners). My observation notes reveal that: *"One learner who was not taking part was bullying the contestants. Immediately, one LRC member took a broom trying to frighten the learner as if he is beating him, and the learner immediately stopped and gave an apology"* (*ibid.*) (see Figure 4.1 below).

Figure 4.1: A policing role

This implies a traditional managerial role which was mostly used before independence to maintain discipline in schools. This suggests a narrow and impoverished leadership role used to ensure positive behaviour in the school, which at the same time encroaches on the school rules (Uushona, 2012).

Having discussed the understanding of the concept learner leadership in the school, I now move on to present and discuss the data analysed to answer the sub-question: *What leadership development opportunities for the LRC currently exist in the school?*

4.3.2 Current leadership development opportunities for the LRC

Leadership development opportunities are referred to as empowerment programmes existing in (and outside of) the school for the LRC, to equip them with necessary skills and knowledge to take up their roles and functions in the school more effectively (Uushona, 2012, p. 72). In other words, the endorsement of these leadership development opportunities is chiefly to promote development of learner leadership in this newly established school (P, I).

4.3.2.1 Leadership training camp

A leadership training camp was offered to all 13 LRC members immediately after their appointment to the council. McGregor (2006) affirms that learner leaders gain necessary leadership skills and knowledge by engaging in organisational projects outside the school. According to Guardian Teacher 1 (I):

> This form of training was offered outside town where the LRC were engaged in different activities to build and empower them on how to handle conflict, guide them on how to lead and work as a team and also to allow open communication.

Correspondingly, the HOD strongly made it clear during her interview that they sent the LRC to leadership training to open their minds, to obtain more leadership skills such as, *"human relationships and all other things that one needs to have, like passion"* (I). The majority of the LRC members also indicated in their questionnaires the leadership training camp as the standing leadership development opportunity, which they regarded as the best means of empowerment (Q_1, Q_2, Q_4, Q_5, Q_6, Q_7, Q_8, Q_{10}, Q_{13}). In addition, the principal also pointed out that, *"at the end of this training, it was the role of the facilitator to assign LRC members in their different portfolios"* (I). This training was therefore significant to the LRC members to acquire leadership knowledge and skills related to their given portfolio, because leadership skills were not explicitly taught in the school. This training was important to the LRC in developing their leadership qualities such as *"consultation, engagement and delegating"* (GT1, I). Thus, it seems that the initial LRC training was positively considered by the majority of the stakeholders at this school. This is in contrast to a South African study conducted by Strydom (2016) on *Leadership Development in the Representative Council of Learners (RLC)*, which found a lack of training as a contradiction which hindered leadership development in the RLC. It was therefore agreed, that the leadership training camp offered, had potential to develop the LRC members with some leadership skills.

4.3.2.2 The LRC community networking events

The LRC community networking events are regarded as opportunities availed by this school, to help their LRC establish effective links with LRCs of other schools. This was organised to allow the LRCs of different schools within the community, to exchange information by interacting with each other, and sharing their expertise, equipment and experiences. At this newly established

school, three types of community networking events were offered to the LRC: A School Exchange Programme; a Town Council breakfast and the Junior Regional Council.

The School Exchange Programme: This is when the LRC of one school visits the LRC of another school within the community *"to solicit information on good practices from each other and adapt those that fit their context"* (GT1, I). Across the data sets, most participants mentioned the School Exchange Programme with LRCs of fully established schools, as a leadership development opportunity that existed for the LRC in the school. The principal mentioned that the School Exchange Programme was done to allow the LRC *"to exchange ideas and discuss matters of common interest"* (I). This opportunity acknowledges that leadership of learners is widely shared across organisations (schools) in seeking "multiple sources of guidance and directions" (Bolden, 2011, p. 162). Through this collaborative learning networking, the LRC of Mazeketo High School had pooled their expertise and vice versa, as it was said that the LRCs normally share how they do things at their schools, as well as sharing some leadership skills (GT2, HoD, I). This constituted an example of the distribution of leadership amongst learners, across the various schools in the community.

The Town Council breakfast: This was another community networking event sponsored by the municipality of the town for the LRCs of all high schools in the town (P, I). Guardian Teacher 1 mentioned that the main aim of this breakfast was *"to allow the LRC of different schools to interact and develop each other professionally and socially through contact"* (I). The principal also mentioned this opportunity and made it clear that, *"normally after the breakfast, the Head Boy and the Head Girl of each school give a report of all activities they are doing with all learners in the school"* (I). This was indeed in line with the policy document entitled the *School Development Plan [SDP]* of 2008, which advocates that schools within the community should establish effective links (p. 15). During my time spent at this school, I was also fortunate to attend this event, although I did not partake of the breakfast. From what I observed, it was evident that *"the LRC from all high schools around town (private and public schools) were present, as well as some teachers and some education officers"* (OB, 03.07. 2017). All three guardian teachers of Mazeketo High School were present too (*ibid.*). The two photographs below were taken at the event. Figure 4.2 shows the

Head boy of Mazeketo High School giving his speech, in which he mentioned, *"fund raising activities such as organising a beauty pageant, school bazaar and, selling hot dogs to teachers and learners every Friday"* (OB, 03.07.2017). Figure 4.3 displays the seating arrangement at the breakfast, the pride and support which is evidenced by the table settings, signifying that the organisation of this event was taken seriously.

Headboy giving a speech   The setup of the event

Figure 4.2: The Town Council breakfast

This opportunity clearly showed how learner leadership is distributed across schools and not only confined within the organisational (school) boundaries – as Bolden (2011) critiques that one of the limitations of distributed leadership is that studies neglect to show how leadership occurs within and between organisations.

Junior Regional Council: This was another leadership development opportunity for the LRC in the school. The school was availed of this opportunity by the regional office to choose four LRC members who were academically performing learners, to serve in the Junior Regional Council. The HoD mentioned that, *"The school management and the staff members were requested to elect four learners from the LRC who are academically performing"* to serve on the Junior Council (I). This opportunity allowed the four elected LRC members from the school *"to enhance their public participation in the law-making process"* (HoD, I). Guardian Teacher 1 similarly pointed out this

opportunity and claimed that *"it motivates other learners to work hard as it gives a chance to young children in schools all over the country to serve in the Junior National Council"* (I). However, this selection was likely based on characteristics reminiscent of 'trait theory' that focuses on leaders who possess certain qualities which in this case, was to be academically gifted (Mullins, 2010). Surely there were benefits to this type of activity, and despite being elitist, it was certainly a great opportunity and good experience for leadership development for the few chosen.

4.3.2.3 Mentoring programmes

Mentoring programmes were considered another form of leadership development for the LRC at the school. Mentoring programmes were equated with the LRC meetings at the case-study school (GT1, I). The principal mentioned that they, *"have guardian teachers who act as mentors to our LRC"* (I). Through mentoring, the LRC members were likely to develop leadership because teachers were expected to act as learners' role models who display "interpersonal skills, a positive outlook, a commitment to excellence, growth and leadership qualities" (Wright & Carrese, 2002, p. 639). Some respondents across the data sets said that the guardian teachers usually hosted meetings twice a term with the LRC members, or anytime they found that there was a need to host a meeting. This was in line with the *Regulation of Education Act of 2001* as it states that "a Learner Representative Council must hold at least two meetings during each term" (p. 19). Guardian Teacher 1 expressed that, *"in these meetings we normally train, direct and inspire our LRC members to work hard and take their roles seriously"* (I). Some of the LRC members also indicated that their guardian teachers regularly conducted meetings with them, training them on how to handle conflict and also to solve some disagreements among themselves and other leaners in the school (Q_2, Q_7, Q_9, Q_{10}, Q_{11}, Q_{13}).

During my stay in this school, I also got a chance to observe a meeting of such a nature: *"All the three guardian teachers were present with 12 LRC members"* (OB, 23.06.2017). This meeting took place in the LRC office which was allocated to them by school management (HOD, I) and was chaired by Guardian Teacher 2.

The meeting was of a general nature, where the LRC guardian teachers raised and discussed a few issues of concern in the school such as:

- Learners not allowed to be in classes during break-time;
- LRC members stop taking authority while the teacher is in class;
- LRC members to stand at the gate in the morning to inspect if learners put on the correct school uniform (OB, 23.06.2017).

This guidance and support given to the LRC is expected to boost their confidence and help them take their leadership roles seriously, as one LRC members stated that, *"Our guardian teachers do meetings with us, and motivate us to take our work seriously"* (Q9). I deduce that the state of such meetings can possibly be seen to promote the collaboration of adults with children, where adults (guardian teachers) can work together with learners to make changes in the school (Mitra & Gross, 2009, p. 524).

4.3.2.4 Social activities in the school

According to the *Regulation of Education Act of 2001*, one function of the LRC is to "undertake projects and programs aimed at providing cultural, sport and social activities for learners" (p. 19) in the school. Social activities include extra-mural activities such as "sports coaching, bazaar, fundraising activities and others" (D3). Across the data sets, hosting fund raising events was highlighted as a leadership development opportunity by almost all participants. Fund raising events such as a fete (school bazaar) and Miss Mazeketo beauty pageant were *"placed in the hands of the LRC in the school to gather some funds, that the school can use for development"* (P, I). The LRC organised these two events last year as well as this year (P, HoD & GT1), which means that a school bazaar and Miss Mazeketo beauty pageant, were currently understood as part of the school culture. Guardian Teacher 1 claimed that *"organising such events exposes the LRC to be creative and also improve their confidence"* (I). It was for this reason therefore, that the school gave the LRC this opportunity to organise social activities on a regular basis as they believed that *"the LRC can develop their leadership through organising the different fund-raising events in the school"* (P, I). From questionnaires, the LRC also specified that they hosted different fundraising events to collect money to build a school hall for conducting their morning assemblies (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q5, Q9,

Q_{11}, Q_{13}). Organisational skills were believed to be developed within LRC members in the taking part of social events (P & GT1). This was in line with the view of Grant and Nekondo (2016) that organising skills were important in the development of learner leaders (p. 25). Therefore, *"exposing the LRC to take over at such events boosts their confidence and organising skills"* (GT1, I).

One question raised in this study was the extent to which the LRC voice was being heard in the school. Although most LRC members indicated that their voices were mostly ignored, three LRC members noticed that their voices were mostly listened to, only when they were organising fundraising events *"because the school wants money"* (Q_3). Organizing such events resulted in developing LRC voice and leadership since they were *"engaged in consultations, marketing and also in creativity to make sure such events are a success"* (P, I). In support of this, Grant and Nekondo (2016) argue that learners get inspired when they are given an opportunity to be in the driving seat (p. 25).

Having discussed the leadership development opportunities which existed in the school for the LRC, I now on to present and discuss the underlying factors that constrained voice and leadership development of the LRC in the school.

4.3.3 Underlying factors constraining LRC voice and leadership development in the school

In this section I set out to discuss the factors that constrained the development of LRC voice and leadership in this newly established school. From the data, factors that hindered LRC voice and leadership emerged as challenges (non-systemic) and as contradictions (systemic). First, I present and discuss the challenges and thereafter the contradictions.

4.3.3.1 Challenges constraining LRC voice and leadership development

Findings revealed that there were some challenges that inhibited LRC voice and leadership development in the school. The newness of the school, absence of a vision and mission statement

and absence of a LRC constitution in the school, were highlighted by the participants as some of the challenges.

The newness of the school seems to have the potential to hinder the development of LRC voice and leadership at Mazeketo High School. During this study, participants were asked if they had encountered any challenges on working with the LRC. The HoD made it clear that *"the LRC in this school are always suggesting unnecessary things to their guardian teachers, forgetting that this is still a new school"* (I). The principal similarly asserted that the LRC members *"suggest for things that they see at other schools which are not possible; we cannot take everything said by them because this is still a new school"* (I). One LRC member expressed that *"most of the things we say in this school, we are always tolded [sic] that the school is new"* (Q$_1$). These excerpts suggest that the status of the case-study school as a new school, was not considered a real opportunity for the development of voice and leadership in learners.

Ironically, the adults in the school did not see the school as a good opportunity to open up new possibilities for the development of LRC voice and leadership. They were unwilling to listen to learner ideas which could likely contribute to the development and growth of their school (Mitra & Gross, 2009). This in other words means, the LRC's suggestions and contributions to the development of their newly established school were denigrated, as is contended by Hatcher (2005) who argues that "leadership is evident when ideas are recognised by others" (p. 256). From the findings it was clearly evident that the newness of the school was used as a reason to suppress learner input. Consequently, the newness of the school was one of the challenges as it was used as a reason to turn down the development of LRC voice and leadership in the school. Learner voice became a stumbling block for the adult job of establishing the new school. Hence the LRC felt discouraged by the School Management Team (SMT) who had the power to support and consider their contributions, but rather ignored them.

The absence of the school's vision and mission statement also seemed to be a challenge experienced in developing LRC voice and leadership in the case-study school. The school has been in existence for almost two years without a vision and a mission statement. According to the policy

document *School Development Plan of 2008*, once a school is established, it has to develop its own mission and vision statements and display it in the foyer of the school for everybody to see (p. 2). The document states that "The vision and the mission statement of every school must guide and determine the school's decision-making process" (*ibid.*, p. 2). This means that the vision and mission should inspire and direct the school team as to why the school exists (*ibid.*). According to the HoD, principal and Guardian Teacher 1, the school did not yet have a vision and mission statement: *"We are in the process of formulating the vision and mission of our school"* (P, I). The HoD alluded to the fact that they were still sourcing ideas from the entire school community (parents, learners and teachers). She further clarified that, *"we tasked parents, teacher and learners to volunteer and come up front with ideas of the vision and the mission statements; currently we are waiting for their input which we will submit to the School Board for approval before 20ᵗʰ July"* (HoD, I).

From the findings, I argue that the absence of a vision and mission statement indirectly became a challenge, which had the potential to hinder leadership development of the LRC in the school because, without a vision and mission statement, the school lacked direction (Ipinge, 2003). A vision and mission statement are supposed to provide motivation and guidance to all stakeholders in a school, including the LRC. These learner council members therefore lacked guidance in planning their activities. However, including the entire school in the activity of vision and mission development primarily showed distribution of leadership. From the finding, I concluded that leadership in the case-study school did not only reside with those who were in formal positions (SMT and teachers) but recognised multiple leaders (learners and parents) within the school (Spillane, 2006). Hence, this likely showed a distributed perspective of leadership.

Absence of the LRC constitution in the school was seen as another challenge which had a negative impact on the members of the council. The LRC constitution is a prescribed document with a list of duties and functions of the LRC. According to the *Education Act of 2001*, the LRC should be "in accordance with the prescribed guidelines which must determine the composition of the duties and functions of such council" (D$_1$, p. 33). By law every school is entitled to compose its own LRC constitution in line with the regulation made under the *Education Act of 2001*. The

school existed for almost two years as I stated earlier; however, from the data it was revealed that the LRC at Mazeketo high school functioned without an LRC constitution: *"LRC members were told their roles and what is expected from them orally, we still do not have the constitution in black and white, we are in the process of composing one"* (GT1, I). As a result, some of the LRC members were not fully aware of what was expected of them. This was revealed by the HoD as she mentioned that *"the LRC in this school do not know up to where they have to decide and what they have to do, because sometimes they have to take decisions that the management of the school should take"* (I). From the questionnaires, most of the LRC members were not aware what their roles and functions were, they instead stated their portfolios such as: head boy, public relations, sports, entertainment, neatness (Q_1, Q_5, Q_6, Q_7, Q_8, Q_9, Q_{10}, Q_{11}, Q_{12}, Q_{13}). I argue that this was a challenge experienced in the school as the LRC constitution as a document is supposed to assist the LRC to become aware of their roles and functions within their school.

4.3.3.2 Systemic contradictions in the activity system under study

In this section, I use CHAT to surface the contradictions that constrained the LRC voice and leadership development within the LRC activity system. This means that I will discuss and explore the underlying causes shaping the contradictions that emerged using the ontological lens of CHAT. To remind the readers, contradictions are not viewed as problems, conflicts or flaws but instead are historically and culturally accumulated structural tensions within and between the elements of the activity system (Engeström, 2001, p. 137; Karanasios et al., 2017). From the data, one primary and three sets of secondary contradictions emerged. According to the CHAT framework, and to remind the reader, a primary contradiction rises within an element, for example within the subjects, while a secondary contradiction arises between two elements of the single activity system, for example, between the community and the rule (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010).

A primary contradiction within the subject (LRC members) which was likely to hinder the development of the LRC leadership was noted. Data from the questionnaires revealed that the LRC members experienced some tensions in managing their council:

- Some LRC members walked out of meetings;
- LRC members stopped talking to each other;

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- LRC members screaming at each other sometimes; and

- Some LRC members do not do their roles seriously. (Q_1, Q_2, Q_3, Q_7, Q_8, Q_9, Q_{10}, Q_{11}, Q_{13})

The above tensions constitute a primary contradiction because they were located within one element which, in this case, is within the subjects themselves. Such tensions hindered leadership development in the LRC because, in some cases, the LRC members did not fulfill their leadership roles. Hence, such differences had a potential to cause division and disharmony amongst the council members. On the other hand, I argue that these tensions were supposed to be minimised, since the LRC members attended a leadership training camp and mentoring programmes by the guardian teacher, as data revealed that, and such opportunities were offered to train them on how to handle and manage conflicts. However, such tensions could be seen as normal as Strydom (2016) mentions that there will always be tensions amongst the members of an activity system. According to the CHAT framework, the possible underlying cause of this primary contradiction was cultural differences. Since the subjects came from different home environments, their cultural upbringings were different. As a result, these children (LRC members) could have copied such behaviors (shouting and not talking to each other) from their parents at home.

The exclusion of the LRC in the 'decision-making process' was noted as a **secondary contradiction between the rule (policy) and the community (principal and teachers).** The School Board was regarded as the highest decision-making body in the school. According to the *Education Act of 2001*, the School Board must be made up of two LRC members, parents, and teachers including the principal (p. 33). The role of the LRC in the School Board is "to represent the interest of learners in this board, by ensuring that the decisions taken do not negatively affect individual learners or the school community" (D_3, p. 18). This means the LRC was the voice of other learners at the School Board meetings. The HoD claimed that by law, the head boy and the head girl must be members of the School Board however, she was not sure whether they did attend or not since she was not a member of the School Board (HoD, I). Data revealed that the LRC of Mazeketo high school was excluded from attending School Board meetings at all times. The majority of the LRC members stated in their questionnaires that they had never been invited to attend School Board meetings. On the question as to why they did not attend such meetings, the head boy expressed that: *"Only the management knows why they do not invite us"* (Q_1). This

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indicated that the LRC's right to participate in decision-making processes was denigrated. As a result, this showed that learners were not "valued as knowledgeable, intuitive and discerning members of the school community" (Grant & Nekondo, 2016, p. 15). Therefore, this was a secondary contradiction between the rule (policy) and the community, because the policy advocates for the LRC's representation in School Board meetings and the community members restricted the LRC to take part in such meetings, at all times. This contradiction constrained the LRC voice in the school, due to them not being allowed to be part of the decision-making process around governance issues; hence, the object (LRC voice and leadership development) was not achieved in this situation. The exclusion of the LRC from the School Board meetings, deprived the LRC of their rights and responsibilities in such meetings, and in the general representation of the learners in the school.

The underlying causes of the above contradiction could possibly be shaped by the societal cultural values and norms, and history of the education system. As the principal expressed, they do not allow the LRC to be in the School Board meetings as, *"such meetings require confidentiality especially when it comes to certain disciplinary issues involving teachers"* (I). Similarly, Guardian Teacher 1, who was also a School Board member, admitted that the LRC cannot be called to attend School Board meetings because, *"learners are still children, they still do not have hearts to keep secrets"* (I). She further expressed that even if they were allowed, *"at the end of the day their voice cannot be considered in matters such as appointments of new teachers"* (GT1, I). These premises suggest that the exclusion of the LRC from the School Board meetings was influenced by society's cultural values and norms. It is a cultural and traditional belief that elders do not discuss important matters in the presence of children and "to do that now would tarnish the respect which children must accord their elders, and bring about decay and morass in the traditional value system" (Sithole, 1998, p. 93). Consequently, this resulted in learners being treated as people whose ideas do not matter (Grant & Nekondo, 2016).

In addition, the profiles of the principal and some teachers who participated in the study, showed that they were part of the South African Bantu Education system in Namibia, (Namibia. [MEC] 1993) where there were limited opportunities for democratic participation in decision-making

amongst learners. Excluding the LRC from the School Board meetings could also be surfaced by "CHAT's principle of historicity" (Engeström, 2001, p. 136). This meant that prior to independence in 1990, the right to freedom of expression and the right to be heard in schools, was restricted amongst the majority of learners in Namibia, (Namibia. [MBESC], 2001) and school governance was left to teachers and principals. Inevitably, learners were rarely given opportunities to participate in the decision-making process and, as a result, teachers often spoke and decided on behalf of them (Grant & Nekondo, 2015). I therefore argue that the historical background of the education system explained above, also had the potential to resonate with the restriction of the LRC in the decision-making process. Hence most teachers at this new school went through the same process, prior to independence.

The controlled communication structure in the school was noted as another **secondary contradiction between the rule (policy) and the community (SMT)**. By controlled communication structure in the school, here I refer to the procedures that the LRC should follow if they want to be heard by the school management members. According to the Regulations made under the *Education Act of 2001*, one function of the LRC in the school was to "liaise between learners and the school management" (D₃, p. 19). The school management was the second highest decision-making body in the school and, at Mazeketo high school, it comprised the principal and the two HoDs. The principal stipulated during his interview that there were channels of communication in the school and that the LRC members were restricted to communicate their concerns to the guardian teachers only. The principal made it clear that the LRC members must *"always follow the communication structure; they are not allowed to come straight to my office otherwise I will send them back"* (P, I). This suppressed LRC voice in the school, as the LRC was denied an opportunity to express themselves to the school management. As a result, there was no straight link between the LRC and school management, which the policy advocates for. Such a situation limited the voice and leadership of the LRC, as the LRC guardian teachers often had to speak on behalf of the learners (Grant, 2015), despite learners being the majority group making up membership of the school community (Wood, 2012). Using the lens of CHAT, I deduced this contradiction to be shaped by pre-independence Apartheid times. This, along with the traditional hierarchical leadership, which was more focused on the formal structure of the organisation in

terms of hierarchy of authority, belongs to "a bygone era" (Dalin, p. 33). The implication is that schools are still run in managerialist ways, drawn from business and industry discourse (Bush, 1999; Christie, 2010).

Lastly, lack of support from some teachers was surfaced as another **secondary contradiction between the subjects (LRC members) and the community (teachers)** that impeded the development of their voice and leadership in the school. Teachers are more knowledgeable others in the school community, who are supposed to act as learners' role models who display positive outlook and leadership qualities (Uushona, 2012, p. 77). Answering the question: "What support do teachers offer to the LRC?", an LRC member stated that some teachers in the school do not support their roles. *"It is only our beloved guardian teachers who sometimes support us in this school"* (Q5,). Another LRC member mentioned that *"some teachers really discourage us, because if we fail their test, they tell us that being an LRC will not take us anywhere, we are here to study"* (Q6). In the same way, guardian teacher 1 confirmed that some teachers are so negative toward the LRC – *"In most cases LRC members are requested to withdraw themselves from the council because of the negative comments from some teachers"* (I). Lack of support prevents leadership development, argues Bolden (2011). This contradiction likely prevented the subjects to achieve their object (leadership development) as *"the LRC members sometimes feel less confidence and de-motivated"* (GT1, I). They therefore, feel too demoralised to take their leadership roles seriously. This contradiction is likely to stem from the history of Namibia's education context where, during the Apartheid and colonial eras, learners were mostly regarded as objects rather than subjects (Namibia. Ministry of Education and Culture, 1993), thus implying that learner were not valued in school by teachers. I therefore argue that teachers' attitudes of not supporting learners could be influenced by the pre-independence education system where learner leadership was mostly absent, and learners were academically prepared for specific jobs that the German and South African rule required (Namibia. *Toward Education for All*, 1993, p. 2).

4.4 Conclusion

In a nutshell, this chapter started by presenting the codes and profiles of the participants. The data generated in the first phase of this study, gave me a clear picture on participants' perceptions and

understanding of the concept learner leadership. Moreover, the findings revealed that there were numerous leadership development opportunities for the LRC in the school, however, there were still factors constraining the development of voice and leadership of the LRC in the school. In the next chapter I present and discuss the data gathered for the second phase of my study.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS: PHASE TWO

5.1 Introduction

As discussed in the introduction to Chapter Four, this fifth chapter consists of the presentation and discussion of findings in relation to phase two of my study. In this chapter, I present and discuss phase two of the data generation process which involved three Change Laboratory sessions with the LRC members and Guardian Teacher 1, as well as data gathered from the focus group interview carried out with the LRC members after the Change Laboratory process. To remind the reader, this phase aimed to intervene in order to promote LRC voice and leadership in the school. Moreover, this phase was again done to generate data to answer the last sub-research question of my study; *in what ways can LRC participation in a Change Laboratory process contribute to their leadership development?*

The chapter begins by:

- Presenting the form and substance of the three Change Laboratories, and thereafter
- Discussing the potential contribution of the Change Laboratories to LRC voice and leadership development.

5.2 Phase two of the study: Intervention workshops

5.2.1 Overview of Change Laboratory workshops

The Change Laboratory is one of the interventionist methods that have been used in different countries at workplaces, communities and educational institutions to manage challenging changes by means of expansive learning (Engeström, 2015). Data presented in this section provides evidence that the Change Laboratory processes also contributed positively to the development of LRC voice and leadership at Mazeketo High School.

Three Change Laboratory workshops were conducted; the first Change Laboratory workshop was done for introductory purposes. In the second Change Laboratory workshop, I presented 'mirror data' and facilitated the discussions, where participants were engaged in a task. The last Change Laboratory workshop was designed as a space for participants to work on what mattered to them most, in which they contributed to the mission and vision building of their newly established school. The pictures below depict the setup of the three Change Laboratory workshops.

| CLW 1 | CLW 2 | CLW 3 |

Figure 5.1: Setup of the Change Laboratories

Next, I present a more detailed description of each of these Change Laboratory workshops.

5.2.1.1 Change Laboratory workshop 1

The first change laboratory workshop was conducted on the 28[th] of June 2017 in Guardian Teacher 1's class room. This was done immediately after school at 13h10, with all 13 LRC members and Guardian Teacher 1. *"I welcomed the participants and introduced myself as researcher-interventionist who was investigating how LRC voice and leadership can be developed in the school"* (OB, 28.06.2017). Thereafter, I requested participants to introduce themselves by stating their names, grade and portfolio they were serving. This was done so that I could get to know them and also create a good relationship between myself and participants.

I then explained the purpose of the Change Laboratory workshops; that they were to provide a platform for participants to analyse their current leadership practices. I further *"explained the*

triangular model of an activity system for this study to the participants" (OB, 28.06.2017) as Engeström (2009) suggests that the "the triangular models of activity are typically presented and explained to the participant at an early phase of the intervention" (p. 10). *"The exact number of Change Laboratory workshops to be held, estimated time, and duration of each session were as well discussed"* (OB, 28.06.2017). All the aforementioned was done to allow the participants again to make a well-informed decision about joining the process (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013). Thereafter, participants nominated the secretary and chairperson to lead the next two workshops, because these Change Laboratories were planned to be learner-driven; "kids speaking directly to kids" (Engeström, 2015) with me as a facilitator. At the end, *"participants also decided themselves the date for conducting the next two Change Laboratory sessions"* (OB, 28.06.2017). This change laboratory *"session took 40 minutes"* (*ibid.*) and Guardian Teacher 1 assisted in taking the pictures.

Figure 5.2: Reseacher-interventionist explaining the model of the activity system to participants

5.2.1.2 Change Laboratory workshop 2

The second Change Laboratory workshop took place on 5 July 2017 in the same venue. Ten LRC members were present as well as Guardian Teacher 1. This was again done immediately after school around 13:10. The main aim of this workshop was to 'mirror data' to the participants in order to prepare them for a task. This meant that *"I presented the challenges and contradictions which were derived from the analysis of the data collected through interviews and questionnaires*

used in phase one of the study" (OB, 05.07.2017). These challenges (non-systemic tensions) and contradictions (systemic tensions) were used as *first stimulus* for the workshop discussion as it displayed both the systemic and non-systemic tensions in the activity system under study. First stimulus refers to "the problematic situation which triggers a paralysed conflict of motives" (Sannino et al., 2016, p. 8). Consequently, the principle of double stimulation derived from CHAT was used in these Change Laboratory workshops since it has the power to show how an individual can use outside resources to transform problematic situations (*ibid.*).

Some of the challenges and contradictions' I presented as 'mirror data' were:

Challenges (non-systemic tensions):

- Newness of the school;
- The LRC functions without the LRC constitution; and
- The school does not have mission and vision statements to guide and lead the learners.

Contradictions (systemic tensions);

- Differences within the LRC members;
- Lack of support from teachers;
- No platform to communicate with the SMT (controlled communication structure);
- Exclusion of the LRC from the School Board.

Thereafter, *"participants were engaged in a task called the 'Future Search' where they had to analyse the contradictions through the three layers of time (past, present and future)"* (OB, 05.07.2017). This *'Future Search'* (second stimulus) was designed by the researcher-interventionist following the steps of the expansive learning cycle (Sannino et al., 2016).

- **Step 1: Charting the situation**

  - Recognising the need for change (mirror data)

- **Step 2: Analysing the situation**

  - How did you work in the **past**?
  - What are the **present** troubles or contradictions?

- **Step 3: Creating a new model**

    - How do we want to work in the **future**?

- **Step 4: Concretising and testing the new model**

    - What changes do you want to try; what mattered to them most

- **Step 5: Implementing the new model**

    - Putting into practice the first steps
    - Pushing for the next steps

- **Step 6: Spreading and consolidating**

    - Teaching others what we learned
    - Codifying the new rules (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013, p. 16).

As mentioned in the second chapter, expansive learning is a process in which learners search for solutions to some of the successively evolving contradictions (Karanasios, 2017, p. 2) which, in other words, is "learning what is not yet there" (Engeström, 2001, p. 74). The expansive learning steps were followed because they had the "quality of transformative agency" (Sannino et al., 2016, p. 7), which in this case was used to transform the leadership practice of the LRC in the school and to develop their voice. These steps in the end, were the intentional instructions that I had prepared, since Sannino et al. (2016) indicate that when a researcher-interventionist intervenes, he/she should have specific instructional intentions to provoke and support the learning process, as a starting point for a truly expansive learning process (p. 3).

Significantly, the expansive learning steps were used during Change Laboratories as a "vehicle of time travel to construct a vision of the past and the future of the activity system" (Engeström et al., 1996, p. 8). The first phase of the Future Search task offered the learners a chance to deliberate on the challenges and contradictions presented by reflecting back on the past. This meant that participants first had to confirm the challenges and contradictions in 'mirror data', by elaborating how they had been working in the past. Participants then had to identify what limited their current leadership practices (present). Lastly, participants discussed how they could improve their current leadership practice (future); this was where learners had the opportunity to engage with each other

and attempt resolutions to a few of the current contradictions which were in the activity system. At this juncture, it is important to note that while the expansive learning cycle has six steps (see Figure), this study terminated at the fourth step, because of the constraints of time as a consequence of my MEd degree.

From my observations: *"All participants were fully engaged in the 'Future Search' where they wrote on sticky notes and pasted them on the flip charts which were horizontally displayed on the board and were divided into rows written past, present and future"* (see Figure 5.6) (OB, 05.07.2017). This means, in trying to cope with the activity, participants employed artefacts such as charts and sticky notes. These artefacts helped the subjects to gain control of and transform the problematic situation (Sannino et al., 2016, p. 8). Significantly, this Change Laboratory session was fully learner-driven: the photos below show how participants were engaged in the tasks.

Writing ideas on sticky notes

Sticking sticky notes on the charts
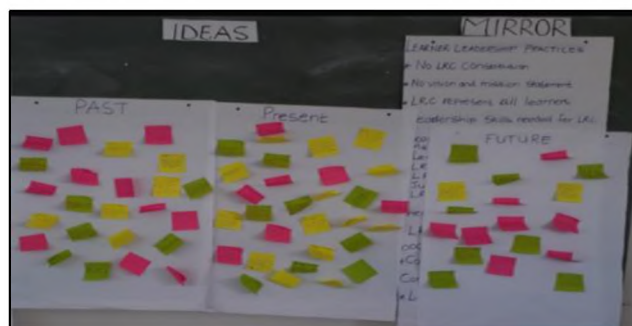
Sticky notes attached to charts

Figures 5.3: Participants engaged in the 'Future Search'

Thereafter, the chairperson who was also an LRC member had a chance to categorise similar contradictions that emerged from the *'Future Search'* on how they worked in the past and their present troubles (see Figure 5.6 below).

Figure 5.4: Chairperson categorising

The table below shows how the *'Future Search'* unfolded both systemic and non-systemic roots that contributed to current leadership practices.

Table 2.1: Modelling the past, present and future of the activity system

Identifying contradictions: modelling the past, present and future of the activity system		
Past	**Present**	**Future**
• Our ideas are not taken seriously; • LRC members do not respect each other; • No LRC member on the School Board; • No LRC constitution; • No vision and mission statements; • No platform to raise learners' concerns; • The school management decides always without consulting the LRC.	• Some teachers do not support us; • LRC members do not co-operate and walk out of meetings; • Only some people's ideas are considered during meetings; • Some LRC members refuse some roles; • No action taken after our meetings; • We do not listen to each other; • We lack communication skills (sometimes we do not speak with each other as well as screaming at each other).	• Respect each other; • Do roles as expected; • Training to equip us with more leadership skills; • Propose to meet with the school management to inform them to give the LRC constitution, representation in the school board and a platform to be heard.

Most of the categories which emerged conformed to all the contradictions I presented earlier in the 'mirror data'. Participants, with the assistance from their Guardian Teacher, resolved on how they wanted to bring about the changes (work in the future) in which they *"all agreed to co-operate, respect each other, and do their roles as expected"* (OB, 05.07.2017) as depicted in Table 5.1 above. The LRC members (OB, 05.07.2017) further suggested that:

> They wanted to have a meeting with the school management where they wanted to propose that they needed; two representatives in the school board, the LRC constitution and also to create a platform to liaise with school management for their voice to be heard. This message was left in the hands of the guardian teacher to consult the school management.

As already mentioned, this was an interventionist study which meant that participants together with their Guardian Teacher after resolving, had to choose a challenge or a contradiction (what changes do they want to try) that mattered to them most (fourth step of the expansive learning cycle). Although this was to be worked on during the third Change Laboratory workshop, participants had to choose what they wanted to work on in this second workshop, so that I could go and prepare the materials they had to use. As Sannino et al. (2016) claim, in a formative intervention the researcher-interventionist offer participants resources to engage in practical work that can lead to generative novel outcomes (p. 10). Participants therefore decided to contribute ideas and develop a vision and the mission statement of their school which emerged as a challenge from the 'mirror data' I presented. They chose this because Guardian Teacher 1 expressed to the LRC that, *"You have to choose something which benefits the whole school and not only you, because you are the representatives"* (OB, 05.07.2017). The head girl likewise supported the Guardian Teacher as she recommended that, *"Yes ma'am, I think the major contributing factor to our problems I think is the absence of the mission and vision statements to lead and guide us, the school is just in the air"* (OB, 05.07.2017). Most learners also agreed to work on the vision and mission of their school during the final Change Laboratory workshop as they were in the process of doing it. In reflecting on this second Change Laboratory workshop, I noted in my field notes that *"This change laboratory session lasted for about two hours and 20 minutes and at the end of the session all participants agreed to work on the vision and mission statement in the next workshop"* (*ibid.*).

5.2.1.3 Change Laboratory workshop 3

The third and last Change Laboratory workshop was conducted on the 6[th] July 2017. Guardian Teacher 1 and nine LRC members were present, and these were the LRC members who attended the second Change Laboratory. This was again conducted in Guardian Teacher 1's class room immediately after school. Most participants were ready to contribute to the vision and mission statement of their school when I met them. However, two LRC members were confident enough to speak out and challenge this agenda, with a request that they wanted to compose a school song and not a vision and mission statement anymore. This attempt to change the plan *"showed that the LRC members were free to express their feelings without any fear"* (OB, 06.07.2017). Guardian Teacher 1 (OB, 06.07.2017) convinced these LRC members again, as she explained to them that:

> Remember we have the due date to voluntarily submit our input for the school vision and mission statements; why can't we do it now? Let's leave a school song for sometime and focus on the vision first because the vision will help and guide us in coming up with our school song.

Participants agreed and all were ready for the vision and mission building exercise. As a facilitator I prepared the artefacts such as charts, and marker pens for participants to draft their ideas. Participants divided themselves into two groups: one group had four LRC members and the other one had five LRC members (see Figure 5.3 below). Each group was tasked to come up with their own ideas about the vison and mission statements. Thereafter *"each group selected a representative (presenter) to present and explain their whole ideas to all other participants"* (OB, 06.07.2017). During this workshop, I was video filming as well as taking some of the pictures as presented below:
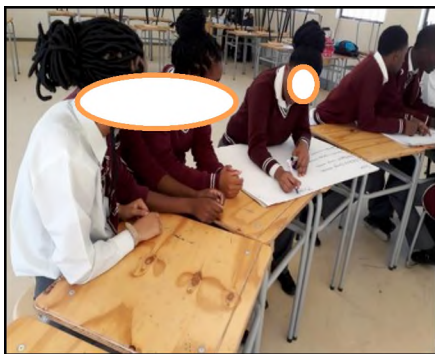
Group One   Group Two

| Group One presenter | Group Two presenters |
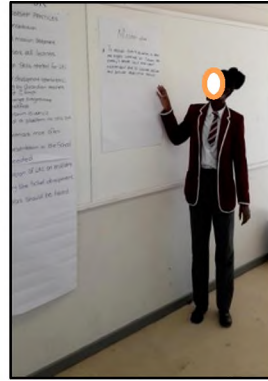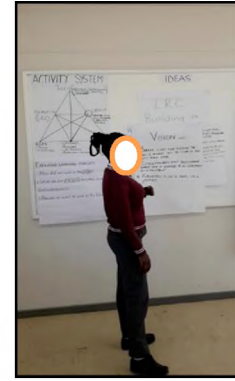
Figures 5.5: Group presenters interpreting their ideas of the vision and mission

The table below portrays the vision and the mission statements that the participants from the two groups suggested (formulated).

	VISION STATEMENT	**MISSION STATEMENT**
Group One	To become a sound, vibrant, academic oriented institution and a model education centre.	To become a centre of excellence which provides services in an efficient, transparent, innovative and responsive manner.
Group Two	To become professionals through hard work and to produce responsible citizens.	To provide quality education to each and every learner, to become self sufficient, independent through delivering productive results.

Table 5.1: Vision and mission statements

Group One's presenter (L3, CLW3) presented and explained that their ideas for the vision and mission statements are very clear :

> What that vision means is that, this school should be a lively education centre for guiding learners to their academics, and our mission statement means that, this should be the school which produce excellent learners in an efficient, transparent, innovative and responsive way.

Group Two chose two representatives to present their ideas. The first presenter (L5, CLW3) interprented their vision as:

> What we meant by becoming professionals through hard work and to produce responsible citizens is that, through hard work and commitment this school should be there to produce learners who will one day become somebody in life, meaning have a profession.

The second presenter for Group Two (L2, CLW3) continued interpreting their mission statements:

> This is straight forward and I think all of you understand it, it simply means that we are standing on the words of our late former education minister, meaning we are going to deliver as much as we can, our academic results are going to be productive to put Namibia on the map.

The mission and vision statements were left with Guardian Teacher 1 to submit to the school management team (SMT) for approval. These, in the end, were to be consolidated by School Board members with other input (ideas of the vision and mission) sourced from other learners, teachers and parents (HoD, I). This has been a summary of the intervention workshops and what transpired.

Next, I present and discuss the answer to my last sub-research question: *In what ways can LRC participation in a Change Laboratory process contribute to their voice and leadership development?*

5.2.2 Potential contributions of a Change Laboratory process to the development of LRC voice and leadership

The overview of the Change Laboratory workshops above, evidenced that during these Change Laboratories, "*the LRC members collaborated with each other and with their Guardian Teacher as well*" (OB, 05.07.2017). This showed the "collaboration with adults" which is a form of learner voice that describes instances in which learners work with adults to make changes in their school (Mitra & Gross, 2009, p. 524). Given these opportunities, the LRC members showed an eagerness to suggest how they wanted to improve their leadership practice in the school. For example, they suggested a chance to meet the school management to "voice their opinions in matters that concerned them in and around the school" (*ibid.*), such as: requesting for an opportunity to be heard in the school by the school management and to be included in the School Board meetings.

This can also be equated to "building capacity of leadership" which was is also another form of learner voice where learners serve by "questioning issues such as structural and cultural injustice within the school" (Mitra & Gross, 2009, p. 524). As a consequence of the Change Laboratory process, the LRC began to question why they were not represented in the School Board, despite this possibly causing a disruption to the current cultural practices in the school. It is widely believed to be a sign of disrespect when children question adults because, traditionally, "learners in our society are essentially viewed as children who should not have a voice in decision-making" (Shekupakela-Nelulu, 2008, p. 1).

LRC members themselves also confirmed during their focus group interview, conducted after the Change Laboratories, that their leadership skills improved during these workshops. The majority of the LRC mentioned that they had realised the significance of team work, that different people have different ideas, for instance one learner said: *"I thought it will be difficult to come up with the mission and vision statement of our school, but since we did this as a team, it was so fast and enjoyable"* (L_3, FGI). The contributions to the mission and vision building, enhanced the LRC's *"sense of pride and strengthens the traditions of the school"* (OB, 05.07.2017). These Change Laboratories provided the LRC with an opportunity to interact, share ideas and develop each other socially. *"All LRC members participated fairly, they considered everyone's opinion; significantly none had more power than others"* (OB, 06.07.2017). In addition, one LRC member indicated that she *"learnt to be patient, understanding and to consider others' opinions when in a group"* (L_5, FGI).

Another LRC member highlighted that he noticed that their communication skills had really improved during the Change Laboratory process. *"We listened to each other, not like during our meetings when we used to walk out without reaching any consensus"* (L_6, FGI). Moreover, problem solving skills was what one LRC member mentioned: *"The way we solved how we wanted to work in the future, was the thing that most touched my heart; this was like reconciliation to some of us because we normally do not co-operate"* (L_2, FGI,). By the same token, one LRC mentioned that *"We learnt how to solve problems quickly; we had so many burning issues with ourselves, but never attempted to solve it together as we did in the second workshop"* (L_4, FGI).

From the findings I deduced that, "developing the sense of ownership" (Mitra & Gross, 2009, p. 530) was the other way the Change Laboratory workshops contributed to the leadership development of the LRC. As one LRC member said, that although they received some training, they never had a platform like the Change Laboratories where *"we are free to discuss what matters to us, like I never thought of the LRC constitution or even coming up with the mission and vision which we did"* (FGI). This showed that some LRC members felt valued when provided with these opportunities where they could freely express themselves; they provided a democratic space (Thomas, 2006) which is one of Namibia's educational reform goals. In addition, the majority of the LRC during the focus group interview, suggested that they needed platforms like these (Change Laboratories) in their school, where they have to work together with their teacher to resolve certain issues around the school (L$_1$, L$_2$, L$_3$, L$_5$, L$_5$, L, L$_{11}$, L$_{12}$, L$_{13}$).

In summary, that was how phase two of the study progressed. It was evidenced by the above discussion, that the Change Laboratory process made a great impact on the LRC of Mazeketo High School. It was an eye-opener to the LRC members who eagerly wanted to challenge the current status quo and become more involved in school wide decision-making.

5.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, data presented showed that the Change Laboratory process, positively contributed to the development of LRC voice and leadership in the school, through the steps of the expansive learning cycle. In the following and final chapter, I present some concluding remarks, as well as look at some recommendations to improve the current learner leadership practice of this newly established school.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This is the closing chapter for my research study, which set out to explore how LRC voice and leadership could be developed in Mazeketo High School. The chapter begins with a brief summary of the research findings, without fully repeating what has been discussed in the previous chapter. The discussion of this chapter continues with explaining the value of my study, limitations of the study, recommendations for practice and suggestions for areas of future research. I finally conclude the chapter by reflecting on my research journey.

6.2 Addressing the research goal and questions

As stipulated in Chapter One, this interventionist study aimed to develop LRC voice and leadership in a newly established secondary school and at the same time bring to light the factors that constrained the development of LRC voice and leadership in the school. To address this goal, the study was guided by the following research sub-questions:

1. How is leaner leadership understood in the school?
2. What leadership development opportunities for the LRC currently exist in the school?
3. What underlying factors constrain the development of LRC voice and leadership in the newly established school?
4. In what ways can LRC participation in a Change Laboratory process contribute to their leadership development?

Next, I present the summary of the findings in response to the research sub-questions of my study.

6.3 Summary of the findings

6.3.1 How is learner leadership understood in the school?

The findings indicated that learner leadership in the case-study school was narrowly understood as being confined to the structure of the LRC. However, within this understanding of learner leadership, a number of variations emerged. Some participants understood learner leadership as the LRC being the voice of the voiceless which, in other words, meant the LRC represented the other learners in the school by being their voice. The findings also revealed that some participants understood learner leadership as leadership enacted through managerial roles, carried out by the LRC in the school to maintain discipline.

6.3.2 What leadership development opportunities for the LRC currently exist in the school?

The findings showed that there were numerous leadership development opportunities offered to the LRC in this newly established school. It was revealed that initially, the school sent all the LRC members to the leadership training camp offered outside town, to prepare and groom these young leaders to take up their roles. The LRC community networking events such as the School Exchange Programme, a Town Council breakfast and the Junior Regional Council were other opportunities offered to the LRC to solicit information, exchange ideas and discuss matters of common interest with the LRC of the surrounding fully established schools. Moreover, organising social events such as a fete and beauty pageant, which became part of the school culture, were left in the hands of the LRC. Participants believed that LRC members gained organisational skills from organising such events. Lastly, the mentoring programme offered by the LRC Guardian Teachers in the school, was again an opportunity to develop leadership in the LRC. The Guardian Teachers usually hosted meetings twice a term with the LRC, to influence them to take their leadership responsibilities seriously. It was also revealed that these mentoring programmes were done to train the LRC on how to handle conflict and disagreements among themselves and other learners in the school.

6.3.3 What underlying factors constrain the development of LRC voice and leadership in the newly established school?

From the data, factors that constrained the development of the LRC voice and leadership emerged as challenges and contradictions, discussed below.

6.3.3.1 Challenges to LRC voice and leadership development in the school

The newness of the school was the greatest challenge, because it was used in most cases as a reason to suppress the development of LRC voice in the school. It was discovered that the LRC's suggestions on school development were, in most cases, not accepted by the SMT with the accompanying reason that the school was still new.

The other challenge, was working without a vision and mission statement to direct LRC activities and the whole school in general, for almost two years. As it has been said, without a vision you do not know where you are heading (Ipinge, 2003). Lack of a vision and mission statement, implicitly affected this council, as there was nothing to lead and guide them when planning their activities.

It was also found that the LRC of this newly established school, functioned without a LRC constitution. The absence of a constitution negatively affected the leadership of this council, as the LRC members were sometimes not fully aware of what was expected of them.

6.3.3.2 Contradictions surfaced in the activity of the LRC

Conflict between the LRC members, such as shouting at each other and refusing to talk to each other, was a primary contradiction that hindered the development of LRC leadership in the school. This affected the LRC's leadership because this lack of communication led to the neglect of their roles. From a socio-historical perspective, this primary contradiction was likely caused by the cultural upbringing of the council members.

The exclusion of the LRC from decision-making during School Board meetings, was a secondary contradiction noted between the community (the SMT) and rule (policy). The findings revealed that the LRC at this newly established school, was restricted from attending School Board meetings. This depicted that LRC voice in this powerful decision-making body, was totally absent

in this newly established school. This contradiction from a socio-cultural perspective, was likely caused by the long-standing African tradition that learners are essentially viewed as children who should not have a voice in decision-making processes, because they are too young.

Lack of support from some teachers in the school was another secondary contradiction noted between the community (teachers) and subjects (LRC members). Data revealed that most teachers in the school held negative attitudes toward LRC roles. This meant that the leadership roles of the LRC were viewed by some teachers as a waste of time, as it 'got in the way' of their academic work. This, from a CHAT perspective, was potentially influenced by the historical conditions of the education system where, during the pre-independence era, leadership of learners was hardly endorsed.

A controlled communication structure in the school was discovered as a secondary contradiction between the rule (policy) and community (SMT), that inhibited the development of LRC voice in the school. The LRC members in the school were restricted by only being allowed to communicate their concerns to the Guardian Teachers. This council of learner representatives were not allowed to liaise directly with the SMT. In other words, LRC members in the school were not allowed to liaise learners' concerns with the SMT, as per policy imperatives. This hierarchical communication structure in the school showed a more conservative view of leadership, typical of a bygone era.

These challenges and contradictions noted were used to expose the dynamics and, most importantly, opportunities for change and action. The process of using the challenges and contradictions was important because they had the power to reveal opportunities for creative innovation for new ways of structuring and enacting the activity (Karanasios et al., 2017). In other words, I used the contradictions as the stimuli to conduct the Change Laboratory process because they had the potential for transformative power and therefore a significant effect on organisational change (Engeström, 2001).

6.3.4 In what ways can LRC participation in a Change Laboratory process contribute to their leadership development?

The Change Laboratories conducted brought about transformation of LRC voice and leadership in the school, by following the steps of Engeström's (2001) expansive learning cycle. Firstly, the LRC members discussed and resolved some of the contradictions and challenges. They promised to work together, respect each other and carry out their roles as expected. The LRC members further suggested meeting the SMT to question why they were not represented at School Board meetings. This is believed to create a "build capacity for leadership" type of learner voice, where learners in schools serve by questioning issues such as structural and cultural injustice (Mitra & Gross, 2009, p. 525). Moreover, the LRC engaged with uncovering what a mission and vision statement might mean for them and thereafter presented what it should be. This artefact in the end was then submitted to the SMT for consideration, hence developing agency in these learners. From the focus group interview, the LRC members confirmed that some of their leadership skills improved after the Change Laboratory process.

The findings above signify that, during the three intervention workshops, learners expansively transformed the object of their activity (Sannino et al., 2016). In the vision and mission statement and in the skills development, the LRC members surely achieved a concrete instantiation of the object. In addition, the Change Laboratories demonstrated how this learning process included productive deviations from the researchers' instructional intentions, to discover potentials for what Engeström (2001) has referred to as expansive learning with its core quality of transformative agency in wider communities and work settings (*ibid.*). This is because in expansive learning, learners learnt something that was not yet there (*ibid.*). In other words, the learners constructed a new object and concept for their collective activity, and implemented this new object and concept in practice (Engeström & Sannino, 2010, p. 2). Through the Change Laboratory process, the learners resisted management, explicated new possibilities and changed the activity. Hence this was democracy (Thomas, 2006) and at the same time development of voice and agency in learners.

6.4 Value of this study

First, this study adds to a body of learner leadership research in Namibian schools generally, but particularly its contribution is unique in that it had the advantage of looking at leadership opportunities in a newly established school – an area that previous researchers have recommended needs further intensive research.

Second, the other contribution that this study makes, is through the use of the second generation of CHAT which underpinned the underlying factors that constrained LRC voice and leadership in the newly established school. This is something which has rarely been done in Namibian studies.

Lastly, the value for this interventionist study lies in its use of one of the formative intervention methods called the Change Laboratory. This is again something which has rarely been done in Namibian research, particularly in a newly established school. The findings from this research showed that the participation of learners in a Change Laboratory process, contributed to their leadership development. For that reason, the study values the use of the Change Laboratory process as a platform to invoke learner voice and transform their leadership in the school.

6.5 Limitations of the study

The major limitation for this study is that it was a very small case-study, as I wanted to get a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study. The study was limited to 13 LRC members, the principal, one HoD and three LRC Guardian Teachers of a newly established school and does not represent similar situations of other new schools in Namibia. Since the case-study findings cannot be generalised because of the small population, transferability is therefore only applicable in this study. In a critical paradigm, "transferability may include consideration of the extent to which others could be inspired to create change in social practices by reading the account of the research, or how the research supports action and social learning" (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 192).

Time was also one of the limitations that this study encountered. The nature of a full-time Master's degree programme restricted this study to only carry out three Change Laboratory workshops as time at the research site was limited. As a result, the six steps of the expansive learning cycle could

not be completed; however, data revealed that the three Change Laboratory conducted brought about some transformation.

Moreover, this study was confined to the second generation of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as a theoretical and analytical framework, which looked at a single activity system. This was a limitation, because the study could not address the relationship between multiple activity systems within the school.

6.6 Recommendations for practice

It was my hope that this research would also develop a strong foundation of learner leadership practice at this newly established school. To accomplish this, I recommend the following:

First, I recommend the SMT of this newly established school use the status of the school as an opportunity for development and therefore invite the LRC to participate in the different leadership practices.

Second, the study recommends the SMT and LRC Guardian Teachers of this newly established school, establish a professional learning community of teachers (or run a Change Laboratory process with teachers) to determine what teachers know about the policies in relation to learner leadership and help them to expand their knowledge and comprehension in this regard.

Third, the study again recommends that teachers and the SMT of this newly established school, minimise enslaving cultural practices which make it difficult for children and elders to openly discuss and solve important matters in and around the school. The school needs to embrace new ways of thinking and acting in this era of independence and transformation. I therefore recommend that the head boy and the head girl be allowed to attend all School Board meetings and be given a voice in decision-making processes.

Fourth, this study recommends the school create a platform where the SMT and all the LRC members come together to share their views and opinions. This could be beneficial for all the LRC members if they are given the opportunity to liaise directly between the SMT and other learners.

Fifth, it is recommended that the school develop the LRC constitution for LRC members to use. This should be done to avoid confusion at the school, as the findings revealed that the LRC members in this school were not aware of their roles and, consequently, they sometimes took decisions that the management of the school should take.

Sixth, teachers in the school should also be encouraged to change their mind-sets of viewing learner leadership as unimportant. Teachers in the school should support the LRC members in executing their leadership roles. Here, it might be a good recommendation that teachers are trained in the Change Laboratory method and conduct formative interventions with each other, to address unsustainable contradictions and transform their activities; this is what Sannino et al., (2016) call intraventions.

Last, the findings revealed that leadership is indeed distributed in the school, to some degree. However, there is a need for expansion, and it is recommended that the school create additional platforms where more learners can involve themselves in leadership development activities. These might include afternoon school learner leadership clubs (Grant, 2015; Grant & Nekondo, 2016). Involving learners in different clubs can provide them with an opportunity to develop learner voice and leadership in school; hence, leadership is likely to be widely distributed to involve those who are not in formal management positions.

6.7 Suggestions for further research

Learner voice and leadership is an under-researched topic in Namibia. More vigorous research is needed to grow this body of knowledge. For this reason, I suggest that future Namibian researchers and scholars conduct and explore more comprehensive and large-scale studies in different schools, including newly established schools in different regions. A comprehensive study has the potential to explore more information about learner voice and leadership practices in schools.

Moreover, this study used the second generation of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as a theoretical and analytical framework, which looked at the single activity system of the LRC. I suggest future researchers conduct similar studies using the third generation of CHAT, as it has the potential to expand the unit of analysis to understand the relationship between multiple activity systems. I recognise too the benefits to future scholars of including both parents and learners who are not LRC members, as participants in their studies.

6.8 Reflection

My research experience is an unforgettable memory of my entire life. I was delighted when I was offered a chance to study at Rhodes University and, a few months later, I was told that my research proposal had received the go-ahead from the Education Higher Degrees Committee. Little did I know how much more work lay ahead of me. The writing of this thesis in a year, was mind-boggling and tiring. At times I wanted to throw in the towel, but gave myself hope that if others managed it, why not me. The writing of the literature review chapter, the data presentation and discussion of findings chapters, will remain indelible in my mind. A lot of reading had to be done before I could get a clear understanding of the leadership theories. I really enjoyed collecting mountains of data, which gave me sleepless nights, to analyse. I found it challenging to triangulate my data from different data-gathering tools. After consulting my supervisor and even further reading, there was light at the end of the tunnel.

Nonetheless, doing the research has helped me to become patient with whatever I do and taught me to have good listening skills. My writing skills have improved drastically and are still improving. This research process has also allowed me to be critical about the practices of learner voice and leadership in my own, as well as in my research school. Before I undertook this research study, I was one of the teachers who used to get frustrated when my school's LRC went on leadership excursions and missed attending my Mathematics lessons. Not knowing how important learner voice and leadership was, this journey has turned out to be a life changing experience.

Form the findings of my study, I learnt that learners must be treated as young people whose ideas matter; this was indeed an eye-opening and worthwhile experience. This journey has fulfilled my

first step towards my dream of playing a valuable role as a teacher in the community in Namibia. From this study, it is clear that there is more than what we take for granted as teachers, when we work with our learners in our schools. The research skills acquired in this degree helped me view teaching and learning through a different lens. How I wish that all teachers could go through the same process in Namibia. In short, my research experience was very useful and I personally will conduct "formative interventions, including intraventions aim[ed] at transforming" (Sannino et al., 2016, p. 16) learner leadership practice in the school where I work.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Document analysis schedule

Document Analysis Schedule

Learner voice and leadership in the school

Documents to be analysed	Comment
1. Education Act of 2001	
2. School development plan of [SDP] 2008	
3. Regulation made under the Educational Act of 2001	

Appendix B: Individual interview schedule

Interview schedule: HOD, Principal and LRC Guardian Teacher

The aim of this interview is to investigate how learner leadership is understood in the school and what leadership development opportunities for the LRC exist in the school.

1. Why was this school established?

2. What is the vision and mission statement of this newly established school?

3. In your own view what is leadership?

4. How do you understand the concept 'learner leadership'?

5. Do you believe learner leadership is important in your newly established school and why?

6. How are the learners involved in leadership at the school?

7. How does the school select learners to become LRC members?

8. What are the roles of LRC in the school?

9. How does the school empower LRC with skills and knowledge?

10. How often does the LRC meet in a term?

11. Are the LRC members being consulted on matters concerning the school development?

12. What procedures do the LRC follow if they want to be heard by school management?

13. Are the LRC members allowed to attend School Board meetings at all times/ how many since the endorsement of the School Board?

14. What leadership development opportunities for the LRC does the school offer?

15. What are the challenges of implementing learner leadership at this newly established school?

Appendix C: Questionnaire

Questionnaire administered to LRC teachers (guardians) and LRC members.

The aim of this questionnaire is to investigate the leadership development opportunities for the LRC that exist in the school.
You are kindly requested to complete the following questionnaire by giving your honest opinion. Please do so by writing in the space provided. All information provided will only be used for this research project and will be treated as confidential.

NB: DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME:
Age _____ Gender_____ Grade_____ Portfolio_____

1. What is the vision and mission statement of your newly established school?
2. In your view, what is leadership?
3. How do you understand the term learner leadership?
4. Do you believe learner leadership is happening (exercised) in this new school?
   Yes_____   No_____ [tick your answer and explain why]
5. a) What are the roles of LRC members of this newly established school?
   b) Are these roles stated somewhere or how did you come to know them?
6. How does the school empower [enhance] leadership skills in the LRC members?
7. In what ways are the LRC members involved in school leadership? Explain by giving examples.
8. How often do LRC members meet in a term? How many meetings?
9. How often do the LRC members meet with the Guardian Teachers?
10. What support do Guardian Teachers give to the LRC?
11. How is LRC voice being heard in this newly established school? Provide a practical example(s)?
12. Are the LRC members allowed to attend School Board meeting at all times? Explain.
13. How are the LRC being consulted on matters concerning the school development? Explain/ give an example.
14. What leadership development opportunities does the school offer to the LRC?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your contribution to and interest in this study is greatly appreciated.

Appendix D: Observation schedule

Observation Schedule

Learner voice in leadership

1. LRC meeting: • **Who chairs the meeting?** • **Who has the power to make decisions in this meeting?**	
2. Change Laboratory • **Observing LRC participation when an opportunity is given.** • **How LRC collaborate with each other and with the LRC teacher.** • **How LRC lead and own the processes.**	**Workshops (CLW)**
CWL: 1	
CLW: 2	
CLW: 3	

Appendix E: Focus Group interview schedule

Focus group interview questions with LRC (after Change Laboratory workshops)

1. What did you learn from being a part of the Change Laboratory workshops?

2. Did you enjoy being part of these workshops? why /why not?

3. Did you gain any leadership skills in these workshops?

4. Did your participation in the CLW contribute to your leadership development? How?

5. How do you feel about being part of the group who contributed to the vision and mission statement of their newly established school?

6. How are you going to implement your new solutions to the contradictions?

Appendix F: Permission letter from the gate keeper

<div align="right">

P.O. Box 3895

Walvis Bay

10 January 2017

</div>

Dear Principal

RE; request for permission to carry out a one year research project with learners/teachers at ████████████

I am Linda Amadhila a full-time master's student in the field of Educational Leadership and Management (ELM) at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa. For the ELM research, I am required to identify an educational institution where I can base my research project, which should not be my work place (to avoid ethical issues). I therefore decide to choose ████████████, since it's a new school, I felt that there is still no one who has carried such a research project which will of course benefit the school. I thought it will be of the benefit of the school from the research project because it will be exploring leadership development opportunities at this institution. I plan to work with the learners/ teachers on a voluntary basis, when collecting data for the project during the year.

I am therefore requesting a permission for an entry at ████████████ to carry my research. If you require further information, you are welcome to contact my supervisors at the University:Prof Hennie van der Mescht at h.vandermescht@ru.ac.za: Ms. Farhana Kajee at: f.kajee@ru.ac.za and Prof Carolyn Gant at: c.grant@ru.ac.za could also be contacted in this regard.

I undertake to work ethically with the learners/teachers and parents. I will obtain the written consent of all participants as well as that of their parents. I will ensure the anonymity of the school and the participants when I report on the project. In addition, participants will be free to withdraw at any time without negative or undesirable consequences to themselves.

Yours sincerely

[signature]

Linda Amadhila; (15A8711)

<div align="center">

Declaration

</div>

I ████████████ (Full names of the Principal) hereby confirm that I understand the content of this document and the nature of this project. I therefore give permission to M̶r̶s̶.̶ Linda Amadhila to carry out her research project at our school.

████████████   12-01-2017

Signature of Principal   WALVIS BAY   Date

1 2 JAN 2017

TEL: 064 ████

FAX: 064 ████

E-mail ████

Appendix G: Permission letter from the Inspector of Education

ERONGO REGIONAL COUNCIL

DIRECTORATE OF EDUCATION, ARTS AND CULTURE
WALVIS BAY CIRCUIT

Tel: 064 200218
Fax: 064 200205

Private Bag 5008
Walvis Bay

Enquiries: Ms MRS /Gawises

Date: 09 June 2017

To: The School Principal

█████████████

Walvis Bay

Erongo Region

**Subject: Permission to conduct a research study at ████████████
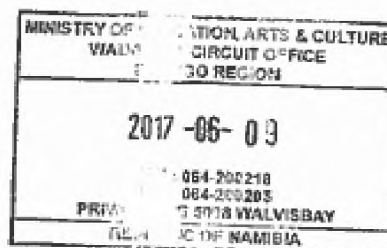Walvis Bay, Erongo Region**

This letter serves to notify your good office that the inspector of education has granted Mrs. Linda Amadhila, a student from Rhodes University a permission to conduct the research at your school. She will be working with some teachers and LRC on voluntary basis. However, the research to be undertaken should by no means disrupt teaching and learning at school.

Counting on your usual co-operation.

Yours faithfully

Ms M.R.S. /Gawises

Inspector of Education

MINISTRY OF ...ATION ARTS & CULTURE
WALV... CIRCUIT OFFICE
... 3O REGION

2017 -06- 09

· 064-200218
064-200205
PRIV... ...5008 WALVISBAY
RE... ...C OF NAMIBIA

Appendix H: Consent letter one

Enq: Mrs. L. Amadhila
Cell: 0813222828
Email: amadhilalinda@gmail.com

Dear Parent/Guardian

Request for permission for your child to participate in the study of learner leadership development.

I am a full time Master of Education student at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa. I am sending this invitation and request for permission to allow your child who is an LRC member to participate in a research study to be undertaken at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ol. The purpose of this study is to develop learner voice and leadership at this newly established school. The study plans to conduct three workshops after school with the Learner Representative Council (LRC) to attain its purpose. I therefore selected your child to participate in the study since she/he is an LRC member of the school.

Please note that this is not an evaluation of your child's performance or competence. I undertake to work ethically and to uphold his/her autonomy, and he/she will be free to withdraw from the research at any time without negative or undesirable consequences to himself/herself. If you give permission for your child to participate in this study, please complete the declaration below and return to me.

Yours sincerely.

Linda Amadhila (15a8711)

DECLARATION

I_____ (Full names of Parent/Guardian) hereby confirm that I understand the content of this document and the nature of the research project. I give permission for my child to participate in the study.

_____   _____

Signature of Parent   Date

Full Names of Learner _____

_____   _____

Signature of Learner   Date

Appendix I: Consent letter two

Enq: Mrs. L. Amadhila
Cell: 0813222828/
Email: amadhilalinda@gmail.com

Dear sir/madam

Request for your permission to take part in research study.

I am sending this invitation to you as a teacher who might be interested in participating in my research study. I am a full time Master of Education student at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa. As part of my course I have to complete a research study. My research topic is: **Learner voice and leadership: A formative intervention to develop LRC voice and leadership in a newly established school in Namibia.** The purpose of this study is to develop leadership in learners and to invoke learner voice in leadership. The research study is being done with permission of the Higher Degrees Committee of Rhodes University. I plan to conduct this research and collect data from June to July. I would, very much, like to work closely with you in order to extend the boundaries of our knowledge on this phenomenon.

Please note that this is not an evaluation of your performance or competence. I undertake to uphold your autonomy and, as such, you will be free to withdraw from the research at any time without negative or undesirable consequences to yourself. In this regard, you will be asked to complete a consent form. It is against this background that I am humbly inviting you to participate in my research study at your school. Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have any queries or questions you would like answered.

Yours faithfully

Linda Amadhila (15a8711)

Declaration

I_____ (Full name) hereby confirm that I understand the content of this document and the nature of this research study. I understand that I reserve the right to withdraw from this study at any time.

_____   Signature: _____
Principal/HoD/Teacher

Date: _____

Appendix J: Permission letter from the supervisor

RHODES UNIVERSITY
Where leaders learn

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Tel: +27 (0) 46 603 8383

Fax: +27 (0) 46 622 8028

PO Box 94, Grahamstown, 6140

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

23 May 2017

This is to certify that Ms Linda Amadhila (student number 15A8711) is a registered Master's student at Rhodes University, currently pursuing research in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree *Master of Education, Educational Leadership and Management*. Ms Amadhila has made excellent progress in the course so far, and has successfully submitted a research proposal to the Higher Degrees Committee. She has now reached the stage where data collection is necessary, which necessitates spending a period of about two months at the school of her choice. The purpose of this letter is to obtain your permission to allow the student to conduct research in your region, circuit or school, and to assist the student as much as possible to gain entry to institutions and access to people and documents.

Ms Amadhila's research involves learner leadership at a school, and to conduct the study the student needs to interview staff, learners and in some cases parents. The student will also need to do observation, administer questionnaires, and study relevant documents. The university has a strict ethical code which applies to research in education. The code includes guarantees of confidentiality, anonymity, and respect for the context of the study. As such, the student may not in any way interfere with the smooth running of the school, and needs to take into account the culture and norms of the institution. The student will obtain permission from all participants in writing, and where learners are involved, permission will be sought from their parents. We also discourage students from researching their own schools for obvious reasons.

Research is a difficult and challenging enterprise, and we would therefore really appreciate anything you can do to make the student's data gathering as smooth and effective as possible. Your cooperation is highly appreciated. The student's research is likely to constitute a valuable contribution to the small body of literature on this important phenomenon in education, and thus serve a broader purpose of uplifting educational standards in Namibia.

Should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact any of the supervisors listed below.

Regards

(Prof) Hennie van der Mescht (h.vandermescht@ru.ac.za)
Prof Callie Grant (c.grant@ru.ac.za)
Ms Farhana Kajee (f.kajee@ru.ac.za)
(Supervisors)

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