

**AN EXPLORATION OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT  
IN A LEARNER REPRESENTATIVE STRUCTURE IN A  
SECONDARY SCHOOL, OSHANA REGION, NAMIBIA**

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by

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## Declaration

I, Selma Ndeyapo Kadhepa-Kandjengo, hereby declare that the work in this thesis is my own idea and where ideas from other writers were used, they were acknowledged in full using references according to the Rhodes University Education Guide to References. I further declare that the work in this thesis has not been submitted at any university for degree purposes.



Signature

28 February 2018

Date

## **Abstract**

Before independence, Namibia inherited a system of Bantu education which was hierarchical, authoritarian and non-democratic. Upon independence, the educational sector went through numerous reforms which were meant to transform education and to make it more democratic, whereby all stakeholders can broadly participate. In spite of these reforms, leadership of schools has remained a hierarchical system, where a principal who, as an individual, runs the school without recognition of the potential leadership of others.

Recent studies on leadership have called for shared leadership, whereby leadership is a practice, permeable to learner leaders and not associated with individuals. This research study aims to explore learner leadership development in the Learner Representative Council (LRC) structure at a secondary school in Namibia. The motivation of this research study was twofold – firstly, my personal interest in learner leadership was aroused by my teaching experience. The second reason was due to my realisation that the area was under-researched in Namibia, hence I wanted to fill the existing gap on learner leadership.

The study critically engaged learners and teachers to help me get an understanding of learner leadership and the factors enabling learner leadership development. I also found that challenges which resulted in contradictions, hampered leadership development.

The study took an interventionist approach and second generation Cultural Historical Activity Theory was used to surface tensions and contradictions affecting learner leadership development. Change Laboratory workshops enabled the expansive learning process with the 12 LRC members. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, observation, document analysis and journaling.

The study found that learner leadership was understood more in terms of traditional views of leadership, whereby a learner needed to possess certain qualities in order to lead. The findings further pointed out that the LRC members were mainly involved in managerial roles and not

really leadership roles, as such, and they were not involved in decision-making at the school. Although provision for the LRC body is made in an Educational Act, historical and cultural forces account for teachers' reluctance to support the LRC members, as well as for silence of learner voice. I hope that the findings from this research study strengthen learner leadership structures in schools and contribute to the creation of knowledge on learner leadership in Namibia.

## **Acknowledgement**

“For I know the plans I have for you”, declares the Lord, “plan to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and future” (Jeremiah 29:11). I thank the Almighty Lord for all he has done for me throughout my life.

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## **Dedication**

This study is dedicated to my loving daughters Saara, Latunga, Laolange and Letuvene. You are the reason I pursued this Master's degree. I wanted to set an example that you can emulate; always strive to reach your potential. It is my wish that you grow up into responsible and productive citizens of our country. "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans" (Proverbs 16:3).

It is also dedicated to my parents Mr. Jesaya Kadhepa and Anna Shindaadhi-Kadhepa for instilling the love of education in me and for allowing me to make my own choices in life.

## **List of Acronyms**

ACE	- Advanced Certificate in Education
BETD	- Basic Education Teacher Diploma
CHAT	- Cultural Historical Activity Theory
CL	- Change Laboratory
CLW	- Change Laboratory Workshop
ELM	- Education Leadership and Management
ETSIP	- Education Training Sector Improvement Program
HOD	- Head of Department
HPP	- Harambee Prosperity Plan
LRC	- Learners Representative Council
MEC	- Ministry of Education and Culture
PAAI	- Plan of Action for Academic Improvement
SDP	- School Development Plan
SEO	- Senior Education Officer
SMT	- School Management Team
UNAM	- University of Namibia
ZPD	- Zone of proximal Development

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this research study is to explore the leadership development of learners in a Learner Representative Council (LRC), with the intention to bring about transformation of learner leadership practices within the structure, through Change Laboratory workshops. In order to capture the enactment of learner leadership, which is an under-researched area in the Namibian context, an in-depth case study was conducted at Makuva secondary school (pseudonym) in the Oshana Region, Namibia. The findings of the case study are presented in detail in this thesis.

The aim of this chapter is to provide an orientation of the study to the reader. I begin this chapter by providing a rationale for the study, drawing on literature to get a sense of the context of leadership in Namibia. This leads to a discussion of the aims, research questions and potential value of the study. Thereafter, I focus on the conceptual underpinnings and methodology employed in the study. Finally, an outline of the thesis will be provided.

### **1.2 Rationale**

My interest in the development of learner leadership arose from my personal, professional, and academic experiences. Firstly, while I was doing my BEd Honours in Educational Leadership and Management at Rhodes University, I realised that there was little research conducted in Namibia on learner leadership. Shekupakela-Nelulu (2008) also mentions that learner leadership is the most under-researched area in Namibia. Secondly, I was a teacher, a Head of Department, and I am now a Senior Education Officer (SEO); my experience in teaching has taught me that learner leaders usually execute menial managerial tasks only, and there is no visible and meaningful platform for them to voice real issues. Thirdly, during a pre-course assignment for this MEd programme, I found that teachers and learners equate leadership with an individual

which in most cases is the principal, and that leadership is not viewed as a practice including a number of individuals. For example, one of the LRC members in the pre-course assignment questionnaire explained that leadership “is about having the power to lead, guide, and direct people in different situations, as well as about giving a good example” (Kandjengo, 2017, p. 7). Based on the three reasons above, I realised there was a need to conduct an in-depth study on learner leadership in Namibia, to grow the body of existing knowledge. This research study will contribute to the understanding and development of the phenomenon of learner leadership in Namibia and hopefully stimulate further research on the phenomenon by scholars. My attention now turns to the Namibian context, with particular reference to the aspect of leadership.

### **1.3 Context of the study**

Before independence, Namibia inherited a system of Bantu education from the South African government. This education was based on segregation and racism and, as such, it was undemocratic and had Apartheid generation policies that encouraged racism across all levels of government (Amukugo, 1993). This resulted in stark differences in the quality of education provided to black people due to limited funding provided and thus, the white population was privileged and the majority of blacks were disadvantaged (Namibia. Ministry of Education and Culture [MEC], 1993). The education system was characterised by hierarchical, authoritarian, non-democratic, and non-participatory leadership (Nauyoma-Hamupembe, 2011), and therefore, the education leadership in schools at that time was entrusted to principals and senior administrators (Hamatwi, 2015).

In post-independence Namibia, the government started with a number of reforms in order to unify the educational system. The educational reforms led to the formulation of a policy document called *‘Towards Education For All’* (Namibia. MEC, 1993, p. 4), which guides the education sector in the country and introduced the four major educational goals: access, equity, quality, and democracy. The policy document further calls for democracy in education and a democratic education system organised around broader participation in decision-making for parents, learners, and teachers (Namibia. MEC, 1993, p. 4).

Another policy formulated to reform education is the *Namibian Education Act 16 of 2001*, which calls for the establishment of Learner Representative Councils (LRCs) at all government funded secondary schools (Namibia. [MEC], 2001). The LRC is the “highest body of elected leaders of learners and it must liaise between learners and school management” (Namibia. MEC, 2001, p. 19). This body serves to democratise and encourage participation of learners in school activities which align with policy imperatives.

Apart from policies, there are educational programmes in place to help with reform and development of the sector, such as the *Education Training Sector Improvement Programme* (ETSIP, 2006) which aims to improve the quality of education, and to enable the country to produce citizens who are capable of making Namibia a knowledge-based economy. The programme intends to bring about effective education and training that can lead to social participation and resultant participatory democracy.

In addition to the ETSIP (2006), the comprehensive Harambee Prosperity Plan (HPP, 2016) was introduced in 2016 as a way of gaining insight into the success of every kind of government-initiated programme in terms of its governance. This programme focuses on the implementation of government policies with the aim of removing potential challenges and accelerating development in the country. The word *Harambee* is a Kiswahili word which means “pull together in the same direction,” and the HPP calls on all Namibians to unite and work towards a common purpose (HPP, 2016, p. 6). The HPP includes learners also in every aspect and activity intended to increase prosperity in Namibia. Learners will be allowed to participate in public activities and thus have a voice that can allow them to participate meaningfully and effectively in issues related to the upliftment of society. It becomes the responsibility of the education sector to ensure that learners are properly equipped to take on the expectations expressed in the HPP.

In spite of these policies and initiatives, many argue that the leadership of schools have remained a hierarchical system, where the principal, as an individual, runs the school without recognition of the potential leadership of others (see for example, Hamatwi, 2015). Current studies on learner leadership in Namibia reveal that the LRC is not representing the interests of other learners, as

they do not take part in decision-making platforms (Uushona, 2012). In addition, Shekupakela-Nelulu reports that “there is an indecisive and autocratic mindset among educators regarding the sharing of power and decision-making with the learners” (2008. p. 3). This implies that those who were supposed to speak on behalf of other learners are silent and thus there is no broad participation of learners, as required by a democratic education system. Hence, simply having ‘correct’ policies is not enough; the education system and schools in particular need to implement a type of leadership that will allow learners to actually participate. This calls for a different view of leadership, where leadership is seen as fluid and evolving, rather than being a fixed phenomenon; it should be an activity anybody at any level can participate in (Harris, 2003).

In support of policy development, current leadership theory also embraces the participation of learners in the governance and management of schools. This approach, known as distributed leadership, advocates for shared leadership by multiple sources in an organisation (Gronn, 2008). This leadership phenomenon allows all stakeholders, including learners, to share in the responsibilities and to work towards a common goal. Distributed leadership further nurtures leadership development in learners and gives a platform for the learners’ voice to be heard (Grant & Nekondo, 2016). It is against this backdrop, that this study seeks to explore ways in which leadership can be developed in the structure of the LRC in a Namibian secondary school. In the section below my attention turns to the aims and research questions guiding this study.

#### **1.4 Aim and research questions**

The overall goal of this study is to critically engage learners and teachers with the purpose of developing learner leadership in the structure of the LRC, through Change Laboratory workshops which were conducted with the LRC members, at a public secondary school, in the Oshana Region, Namibia. The study is guided by the following question: **How can learner leadership be developed in the LRC?**

To answer this central research question, the study seeks to answer the following sub-questions:

- How is the term ‘learner leadership’ understood by teachers and learners at the school?
- What are the roles of the LRC at the school?
- What factors enable and constrain learner leadership development in the school?
- How can LRC voice be invoked through Change Laboratory workshops?

My attention now turns to addressing the potential value of this research study.

### **1.5 Potential value of the study**

The study is of potential value to the Ministry of Basic Education, Arts and Culture, teachers, and principals, and other researchers who have an interest in the development of learner leadership in Namibia. It also serves as a source of information to policymakers when formulating and revisiting policies related to learner leadership in Namibia. The Regional Directors can use the findings during training to communicate to novice and existing staff who are ‘stuck’ in their old leadership practices. The University of Namibia can also use the findings in training student teachers on leadership practice. Because the focus of the study is leadership which is distributed across different individuals, my attention now turns to distributed leadership which is the conceptual framework underpinning the study.

### **1.6 Conceptual framework**

According to Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004), distributed leadership as a theory is understood as a practice that surfaces in the implementation of leadership tasks, in and through the interactions of leaders, followers, and situations. In a school setting, distributed leadership “is framed as a product of the joint interactions of school leaders, followers and aspects of their situation such as tools and routines” (Spillane, 2006, p. 3). The inclusion of these three in the leadership practice necessitates the development of leadership amongst learners, and thus I argue that distributed leadership as a practice can be used in the development of learner leadership.

According to Uushona (2012), learner leadership development may occur through interaction, and building relationships with other learners or other members of the school, as well as through participation in school activities. In line with this, Mitra and Gross (2009) state that there are three stages involved in the development of learner voice in schools: being heard in their schools, collaborating with adults to make changes, and building capacity for leadership through the development of leadership opportunities for learners.

Learner voice can be heard through the Learner Representative Council (LRC), which is the platform intended for the learners to execute their democratic rights and enact democratic education. There is thus a need to create a supportive environment in schools for learner leadership opportunities to emerge (Hamatwi, 2015). In the section below my attention turns to the methodology used for this research study.

## **1.7 Methodology**

The research study took the form of a case study which focused on learner leadership. A case study “is a systematic and in-depth study of a particular case in its context” (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 42). A case study allowed me as a researcher to set boundaries for the research, and to effectively understand how the case of learner leadership, in this instance, operates and functions (Berg, 2001).

The research was designed as an interventionist study and adopted qualitative data collection tools. It aimed to construct meaning from the interactions among learners and teachers on the object of the activity: learner leadership. Learners were involved in a formative intervention through Change Laboratory (CL) workshops directed towards generation of solutions. Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) was used to analyse the data. CHAT interventions are driven by historically formed contradictions (Sannino, Engeström, & Lemos, 2016). The research study has a critical element to it as well. Critical researchers critique and question beliefs and practices that go against social justice in pursuit of change and emancipation (Scott & Morrison, 2007). CHAT as a framework aligns with a critical orientation, as they are both involved in questioning, tracing the history, and bringing about some form of transformation.

The research study used semi-structured questionnaires which were administered to the LRC members. Interviews were also conducted with three teachers. Analysis of documents such as the school code of conduct and school development plan were conducted. An observation report was also completed based on a schedule, and self- reflection through journaling was captured.

The data was analysed using an inductive approach. Later on, CHAT was used as a lens to surface the contradictions. Next, I present the outline of the thesis.

## **1.8 Thesis outline**

This chapter presented a rationale for the study, as well as the context of leadership in Namibia. It further discussed the aims, research questions, and potential value of the study. It also provided the conceptual framework and methodology employed in the study. It concludes with this thesis outline.

Chapter Two presents a review of the literature on learner leadership, tracing the origins of leadership and management, as well as discussing the leadership theories from which distributed leadership evolved. I also discuss CHAT as a theoretical framework of this study.

Chapter Three presents the research design. The case study approach, data gathering tools, and the data analysis processes are discussed. The research participants and selection strategies are also highlighted in this chapter. I have also included issues of validity, positionality, and ethical considerations in the chapter.

Chapter Four presents and discusses the data collected. In this chapter I commence with an overview of participants' profiles. Thereafter, I present the data collected (including Change Laboratory workshops) using themes and linking appropriate theory to this discussion. Finally, the presentation and discussion of findings related to challenges are discussed in a nuanced manner by using a CHAT lens. This facilitated a deeper understanding of these contradictions.

Chapter Five presents a summary of the key findings of the research study. I also discuss the potential value and limitations of the study. Furthermore, I provide a short discussion on the practicality of CHAT in the study, and finally I reflect on my research journey.

My attention now turns to Chapter Two, where the theoretical underpinning of the study is discussed.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

*The review of related literature involves the systematic identification, location and analysis of documents containing information related to the research problem. It determines what has already been done in terms of the research topic under study and provides an understanding and insight needed to place the research topic within a logical framework*

(Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009, p. 80)

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the theoretical perspectives on the phenomenon under study which is learner leadership and to alert the reader to Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) which informs how this study is framed. I acknowledge that there is a lack of published literature on the phenomenon of the study in the Namibian context. Thus I relied on sources mainly outside Namibia for the purposes of this study. In this chapter, I commence with the discussion on the field of Educational Leadership and Management in order to provide an understanding of the field. Secondly, I present leadership theories where traditional views of leadership and distributed leadership as a contemporary view are located. The chapter also addresses democracy in education, which highlights how the democratic education system in schools allows and nurtures the development of leadership in learners. The chapter concludes with the concept of learner leadership and a discussion of CHAT as a framework.

#### **2.2 The field of educational leadership and management: towards an understanding of leadership and management**

In this section I will briefly contextualise the field and then move on to a discussion of the concepts leadership and management.

### ***2.2.1 The field of educational leadership and management***

The field of ELM is relatively new and has gained prominence in the last few decades (see for example, Spillane, 2005; van der Mescht, 2008). Educational management started as a distinct discipline in the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and later moved to the United Kingdom where it was developed and established as a field (Bush, 2003). The evolution of the concept and practice of educational management emerged from management principles which were applied to industry (Bush, 1999). The scientific management theories of Taylor and management theory by Fayol are said to be some of the earliest contributions to the field, and their theories are currently applied in education (Bush, 2003).

The field has limited discourse and thus borrows from other disciplines such as, commerce, industry and psychology (Fitz, 1999). The discourses are reviewed, restructured and reconstructed to fit into educational settings (Fitz, 1999). It is based on this background, that the educational management field uses combined discourses which has led to the creation of educational discourse (Bush, 1999). Nowadays, educational leadership has progressed from being a new field dependent upon ideas developed in other settings, to become an established field with some theories and significant empirical data (Bush, 2003). However, the field names vary from educational administration to educational management and to educational leadership and management depending on the context (Van der Mescht, 2008). My attention now turns to the different foci of the names by providing a discussion of these concepts of leadership and management.

### ***2.2.2 Towards an understanding of management and leadership: defining the concepts***

Management and leadership are common but still contested terms in education. The literature indicates that these terms are used interchangeably by people from different contexts, however, one should be aware that they are distinct concepts (Coleman & Earley, 2005). There is a general consensus among various authors that management focuses on the preservation and maintenance of structures of the organisation (see for example, Spillane, 2005; Van der Mescht, 2008; Grant, 2009; Christie, 2010; de Villiers, 2010). In addition, Bush (2003) points out that management is concerned with internal operations of an institution and that it has an executive purpose of

carrying out approved procedures and policies as well as maintenance, directed towards achievement of identified educational goals.

On the other hand, leadership is a process of influencing others to reach set goals (Bush, 2003; Spillane, 2005; Christie, 2010; Gillies, 2013). Similarly, Spillane (2006) indicates that leadership is about influencing and motivating other members to be more knowledgeable. Likewise, Grant (2009) mentions that leadership is a process which works towards movement and transformation in an organisation. In the same vein, leadership is said to be related to people and it is change oriented (Van der Mescht, 2008; Gillies, 2013). The above definitions suggest that leadership is a process, it influences, it moves toward identified objectives and that it results in change.

Having defined the concepts of leadership and management, I next provide a distinction between the two concepts.

### ***2.2.3 Distinguishing between leadership and management***

One of the significant distinctions between leadership and management lies in the fact that leadership is associated with change, while management is linked with maintenance (Bush, 2003; Spillane, 2005). Similarly, leadership is tied to values of an institution while management is connected to implementation (Bush, 2003). In addition, Christie's (2010) distinction between the two concepts is fairly different as it focuses on the human element; she indicates that management is positional and thus tied to a position that one holds, whereas leadership can be practised by anyone as it is not reserved for positions.

Although there is a distinction between leadership and management they have an "intimate connection" and a great deal of similarity as far as inspiring as well as directing people to the purpose of the organisation concerned" (Bush, 2003, p. 8). He further elaborates that leadership and management are equally vital if schools are to function effectively and achieve the set goals. The school which is poorly managed, but yet has a strong leader, may fail just like a school which is over-managed but under-led, may lose any sense of the school goals; thus, a balance in

terms of leadership and management is needed for an institution to reach goals and objectives (Bush, 2003).

Having discussed the concepts of leadership and management, and with leadership being the focus of this study, I deem it necessary to provide a discussion of the traditional theories of leadership.

## **2.3 Theories of leadership: traditional theories to a more contemporary theory**

It is significant to understand the history of the field in terms of leadership theories since the past will help to direct the present, as well as inform the future. Various theories of leadership exist. This section will present the traditional theories which focused on an individual and contemporary theories which centres on shared leadership.

### ***2.3.1 Traditional theories of leadership***

This section will discuss the trends of the trait theory of leadership, behavioural theory and lastly transformational leadership.

#### ***2.3.1.1 Trait theory of leadership***

The trait theory focused on the individual leader, that one heroic person was responsible for the efficiency of an organisation (Hartley, 2007; Spillane & Harris, 2008). The trait theory dominated leadership thinking until the 1940s and it focused on human traits (Tng, 2009, p. 2). It was based on the notion that people are born with inherent characteristics that make them leaders (*ibid.*). There were certain characteristics which were perceived to be signs of leadership qualities such as “emotional intelligence, charisma, dominance and conservatism” (Conger & Kanungo, as cited in Knott-Craig, 2007, p. 25). The idea was that if traits that distinguish leaders from followers could be recognised, successful leaders could be evaluated and given leadership positions (Horner, 1997).

This style entrusted one person with all the attributes needed to transform the organisation. According to Tng (2009, p. 2) the leadership research could not establish “universal traits for leadership success”. In addition, there were claims that leaders exhibited some useful managerial traits over non-leaders, but none of these traits were clearly superior (Tng, 2009, p. 2).

This leadership approach would be inadequate in a school leadership context, as the focus should be on the practice of leadership and not on the traits and actions, since leadership involves interactions of multiple people with various tools (Spillane, 2005).

### ***2.3.1.2 Behavioural theory***

Based on the fact that the trait theory was not successful in establishing universal attributes of a leader, a new leadership theory called behavioural theory of leadership was introduced around the 1950s (Tng, 2009). However, just like its predecessor, it also focused on leadership as something possessed by one person in an organisation only. This leadership theory looked at how leaders behaved, in an attempt to conclude what successful leaders did and did not do (Horner, 1997). Behavioural theory of leadership was initiated and grounded by the idea that leaders were made and not born (Amanchukwu, Stanley, & Ololube, 2015). In addition, the theory implied that anyone who wanted to become a leader could be trained and observed, resulting in the development of a leader (*ibid.*, p. 8). This implied that learners could be taught leadership in schools and become effective leaders as “everyone is born to lead the same way that everyone is born to learn” (Lambert, as cited in Uushona, 2012, p. 13).

In addition, behavioural theories explained leadership theory using two-dimensional models (Tng, 2009). Although the dimensions were given various names, the study will only highlight the dimension which had “concern with people and concern for production ... leading to a task relational dichotomy for leadership behaviour” (Blake & Mouton, as cited in Tng, 2009, p. 2). This dimension attempted to balance the administrative tasks with human tasks, however, this seemed to be a challenge as nothing stays constant in school leadership. This theory seemed to maintain the heroic leadership genre discussed earlier, whereby expecting the principal with certain distinct behaviours, to balance the school tasks with human relations. As a result, this

theory appeared not to view leadership as a practice involving an array of individuals, such as the LRC (Spillane, 2005). My focus now turns to transformational leadership.

### ***2.3.1.3 Transformational leadership***

The idea of transformational leadership was created by Burns and developed by Bass (Gregory-Stone, Russel, & Patterson, 2004). Transformational leadership develops and enhances followers to achieve objectives of the institution (*ibid.*).

Transformational leadership is described as:

Grooming followers into future leaders by giving them freedom to control their behaviour, elevates followers' concerns from physical to psychological needs, inspires subordinates to consider group rather than self-interests, and communicates desired outcomes to let subordinates perceive changes as worthwhile (Bass, Yammarino, Spangler, & Bass, as cited in Tng, 2009, p. 2).

In the educational context, transformational leadership is assumed to link leadership to morals, as such leaders are seen as moral agents (Tng, 2009). Similarly, the inspiration and mentoring help to develop followers, who eventually become leaders and revolution agents in the transformation of the organisation (Hoy & Miskel, 1996).

Although transformational leadership is said to transform organisations, the leadership theory still hinges on one single, heroic person who is expected to enhance and motivate followers as well as to develop them for organisational success. The trend just like its predecessors entrusts a heroic leader alone to change others (Spillane, 2005). This approach tends not to include the LRC members in the leadership practice and it is inadequate for school leadership.

This section deliberated on traditional theories which all focused on leadership as the influence held by a singular person. In the next section, the discussion will turn to distributed leadership as a contemporary theory of leadership.

### ***2.3.2 Distributed leadership as a contemporary view of leadership***

Research in educational leadership has shifted away from leadership views associated with attributes and behaviours of singular heroic leaders, to distributed leadership as a contemporary leadership theory which views leadership as a practice involving multiple leaders (Spillane et al., 2001; Spillane, 2005; Harris & Spillane, 2008). Although distributed leadership is considered a new kid on the block, the notion of distributed leadership has gained momentum and has caught the attention of researchers, educational reformers and policy makers (see for example, Spillane, 2006 & Harris, 2008). This section commences with the background and definition of distributed leadership. Thereafter, a presentation of the benefits and challenges of distributed leadership in the school context follows.

#### ***2.3.2.1 The background of distributed leadership***

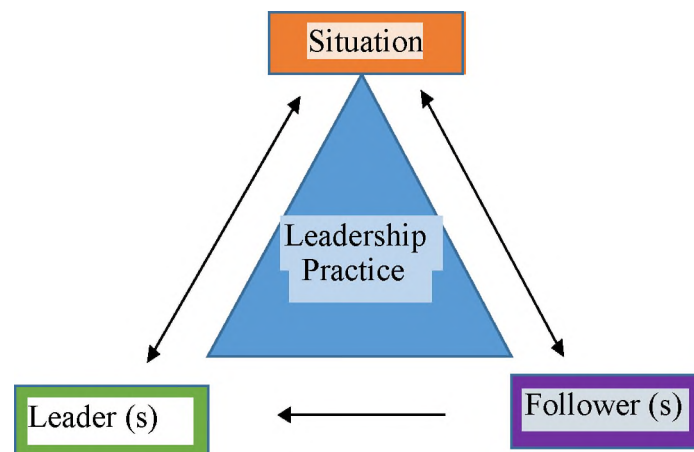
The genesis of distributed leadership was derived from the field of organisational theory around the mid-1960s (Williams, 2011). However, the theory only received prominence during the last 10 years. Bolden (2011) states that the origins of distributed leadership arose from distributed cognition and activity theory. Cognitive activity, which is knowing what to do, is socially distributed and thus influenced by other people. While, activity theory is a situated activity; in mediated interactions between subjects, objects, rules, community, division of labour and instruments. The distributed perspective of leadership understands leadership activities as situated and social (*ibid.*). I will pick up on this discussion of activity theory in Section 2.6 of this chapter.

Studies by Harris and Spillane (2008) and Williams (2011, p. 191) explain that different concepts such as democratic leadership, shared leadership and collaborative leadership are used to promote distributed leadership. However, Spillane (2005) argues that shared leadership, collaborative leadership and democratic leadership are not synonyms for distributed leadership. This idea is further discussed under challenges. My attention now turns to the various definitions of distributed leadership.

### 2.3.2.2 Distributed leadership defined

Recent studies reveal a nuanced understanding of distributed leadership by different authors. For instance, Grant (2008) defines distributed leadership as a “shared process which involves working with all stakeholders in a collegial and creative way to seek out the untapped leadership potential of people and develop this potential in a supportive environment for the betterment of the people” (p. 85). While, Gronn (2000, p. 324) states that distributed leadership is “seen as fluid and emergent rather than as a fixed phenomenon” (p. 324), besides, distributed leadership is not something “done” by an individual “to others”, rather it is emergent property of a group or network of individuals in which group members pool their expertise” (Benett et al., as cited in Harris, 2004) p. 14). Similarly, Grant (2008) states that distributed leadership involves and engages expertise within the organisation instead of looking for it from people who hold formal roles.

In addition, Spillane (2005) clarifies that distributed leadership is first and foremost about leadership practice rather than actions of leaders. Therefore, a distributed leadership practice is not a product of the leaders’ knowledge and skills but a product of interactions of school leaders, followers and their situation (Spillane, 2005; Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2004; de Villiers, 2010). In a school situation, distributed leadership is stretched over the school social and situational contexts (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001), hence, ensuring that each component of the leadership practice such as situation, leaders and followers interact with each other (Spillane et al., 2001; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004) (see Figure 2.1).



**Figure 2.1: A model of leadership practice** (Adapted from Spillane et al., 2004, p. 11).

The triangle represents Spillane's leader-follower-situation model that places leadership practice central to distributed leadership (Spillane et al., 2004). The inclusion of the three components in the leadership practice necessitates the development of leadership among learners.

I now turn to the benefits of using distributed leadership in the school.

### ***2.3.2.3 The benefits of distributed leadership in the school***

In this subsection I present the benefits of distributed leadership in the school. Distributed leadership as a practice can be used in development of leadership amongst the learners in schools. Firstly, it offers a set of ideas that can be harnessed to frame diagnoses and inform the design process (Harris & Spillane, 2008, p. 33). In addition, distributed leadership "offers the schools the opportunity to stand back and think exactly how leadership is distributed and the difference made or not made, by distribution" (Harris & Spillane, 2008, p. 33).

Secondly, Harris (2008) and Harris and Spillane (2008) state that distributed leadership has the potential to positively influence organisational change in terms of organisational outcome and student learning. Student results are likely to improve when leadership sources are distributed throughout the school community (Harris, 2008). Similarly, Uushona (2012) indicates that schools that implement distributed leadership secures and sustains improvement.

Thirdly, distributed leadership acknowledges all individuals who can contribute to leadership practices, whether they are formally designated or defined as leaders (Harris & Spillane, 2008), making it a powerful tool for transforming leadership practices in schools (Harris, 2008). In addition, Williams (2011) indicates that distributed leadership gives importance to agency of persons' interactions, making it an ideal leadership practice where learners are given a voice to contribute to the decision-making process. As such, distributed leadership tends to find functional solutions to problems related to students' learning (Gronn, 2008). Furthermore, Harris and Mujis (2005) express that distributed leadership bring benefits from various sources of guidance and direction in the school (Harris & Mujis, 2005).

Lastly, Gronn (2008) and de Villiers (2010) state that distributed leadership provide leadership from an angle of shared leadership which allows teamwork and collaboration. This has made distributed leadership an ideal theory of leadership in schools, since it would lessen the workload of the principal (de Villiers, 2010), while at the same time, empowering teachers and learners entrusted with leadership responsibilities (Lumby, 2013). Although distributed leadership benefits the school, I am cognisant of the challenges of distributed leadership in the school and these are presented next.

#### ***2.3.2.4 Challenges of distributed leadership in the school***

Distributed leadership is viewed as the leadership idea of the moment; however, it has its shortcomings. Firstly, Williams (2011) and Harris and Spillane (2008) mention that distributed leadership lacks conceptual clarity. In addition, Harris and Spillane (2008) explain that there is conceptual overlap and confusion of what distributed leadership is, as the concept overlaps with any form of collective leadership such as shared, democratic and team leadership. In a similar vein, Harris (2009) articulates that distributed leadership is “an old managerialism in a contemporary guise” (p. 55). This implies that distributed leadership is not really a new method of leadership, but that it is the old managerial style which has been given a new name (Harris, 2009). Similarly, lack of clarity may be confusing to principals, who could over delegate their work to their teachers, in the name of distributed leadership (Grant, 2008).

Secondly, the implementation of distributed leadership might be hindered by the readiness of the implementers in a school setting, therefore, implementers need to be made aware of the leadership practice before introducing it in schools; teachers and principals as implementers, may not be able to implement this new style of leadership if they are not adequately motivated and trained on it (Williams, 2011).

Thirdly, cultural attitudes may also be a challenge in implementation of distributed leadership. Donnell and Boyle (as cited in Nangolo, 2015, p. 10) refer to the culture of a particular group of people, as being constituted from their unique norms, values and beliefs, as well as the ways they behave. In addition, culture is socially constructed, as a group of people in a certain school, may create and adopt a certain way of behaving or getting things done (Schein, as cited in Nangolo,

2015, p. 10). Based on this, people at a certain organisation may be used to doing things the same way; as such, it may be hard to adapt and practice distributed leadership (*ibid.*, 2015).

Lastly, distributed leadership is silent on issues of power, as it does not address how power can be distributed (Lumby, 2013). Therefore, there is a concern that people who hold positions of power will be more likely to participate compared to others and this could maintain the power status quo (*ibid.*). In addition, distributed leadership does not disclose how the power could be redistributed in terms of age, background and gender (Lumby, 2013). This implies that in a school setting, it is not clear how the principal could distribute leadership in terms of age, race, and experience and if so how it advantages or disadvantages specific individuals. Learner leadership development may indirectly suffer from these challenges, for instance, if the principal decides to delegate hard tasks to learners, it may discourage them instead of developing the learners (Grant, 2008).

This section provided an overview of traditional theories of leadership and distributed leadership as a contemporary theory of leadership. Distributed leadership clears the path for democratic education to emerge at the school, to which my attention now turns.

#### **2.4. Accessibility to democratic education for learners**

In this section I discuss democracy in education. One of the major education goals in Namibia is democracy, which is provided through a democratic education system (Namibia. MEC, 1993). In its policy document '*Towards Education for All*', the ministry stipulates that: "Democracy is our commitment to developing an education system that will play a central role in transforming our society. To teach democracy we must be democratic. And being democratic will enable us to expand access, promote equity, and raise quality" (*ibid.*, p. 67). In addition, the democratic education system is organised around participation in decision-making of all stakeholders in education, which is parents, teachers, learners and communities. The ministry policy guide encourages the participation of learners in school decisions through which learners are expected to partake in the shared responsibility of leading in their schools (Namibia. MEC, 1993).

Studies conducted in Namibia by Uushona (2012), Nauyoma-Hamupembe (2011) and Shekupakela-Nelulu (2008) have however revealed that the silence in learners' voices affects their access to democratic education. The policy document specifies that "schools should enable learners to become active participants in school governance and active contributors to discussions of school management" (Namibia. MEC, 1993, p. 30). However, Shekupakela-Nelulu (2008) mentions that although learners are recognised as stakeholders in education, they do not really play any role in leadership at schools. Similarly, Nauyoma-Hamupembe (2011) states that learners who do not have roles in the LRC bodies indicate that their views on school policies are disregarded, simply because they do not hold positions in the governing body.

Therefore, introducing a type of leadership that focuses upon the team and its interactions might enable access to democratic education (Spillane et al., 2001; Harris & Spillane, 2008), and this may just be the base for learner leadership.

My attention now turns to learner leadership as a form of distributed leadership that promotes democracy in schools.

## **2.5 Towards an understanding of learner leadership**

The concept of student leadership is often used interchangeably with the term student agency, student voice and student participation (Black, Walsh, Magee, Hutchins, Berman, & Groundwater-Smith, 2014). Some of the literature that I drew on uses the term 'student' instead of 'learners'. However, I will use the term 'learners' in this study, since in Namibia the term 'learner' refers to "any person receiving basic education; which is a formal education provided from the level of first grade to the level of the twelfth grade" (Namibia. MEC, 2001, p. 5).

This section commences by defining learner leadership. Thereafter, it discusses the notion of giving learners a voice and concludes with the challenges of learner leadership.

### *2.5.1 Defining learner leadership*

Searching for a definition of learner leadership turned out to be complex, as I could not find a single similar definition of learner leadership. Similarly, Shatilova (2014) and Uushona (2012) indicate that there is no singular or generic definition of what learner leadership is. Authors tend to define learner leadership differently. Firstly, I will provide a definition using models. Knott-Craig (2007) indicates that some authors have attempted to explain student leadership using models. For instance, van Linden and Fertman (as cited in Knott-Craig, 2007, p. 13) discuss a model which pinpoints three key stages in adolescents' leadership development: The first one is awareness which involves adolescents becoming aware of their leadership potential, as well as the necessity to be trained in leadership styles and skills; the second stage is described as expansion in leadership capacity through widening social interaction – this stage has some sort of training as well; the third and final model is about undertaking the responsibilities – this is through doing and tackling projects that demonstrate leadership. The aim of this model is to recognise the type of support and learning the adolescent leaders may need at each stage. In addition, Goldman and Newman (as cited in Knott-Craig, 2007, p. 13) use a model called the quality student leadership model. This model places the learner at its centre and claims that learner enablement through participation, is crucial to leadership development.

Secondly, learner leadership is defined by characteristics provided by numerous authors (see for example, Theron & Botha; Mordaunt; Rudduck & Flutter; Clarke & McGregor, as cited in Uushona, 2012, p. 22). These characteristics are:

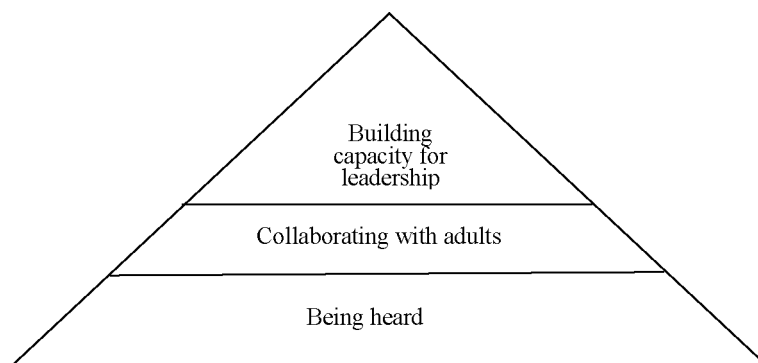
- It is a relational process;
- It involves interaction and building relationships with other students, peer leaders and other members of the school;
- It involves external community;
- It has an outcome of developing leadership skills in students;
- It involves many types of leadership;
- It may develop through participation.

Lastly, learner leadership is defined by Shatilova (2014) as giving the learners a voice to undertake decision-making and empowering them to transform social norms in their schools. Having provided the definition of learner leadership, I now turn my attention to focus on this notion of learner voice.

### ***2.5.2 Giving learners a voice in the school***

The contemporary concept of learner voice is described by Fielding (2004) as an “apparent desire to encourage young people to articulate their concerns and aspirations about a whole range of matters that has the potential to offer an important contribution to education” (p. 197). Similarly, Mitra (2007) and Mitra and Gross (2009) describe learner voice as the many ways in which youth could actively participate in school decisions that will shape their lives and the lives of their peers. In a similar vein, Grant (2015) states that student voice explains the diversities of ways in which learners can share in decision-making in schools.

Current views on learner voice are described by Mitra and Gross (2009) as a way that is different from traditional student roles, as they go the extra mile rather than just showing school spirit through rallies for example. Correspondingly, Fielding states that student voice covers a range of activities that encourage reflection, discussion, dialogue and action on matters that primarily concern students (2004, p. 199). In addition, Mitra (2007) explains that students are included in efforts that influence the core activities and structures of their schools. In a school setting, Mitra and Gross (2009) explain that there are three stages involved in learners’ voice: Being heard, collaborating with adults and building capacity for leadership.



***Figure 2.2: Pyramid of learners’ voice (Mitra & Gross, 2009, p. 523)***

Firstly, Mitra and Gross (2009) mention that learners can be heard by encouraging them to express their opinion about issues and advocate for change. Secondly, learners can collaborate with adults to address the problems in schools or seek changes around their schools (Mitra, 2007; Mitra & Gross, 2009). Thirdly, Mitra and Gross (2009) emphasise that learner leadership capabilities can be built through involvement in leadership building activities. The pyramid of learners' voice can be interconnected to distributed leadership which nurtures leadership development in learners (Grant & Nekondo, 2016).

Studies by Mitra (2007) and Hine (2011) have accounted for numerous benefits of giving and hearing learners' voices in schools. Mitra (2007) mentions that an opportunity to consider student voice has a potential to improve student results and school reconstruction. Similarly, Hine (2011) indicates that there are benefits in giving and hearing students voice as it engenders a sense of pride in their school as they start to feel like they are really part of it. It also provides adults with valuable insights into the dynamics of the school, through the lens of students. In contrast, Grant (2015) states that learners who have limited opportunities for democratic voice in the educational process, feel their lives, beliefs and hopes are undervalued by schooling and hence develop hostility towards school. Learner voice thus plays a very significant role, as it offers true democracy within the institution and leads to student participation in developing their schools (*ibid.*). Next, I discuss the challenges facing learner leadership in schools.

### ***2.5.3 Challenges facing learner leadership development in the school***

There are numerous challenges reported by scholars that hamper learner leadership development. Firstly, Mitra and Gross (2009) highlight that the communication gap between the school board, administration and students is an obstacle to the development of student voice. Some students in USA and Australia indicated that they wanted to be heard in a group, thus they shared a sense of frustration that they were being ignored collectively (Smyth, 2006). Secondary, Smyth (2006, p. 280) states that there is a need for a kind of leadership that fosters student voice, as many learners are suffocating from a lack of human connection. There is a need for interactions between and within learners to make up for human interactions and this is attainable by entrusting learners with leadership roles (*ibid.*).

Thirdly, Black et al. (2014) mentions that the hierarchical leadership model in schools could pose a challenge. The prospects for learners to participate meaningfully could be delimited by the hierarchical system in which schools operate. The structure is made to accommodate ideas from top to bottom, making it harder for the custodians of schools to accommodate ideas from the bottom to top (Black et al., 2014). In a similar vein, Hine (2011) highlights that lack of support by teachers and the misconception of staff regarding student roles may work against the notion of student leadership development. It may therefore result in student leadership failing. Similarly, Shekupakela-Nelulu (2008) raises the point that cultural influences could be a challenge. Traditionally, it is taboo for children to be in the presence of adults when there is discussion of important matters (Shekupakela-Nelulu, 2008). When adults are discussing issues that need to be resolved, children are sent away. Learners coming from this background where they are discouraged to speak out, may find it hard to suddenly voice their views. This could hinder learner leadership which advocates for the notion of multivoicedness in schools.

Fourthly, the policy framework may pose as a challenge as well. The Namibian Education Act 16 of 2001 calls for an establishment of a body called the Learners' Representative Council (LRC) at all government secondary schools, this is the "highest body of elected leaders of learners and it must liaise between learners and school management" (Namibia. MBESSC, 2001, p. 19). The Act further clarifies that the LRC is the mouthpiece of other learners and has to be involved in decision-making on behalf of other learners (*ibid.*). However, the LRC benefits some learners only, most particularly those who are directly involved, rather than functioning to build the knowledge and skills of all students in a particular school (Black et al., 2014). In this situation, policy frameworks could pose as a challenge to learner leadership development.

Having discussed learner leadership as a form of distributed leadership, my attention now turns to CHAT which has its theoretical underpinnings in a distributed perspective.

## 2.6 CHAT as a framework for the study

### 2.6.1 Introduction

Earlier in this chapter I discussed distributed leadership as a conceptual framework of the study. Distributed leadership theory originated from distributed cognition and activity theory (Bolden, 2011). At this point I would like to emphasise the point I made in Section 2.5.1, that Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) is a situated activity in mediated interactions between subjects, objects, rules, community, the division of labour and tools (Bolden, 2011). In addition, CHAT is concerned with unfolding a practical activity, as well as in intervening in the practice “in order to promote change” (Grant, 2017, p. 14). Based on this, CHAT is my chosen theoretical framing for this interventionist study. In this section, the theoretical underpinnings of CHAT will be discussed.

### 2.6.2 The genesis of CHAT

CHAT originated from the work of Vygotsky in Russia around the 1920s and early 1930s. Vygotsky’s work on human development and learning was further developed by his colleague Leontiev and, more recently, by Engeström (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). CHAT has evolved through three generations. The **first generation** of CHAT emerged from Vygotsky and it centres on the concept of mediation (Sannino, Daniels, & Gutierrez, 2009). Vygotsky proposed that the relationship between human agents and their environment is mediated by tools. The idea of mediation is represented by a triangular model which entails subject, object, and mediating tools. Mediation opens a way for development and it is acted upon by cultural and historical factors in the course of ongoing human activity (Daniels, 2008). However, there was a limitation to this model, the unit of analysis remains individually focused and thus cultural evolutions were not taken into account (*ibid.*). This limitation was overcome by the second generation of CHAT which was improved by Leontiev.

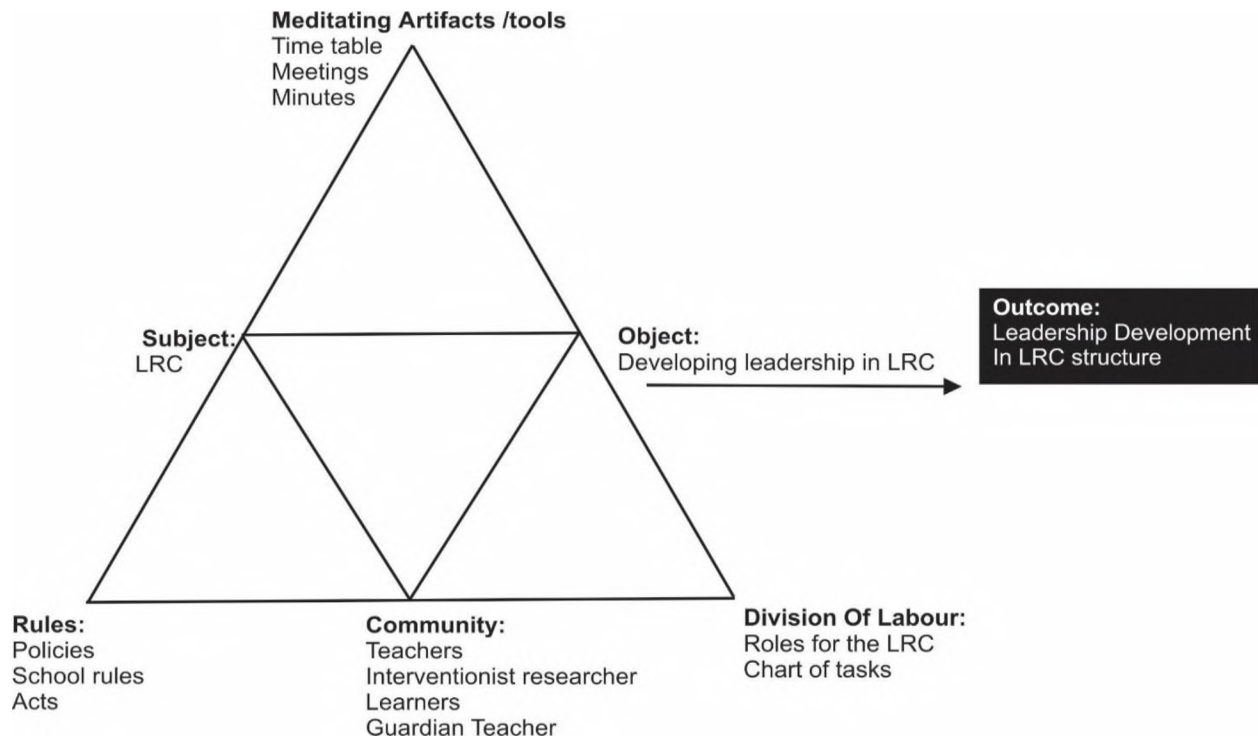
The **second generation** of CHAT was the key framework for this study since the study focused on one collective activity system only. An activity system is described by Mukute as a group of any size, pursuing a certain goal in a focused way (2010); it is something collective that brings in

the collaborative relations between people and the object (Ploettner & Tresseras, 2016). Leontiev's second generation shifted the focus from being individually focused to a collective activity with an inclusion of rules, community, and division of labour and how all the elements could contribute to the mediation process (Olavarria, 2013). This generation attempted to clarify the activity itself from actions. The activity is recognised by its object or goal and therefore, there is a clear distinction between the concepts of *actions* and *activity* in this model (Foot, 2001). In addition, an activity is a collective, systematic formation that has a complex mediational structure which produces actions, and is realised by actions. However, activity is not reducible to actions (Daniels, 2008). Actions are individually focused and have a temporary clear-cut beginning and end, which subjects of the activity systems take, in the process of participating in an activity. An activity system, on the other hand, evolves over a length of time, often taking the form of an institution (Daniels, 2008).

The strength of the second generation of CHAT lies in its capability to bring forth interrelations between the individual subject and his/her community. However, this is also the area where internal contradictions caused by tensions can hinder the subject participation in the activity, in trying to reach the object. Contradictions are cultural-historical “evolving tensions that can be detected and dealt with in real activity systems” (Engeström & Sannino, 2010, p. 4). Contradictions are explained later in more detail under the principles of CHAT. The limitation of the second generation is that it is not accommodative of cultural diversity and perspectives outside the central activity system (Engeström, 2001). Although there is a third generation, it is not within the scope of this study and, therefore, will not be discussed.

### ***2.6.3 Elements of the activity system of this study***

There are six elements in the activity system: subjects, rules, community, the division of labour, mediation tools and the object and it is represented as a triangle (Sannino, 2011, p. 574). The triangular pyramid of the activity system for this study is presented below:



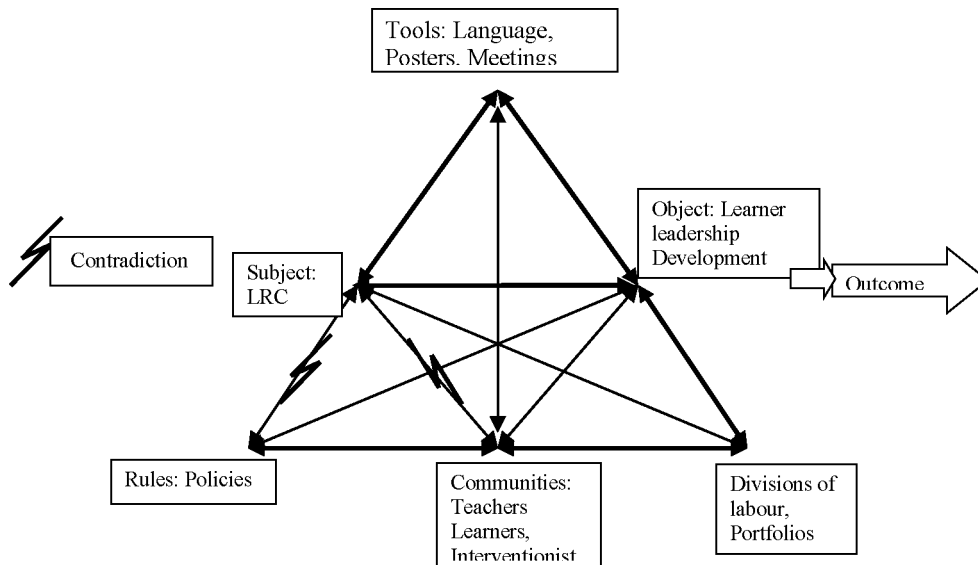
**Figure 2.3: Second generation activity system** (adapted from Engeström, 1987)

The activity system above shows different elements of the system; in my study, the object of the activity system was the goal that was worked on, which was learner leadership development amongst the LRC. Subjects were the LRC participants. Rules were policies and Acts which mediated the interactions between the subject and the community as well as between the subject and the object. Mediation tools were the minutes, meetings, charts and other tools that were used for understanding and transformation of the object. Community represented the group with interest in leadership development which were the teachers, the researcher-interventionist and other learners. Division of labour was the vertical and horizontal allocation of responsibilities that mediated relations between the community and the object. The interaction between the elements of the activity system develops human consciousness, and results in a meaning making process that has a potential to transform the subject as well as the object (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010).

#### **2.6.4. Five principles of CHAT**

Engeström’s model of CHAT is characterised by five principles. The first principle explains the activity system as a unit of analysis (Engeström, 2001). People are interconnected with different activities every day, therefore the activity which people are involved in, is considered the unit of analysis (Ploettner & Tresseras, 2016). The second one is the multivoicedness of the activity. The activity system consists of different people, who all have various ideas and opinions. Therefore, an activity system is always an interconnected web of multiple points of view, traditions, and interests, which bring forth tension and innovation (Engeström, 2001). The third one is historicity of the activity. The activity system takes shape and gets transformed over lengthy periods of time, therefore their problems and potential can only be understood against their own history (*ibid.*).

The fourth principle explains the central role of contradictions and tensions as sources of change and development (Engeström, 2001). Activity theory uses the term contradictions to show misfits within or between elements of a single activity system (Foot, 2001). As contradictions emerge, new ways of developing the activity arises and evolve within and between the elements of the activity system (Foot, 2014). There are different levels of contradictions, however, and the study will only present the two levels that were applicable – the primary contradiction which occurs within a single element of an activity system (Foot, 2014), as well as the secondary contradiction, which develops between two elements of an activity (Foot, 2014). The figure below attempts to show how contradictions lie in the activity system of the study.



**Figure 2.4: Second generation of CHAT with contradictions** (adapted from Engeström, 2000b).

The fifth principle describes expansive learning cycles as a possible form of transformation in the activity (Engeström, 2001). This principle is discussed fully next.

### 2.6.5 Expansive learning

Expansive learning involves the creation of new knowledge and new practices for a newly emerging activity; it is about learning something which is not yet there as knowledge is being learned as it is being developed (Daniels, 2008, p. 126). In addition, Engeström views expansive learning as a learning process whereby the “subject of learning is transformed from isolated individuals to collectives” (Engeström, 2016, p. 44). The expansive learning process allows growth and transformation of the object by pushing the subjects to exceed and go beyond the problem initially given (Sannino et al., 2009, p. 302). Therefore, expansive learning enables individuals to move towards their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is the space for expansive transition. Engeström and Sannino (2010) describe the Zone of Proximal Development as the distance between what an individual can do on their own and what they can do with the help of a more knowledgeable other. An expansive learning cycle has seven stages (Engeström, 2016). However, I only discuss the first three which were covered in this study. Engeström explains the first three of the seven stages of expansive learning cycle as follows: In the first stage, participants are involved in questioning, criticising and rejecting certain existing practices. The second stage involves participants analysing the situation in order to identify causes, by tracing its origin and evolution or by constructing a picture of its inner systemic relations. During the third stage, participants model new solutions (Engeström, 2016). The Figure below (Figure 2.5) attempts to summarise the expansive learning cycle.

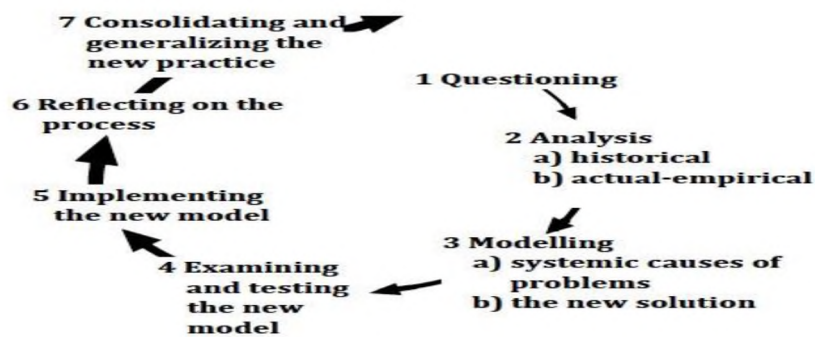


Figure 2.5: The expansive learning cycle (adapted from Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013, p. 47)

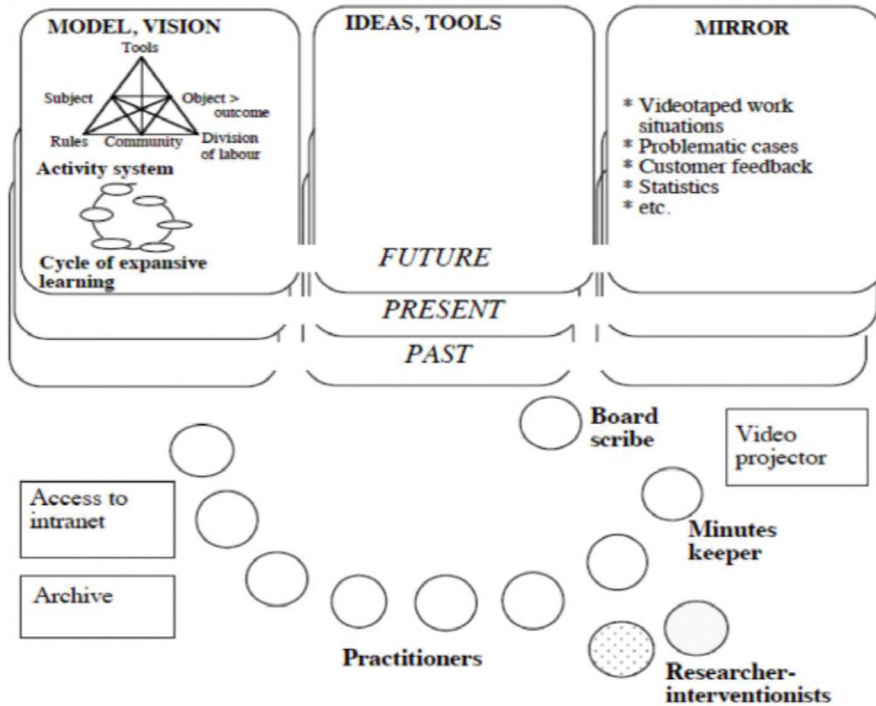
The LRC members went through three stages of expansive learning which guided the Change Laboratory workshops which are presented below.

### ***2.6.6 Change Laboratory intervention***

A Change Laboratory is a novel method and instrument for a developmental intervention to support collaborative learning in and transformation of work activities (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013). Change Laboratories are further defined by Virkkunen and Newnham as a “formative intervention method for developing work activities by the practitioners in collaboration with the researcher-interventionist” (2013, p. 16). According to Ploettner and Tresseras, Change Laboratories trigger and support the process of expansive learning where activity systems are transformed and new potential is found (2016).

A Change Laboratory intervention is foundationally built on two principles connected to the theory of expansive learning, the principles of ‘double stimulation’ and ‘ascending from abstract to the concrete’ (Ploettner & Tresseras, 2016). Double stimulation was employed in the study. The mirror data on contradictions provided the first stimulus, while the object and the expanded learning practice helped learners to redesign their activity thus offering the second stimulus. In addition, the principle of ascending from abstract to the concrete was used in the Change Laboratory workshops (CLW) as well. The researcher-interventionist invites participants to think differently – that is to think dialectically about their activity (*ibid.*). The Change Laboratory intervention thus challenges participants to acquire a different type of thinking about their work (Ploettner & Tresseras, 2016).

In this study, learners worked with me as a researcher-interventionist in two Change Laboratory sessions to analyse and specify the challenges of developing the activity and creating a new model for it.



**Figure 2.6: Layout of a Change Laboratory space** (adapted from Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013, p. 16).

According to Virkkunen & Newnham (2013), the model/vision surfaces are reserved for modelling the past, present and future structure of the activity and inner contradictions in it (see Figure 2.5). Ideas/tools surfaces are reserved for insights from the participants. Mirror surfaces are used to provide the learners with a mirror reflection of the current practice of learner leadership. The mirror of the present surface is used to represent and examine innovations and experiences from work practices. The mirror of the past, comprises data and observation concerning historical changes in the activity. The mirror of the future is used to represent and discuss follow-ups concerning participant's experiments with new concepts and tools, which they have created and with which they begin to build the future form of the activity (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013, p. 16).

### *2.6.7. Relevance of CHAT to my study*

I found CHAT to be of significance to my study because it provided me with an interventionist methodology to engage in. CHAT allowed me to conduct a formative intervention, “a collective effort to understand and face contradictions and the problems that they engender” in the school (Sannino et al., 2016, p. 3). I worked with the LRC as subjects of the activity system, to surface the contradictions, as well as empowering them to own the transformation that emerged from the study. CHAT was thus ideal for studying and transforming practical work activity, allowing learners in the LRC to work on the practical activity of learners’ leadership development.

Furthermore, CHAT provided me with a lens to look at learner leadership practice from different perspectives and not to conform to the school environment only. I was able to look at learner leadership development as part of a broader transformation effort, that is inevitable in today’s world. I gained an in-depth understanding of the practice and explored the cultural-historical roots and tensions in the activity system. I was able to recognise the fact that learner leadership is not an issue for teachers and learners only, but a societal and national struggle (Ploettner & Tresseras, 2016).

The usage of CHAT was ideal for my study since it gave learners a platform through Change Laboratory workshops to voice out issues. Learners participated in discussions and decision-making during the Change Laboratory workshops and this resonates with the views of democratic education which is organised around participation in decision-making by all stakeholders, including learners. Therefore, CHAT and Change Laboratory workshops specifically facilitated the development and nurturing of LRC leadership, which might result in eliminating the silence in learner voice which is the focus of the study. I made specific choices for my research study, such as the usage of second generation CHAT and having the LRC members only in the CLWs. I argue that these choices were to do with giving learners the space to speak, since in the African context, had other stakeholders been there, the learners would not have voiced their opinions so openly.

### ***2.6.8. The limitations of CHAT***

Firstly, Cultural Historical Activity Theory was developed in Finland, a country with a different socio-economic set up to Namibia. For instance, its principle of multivoicedness might not possibly manifest itself well in an African country such as Namibia, where children are taught to listen and are discouraged from questioning their elders. I perceived this as a threat early in my study, and as a result I decided to conduct Change Laboratory workshops with the LRC members only and excluded teachers, to avoid cultural influence.

Secondly, the Cultural Historical Activity Theory principle of expansive learning is often criticised for not dealing with power issues (Masilela, 2017). It is argued that during the questioning stage, it does not take into account who the participants are. Therefore, it is not clear who is doing the questioning, who is silenced and who is prevented from participating in the questioning (Masilela, 2017). This implies that people who hold positions of power will be more likely to participate, compared to others and this might contradict with the intention of distributed leadership theory.

Thirdly, CHAT is an object-oriented theory. Engeström and Sannino (2010, p. 4) indicate that the object is the resistant raw materials, future-oriented purpose of an activity and is the true carrier of the motive of the activity. However, Nussbaumer (2012) argues that if the object is the driving movement for development and change, the model needs to be rethought, as it misses articulation of societal contradictions (p. 38). Society could also drive the subject and not only the object.

## **2.7 CONCLUSION**

This chapter described the theoretical underpinnings of this study. In the next chapter, my attention turns to the methodology embraced in this study.

# CHAPTER THREE

## METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction and research questions

This chapter discusses the methodological considerations of the study by providing the “rationale that explain reasons for using specific strategies and methods in order to construct, collect and develop knowledge” in leadership development (Scott & Morrison, 2007, p. 153). This methodology section of the study elaborates and demonstrates how knowledge was acquired in this study. The chapter commences with a description of the orientation of the study. I then move on to discuss the research site and the participants of the study. The data generation tools and data analysis will also be tackled. The chapter concludes with a discussion of research ethics, trustworthiness of the data and the limitations of the study.

To remind the reader, the overall purpose of the research study and the research questions are reiterated. The overall goal of this study was to critically engage learners and teachers with the purpose of developing learner leadership in the structure of the Learners Representative Council through Change Laboratory workshops which were conducted with the LRC members. The study was guided by the overarching question: **How can learner leadership be developed in the LRC?**

To address this goal, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

- How is the term learner leadership understood by teachers and learners at the school?
- What are the roles of the LRC members at the school?
- What factors enable and constrain learner leadership development in the school?
- How can LRC voice be invoked through Change Laboratory workshops?

### 3.2 Research orientation

The research study was designed as an interventionist study and adopted qualitative data collection tools. An interventionist study design was used in order to “analyse as well as to generate new practices and promote change” (Sannino, 2011, p. 580). The study was located in a formative intervention framework called Change Laboratory. Change Laboratory is an “interventionist method for transforming work used by researchers within the broad theoretical and methodological framework of developmental work” (*ibid.*, p. 590). The Change Laboratory made it possible for me as researcher-interventionist to collaborate with learners in generation of solutions. In this study, Change Laboratory workshops were used to analyse and highlight the challenges of developing learner leadership in the LRC structure. The Change Laboratory was ideal for my study since it aimed to transform, and in this case, was used to transform learner leadership development within the structure of a Learner Representative Council. The qualitative data collection tools were used to gain participants’ understanding of learner leadership development. The gathered data allowed me to conduct an intervention which facilitated transformation through the provision of a platform for learner voice to be heard. Development of leadership may reduce learners’ silence in schools and create platforms for learners to execute their democratic rights and enact democratic education, which is significant in my study (Namibia. MEC, 1993, P. 4). Although the study aimed to construct meaning from the interactions among learners and teachers on the object of the activity (learner leadership development), it had a critical element to it as well.

The critical orientation emphasises “the influence of social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, gender and disability values in the construction of reality” (Mertens, 2005, p. 23). This implies that the view of reality is socially constructed by different factors. Some of these factors may be historically situated structures, and researchers working within this paradigm aim to raise awareness of them, especially among those that are being oppressed (Hatch, 2002). In addition, critical researchers seek to change the world and generate knowledge by “detecting and unmasking beliefs and practices that limit human freedom, justice and democracy” and bring forth the notion of emancipation (Scott & Morrison, 2007, p. 47). Since the study used a CHAT framework, this orientation aligns with CHAT in questioning and in tracing the history.

It is based on this notion that I deemed this orientation to be appropriate for the study, since the study seeks to understand the learner leadership development as well as to raise the consciousness of the LRC. Hatch (2002) explains that “raising consciousness provides understanding that may lead to social change” (p. 17). Therefore, the intervention conducted during the study provided the opportunity to bring forth the change looked for by critical researchers.

Having discussed the orientation, I now move on to discuss the research method for the study.

### **3.3. Case study**

The research study took the form of a qualitative case study which focused on learner leadership development. A case study is a “study of an instance in action” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 181). In addition, a qualitative case study is described as an “intensive holistic description and analysis of a single phenomenon” (Simons, 2009, p. 21). In this study, I intended to get an intensive description of learner leadership development at one school.

I strived towards a comprehensive “understanding of how participants relate and interact with each other in a specific situation and how they make meaning of the phenomena under study” (Maree, 2007, p. 75). The interaction of different teachers and learners brought about multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of learner leadership development in a real-life context (Simons, 2009). I chose a case study to bring forth greater insight into the dynamics of learner leadership development.

The case study has numerous advantages and below I justify why I chose it as my research method. Firstly, I was interested in a particular, specific group of learners which was the LRC; the nature of case studies allowed me to set boundaries for the research (Berg, 2001). The set boundaries helped me in concentrating and focusing on the participants, as well as the development of the LRC as a leadership structure only. This implies that I studied the single case at the school and was not diverted by other factors and cases happening in the school, during the research study. Secondly, a case study is flexible (Maree, 2007). Consequently,

flexibility allowed me to conduct the research for numerous days and collect data at different times and places during the research process. Finally, the case study allowed the usage of multiple sources and techniques in the data gathering process, which enhanced the validity of the data collected (Maree, 2007). However, I must acknowledge that there are some limitations to the case study as an approach; they are discussed next.

Maree states that the findings of the case study cannot be generalised (2007). This however, does not apply to my study, as I had no intention of statistically generalising my findings. The findings may nonetheless allow for naturalistic generalisation, which is arrived at by recognising similarities and differences in cases or situations with which readers are familiar. Naturalistic generalisations develop within a person as a result of experience (Simons, 2009, p. 165). Similarly, Rule and John indicate that reader-determined transferability can be used to draw from other case studies, that is a reader can read rich descriptions, findings, and conclusions to gain a level of transferability that a reader believes resonates with other cases familiar to him/her (2011, p. 105). This implies that readers can infer from findings, without necessarily being provided with statistics. Having discussed the case study, my attention now turns to the research site and participants.

### **3.4. Research site and participants**

My intention in the first part of this section is to sketch a portrait of my case, which is the school where the study was conducted. In the second part of this section, I discuss the participants of the study.

#### ***3.4.1 Research site***

The school is situated in one of the towns of the populous Oshana Region, Northern Namibia. The school is Makuva (Pseudonym) Secondary School. I taught at the school two years ago. Bearing in mind my position as Senior Education Officer, I was aware and sensitive to issues of positionality. I was reflexive about myself and what I was doing, by taking notes in a journal throughout the research process (see section 3.5). Other aspects of positionality will be addressed in the relevant section of this chapter.

The school offers Grade 8-12 with a total enrolment of 523 learners, 26 teachers, and three Heads of Departments. Upon entry through the gate, one's attention will be caught by the faded paint on the school buildings, and hawkers at the entrance – sitting under the tree shade, selling packets of chips and biscuits to learners and to whomsoever is passing through the school gate. The sandy playground which functions as the sport field is visible, as one has to pass through it to reach the administration blocks. Although most of the physical infrastructure looks very old, they seem to be well taken care of and there are two buildings blocks which look new.

Most of the learners are from the Oshiwambo tribal community. Therefore, the school offers Oshindonga First Language, which is a language spoken by most of the Owambo in the area. English, being the language of instruction, is offered to all grades, as are other additional subjects depending on the phase and grade.

The school has the following leadership structure opportunities: School Board Committee, School Management Committee, Learners Representative Council (LRC), and Class Monitors. The people in these committees and councils are entrusted with different responsibilities which are driven towards better management and leadership of the school.

The government of the Republic of Namibia has abolished the charging of school fees in all government schools. Therefore, parents are not expected to make any payment to a government school. All the learners at the school travel to school each morning from nearby townships either by foot, bicycle, taxi, or other means of transport, because the school does not have accommodation facilities.

The rationale for choosing this school is based on convenience. The school is placed in my hometown, which facilitated easy access for data collection. This afforded me an opportunity not to incur high costs during the research process. Maree (2007) notes that convenient sampling is usually quick and cheap, this can be disadvantageous. However, an intervention study brings transformation and thus I hoped to bring a change in the learner leadership structure, as a way of giving back to the school where I spent years as a Head of Department.

### ***3.4.2 Participants***

There were 17 participants in this research; there were 12 LRC members at the school and all of them were the primary participants, while two other learners who were class monitors were involved in piloting the questionnaires. The principal, a Head of Department (HoD), and the mentor/guardian teacher for the LRC were also participants in the study. Purposive sampling was used and thus I chose individuals for the sample, dependent on the characteristics that I was looking for (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Characteristics were, for example, leadership positions, leadership potential, or the ability to provide insight into the phenomenon of the study. Purposive sampling made it possible to choose participants that were holders of the data needed for the study (Maree, 2007, p. 79).

Based on the above, the LRC members were chosen because they were the focus of the study. The principal and the HoD are the knowledgeable others in leadership practice at the school; similarly, the focal teacher is the mentor, the coach and guide of LRC members in the school. The sampling decisions on the research site and participants assisted me in obtaining the richest possible source of information to answer the research questions (Maree, 2007).

Having discussed where the research study took place, and with what participants, I next discuss how the data was generated and collected.

## **3.5. Data generation and data collection tools**

The data generation and data collection tools are discussed simultaneously.

### ***3.5.1 Data generation***

The data for this study was generated in stages and the research process was conducted over a period of 8 weeks.

**Phase one** was completed in a period of five weeks. The goal for phase one was to understand learner leadership development at the school. Therefore, I completed a contextual profile for the

school. This allowed me to dig deeper and gain insights into the past and present on learner leadership. The data was collected through interviews, questionnaires, observation, and document analysis, and the data was aimed at enhancing my understanding of how respondents viewed the phenomenon. This phase answered my first three research questions: *How is the term learner leadership understood by teachers and learners at the school? What are the roles of the LRC members at the school? What factors enable and constrain learner leadership development in the school?*

**Phase two** was conducted over a period of one week. The goal for this stage was to conduct an intervention in order to bring about change. There were two Change Laboratory workshops (CLW) conducted on the 3<sup>rd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> July 2017 in the Computer Laboratory of the school. I only had LRC members in the Change Laboratory session because I wanted learners to speak freely and invoke their voices without being obstructed by the teachers' presence.

This phase sought to answer my final research question: *How can LRC voice be invoked through Change Laboratory workshops?*

In the first CLW, I mirrored the data from phase one using visuals. In the second CLW, we discussed the contradictions that emerged and attempted to find generative solutions to them. The doable solutions were recommended for implementation. This second phase of the data collection focused on the activities of the Change Laboratory workshops which I observed and made notes on. I entered a process of reflective journaling; drawing out themes and making comments on the processes of the workshops from the notes. This journal provided a final data source.

A Change Laboratory is underpinned by an expansive learning cycle. During the Change Laboratory sessions, learners were involved in transformation of leadership practices; contradictions around the object of transformation were presented and it is during these deliberations that expansive learning occurred (Sannino, Engeström, & Lemos, 2016). Expansive learning has seven stages of the learning cycle (Engeström, 2016). However, in this

study, the learners were only able to reach stage three of the cycle. The diagram below shows the main types of expansive learning actions that the LRC members were involved in.

<b>Action 1: Actions of questioning</b>	The LRC members were involved in questioning the LRC leadership practice.
<b>Action 2: Actions of analysing the situation</b>	The LRC members analysed the past, discussing what the former LRC used to do and how the contradictions that emerged were solved in the past.
<b>Action 3: Actions of modelling new explanatory solutions</b>	The LRC members were involved in modelling; they discussed and searched for solutions to the contradictions that emerged in the study.

*Table 3.1: The expansive learning table* (adapted from Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013, p. 46)

**Phase three** was completed in two weeks. The goal of this phase was to surface any information that may have been collected but not clearly voiced. I gave the interview transcriptions to the three interviewees and asked them to verify what appeared in the hard copies. The idea behind member-checking was to verify my understanding of what I had written with the participants (Maree, 2007). The analysis of the data started at this stage and I also ensured that I had collected sufficient rich data.

### **3.5.2. Data collection tools**

In this section, I present the data collection methods and techniques used, as well as the reasons for my choices. The benefits and limitations for each method are addressed. The data for the study was collected using document analysis, semi-structured questionnaires, interviews, observation schedules, and journaling. The range of data collection tools was valuable for this study, because it allowed for the constraints of one to be supplemented by another which, in turn, provided me with rich and meaningful data. With the permission of participants, I used an audio recorder and camera for data capturing.

### ***3.5.2.1. Document analysis***

Document analysis was also used as a data gathering tool. Document analysis is a “systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating printed or electronic material” (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). Specific documents were analysed in order to gather evident information on leadership opportunities that existed at the school. The document analysis further provided me with a picture of the school, before administering other data collection tools. The term ‘documents’ refers to a “wide range of written, physical, and visual materials, including what other authors may term as artefacts (Jacobs & Walker, 2014, p. 471). The documents examined in the study were: Minutes of LRC meetings; School Code of Conduct/School Rules; and documented presence of the LRC members in the School Development Plan and in the Plan of Action for Academic Improvement. These documents were chosen specifically because they were used as guides and were likely to reflect what happens at the school in terms of learner leadership development. I gathered documents from files, computers, and notice boards; hence this has proved to be good original source of information for the study. Document analysis was used during phase one to answer the first three research questions. The Document analysis schedule is attached (Appendix A).

There are numerous benefits of using document analysis as a source of data. Document analysis provided the study with a stable source of data and descriptive information (Jacobs & Walker, 2014, p. 471). The documents are a significant corroboration of the evidence from other sources (Maree, 2007, p. 83). This made it substantive for the study, as it allowed the usage of other data collection tools in the seeking of answers to the research questions.

I should however acknowledge that document analysis has limitations, such as how some data was “recorded for a different purpose than the current research purpose” (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 212.). This might mean that the information provided by the documents might not be sufficient; however, in this study, the document analysis was not used in isolation. Therefore, whatever information that might have been lacking in the documents, was obtained in other data collection tools.

### *3.5.2.2. Semi-structured questionnaires*

At the first level of the research process, I aimed to gather understanding of learner leadership development phenomena, as well as factors that influence leadership in the school. I therefore administered semi-structured questionnaires to the learners to ascertain their understanding. According to Bertram and Christiansen (2014), a semi-structured questionnaire has open-ended questions that participants may answer as they like, in the space reserved. The purpose of the semi-structured questionnaire is that it “enables the researcher to standardise the questions asked and to control the amount of information that respondents supply” (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 79). All 12 LRC members were given the questionnaires and they provided a “written collection of self-report” based on the questions (Gay et al., p. 373, 2009) during phase one of data generation. The questionnaire aimed to answer both research question one and three.

In terms of the process, learners were briefed about the administration and completion of the questionnaires. Written consent was obtained from their guardians. I must admit that the completion of the questionnaires was not done in my presence, as learners were given the questionnaires during their tea break and were requested to hand them back after their study sessions in the afternoon. This might have posed as a limitation as I may never know whether the LRC participants actually completed the questionnaires or someone else completed it for them (Maree, 2007, p. 157). However, filling the questionnaires without pressure from the researcher, provided learners with an opportunity to reflect on their writings and to provide me with rich data. In addition, the completion of the questionnaire without my presence further minimised my influence on the learners, making the tool suitable for the study (Maree, 2007, p. 157).

The questionnaires were beneficial since they enabled triangulation; some of the questions that were in the questionnaires, were also in other data collection tools and this provided me with comprehensive data. Furthermore, questionnaires offer anonymity which is promised in the study, bearing in mind that learners are minors (see Appendix B for a sample of the questionnaire that was administered to the learners).

### **3.5.2.3. Interviews**

The study used interviews as a source of data, which were conducted with three teacher participants during break-times. Thomas (2009) defines interviews as “a discussion with someone in which you try to get information” (p. 160). It is more than a conversation with a purpose. In addition, interviews “enable participants to discuss their interpretation of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 409). Therefore, interviewing the teachers assisted me in gathering an understanding of learner leadership, as well as the information on leadership opportunities in the school. The interviews occurred during phase one of data generation and they answered research question one and two.

The first benefit of the interview for the study was just as the questionnaire; it was used with other methods in the gathering of data and gave me a chance to triangulate (Drever, 1997). Furthermore, I used a semi-structured approach in the interviews, which provided me with an opportunity to ask the prepared questions according to the interview schedule, but gave me the benefit of probing for clarifications (Thomas, 2009). The interview allowed me to probe for detailed information on the past, present, and future leadership opportunities for learners at the case study school. This made it an appropriate method of data collection for the study (see Appendix C for interview questions).

Interviews have their limitations since it is a social and interpersonal encounter, therefore, power relations and biases might occur. To minimise the influence, I practiced self-disclosure at the beginning of the interview, which is sharing personal information about myself, in order to connect with the participants (Lichtman, 2014). This helped in creating rapport with the teachers.

### **3.5.2.4 Observation**

Observation is defined as “the process of gathering open-ended, firsthand information by observing people and places at a research site” (John, 2014, p. 235). During the observation I examined “behavioural patterns of people in certain situations to obtain information about the phenomenon of interest” (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 206). I observed an LRC meeting, a

staff briefing, the morning devotion, the rotational process, and Change Laboratory sessions. During these observations, I noted down striking features about power relations in terms of gender, grade, language, and portfolios. I also tried to observe in terms of CHAT, examining the interactions of one element of the activity system (the LRC) during the workshops (see Appendix D for the aspects of the observation schedule). The observation schedule guided my observations in response to research question four.

Observation is a method of generating data which entails the researcher getting fully involved in a research setting, in order to experience and observe first-hand a range of dimensions in and of that setting (Mason, 2002). I was therefore a participant observer, which is referred to as “when a researcher participates in the situation, while observing and collecting data on the activities” (Gay et al., 2009, p. 366). Being a participant observer helped me to gain insight and develop relationships with the participants which may not have been attained by a researcher who was not a participant in the study (*ibid.*).

Observation was greatly beneficial for the study because it provided an “opportunity to record information as it occurs in a setting, to study actual behaviour and to study individuals who have difficulty verbalising their ideas” (John, 2014, p. 235). I was able to record the information on learner leadership development from participants based on the live data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). The observation was an ideal data collection method since it assisted me to verify what is said in comparison with what was actually happening on the school grounds, and further afforded me an opportunity to triangulate with data collected using other data collection tools.

Observation has limitations, such as that the observer may import pre-formed judgements that are not backed by evidence of direct observation (Simons, 2009, p. 62). This happens because observation is selective and thus what is recorded is usually based on the researcher’s view of the world. I acknowledge observation may be biased as “it is almost impossible to eliminate subjectivity in qualitative research thus it is best to recognise it and move with it” (Lichtman, 2014, p. 36). However, I have done my utmost to reflect only on what I observed.

### ***3.5.2.5 Journaling***

The last tool used was journaling. Its primary focus in this study was for the researcher to be self-reflective (Janesick, 1999). This tool allowed me to reflect on the research process as it progressed. I was able to note down the positives, the negatives, what the process meant to me at those specific times, and what I learned from the experience.

The advantage of the journal is that it offers "interesting and vivid experiences that may be subjective, however, bringing them up front allows future researchers to find ways around problems in their own research" (Berg, 2001, p. 276). I noted down my journey during CL workshops, as well as throughout the research process to intensify professional awareness, as well as to allow for informed professional decision-making (Borg, 2001). The journaling was able to contribute to the study in its own way.

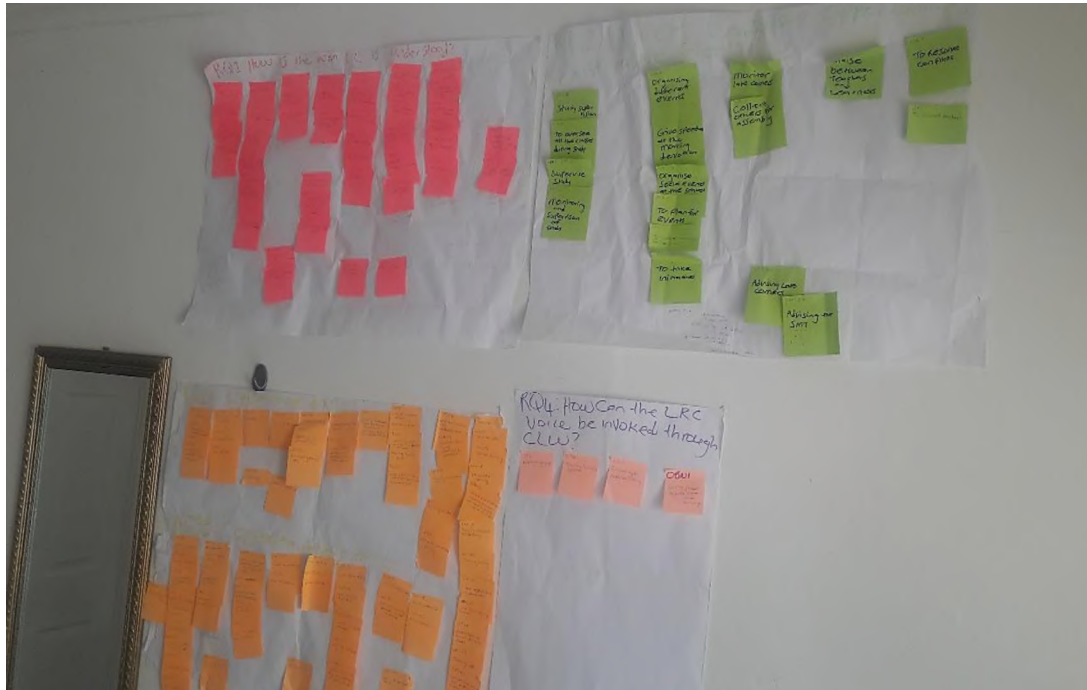
Having provided a clear understanding of the process of data collection, I next move on to the discussion of how the data was analysed.

## **3.6 Data analysis**

Data analysis is the "process of making sense of the data" (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). At this stage of the study, I was involved in the data reduction process whereby I selected, simplified, and transformed the raw data gathered in the field (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). The data analysis for this study included an inductive approach, after which the linking of theory to the findings took place.

During the inductive thematic analysis, I examined the raw data and labeled and coded them in response to my research questions (Rule & John, 2011). I coded on sticky notes which I later pasted into a visual form (See Figure 3.1). The coded portions of data were thereafter grouped logically into categories, which were constructed based on patterns and similarities emerging from data (Merriam, 1998). Thereafter, themes were created. After creating themes, I went through the data again numerous times to look for other information that may have enhanced my

interpretation and in the process, more categories were formed (Lichtman, 2014). Finally, I compared my themes to the literature review and the theoretical framework of the study.



**Figure 3.1: Pictures of coded data during thematic analysis**

During the CHAT analysis, I analysed the raw data using the activity system lens to unearth tensions and contradictions between and within the elements of the system. The surfacing of the contradictions occurred in the first Change Laboratory workshop (see Figure 3.2 below).



*Figure 3.2: LRC members in the CLW, surfacing contradictions*

The LRC members discussed where the contradictions were located in the activity system and how they were hindering the development of learner leadership in the school. Thereafter, the LRC members analysed the historicity of the contradictions and sought model solutions (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013; Engeström, 2016).

### **3.7 Ethical implications**

Ethical considerations play a major role in research and as a researcher, I was aware of and attended to ethical considerations in my research (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Research ethics obliged me to ensure that my research protected the welfare of research participants (Wassenaar, 2007). This research, therefore, ensured that the participants in my study were not exposed to any harm (Maree, 2007).

All the participants were treated with respect and dignity. I obtained site and participant's informed consent before the study commenced. This is because "permission to conduct research in a school does not substitute the informed consent of parents" (Wassenaar, 2007, p. 73)

(Appendix E, F, G & H). The gatekeeper and the participants indicated that they wished to be anonymous, therefore, pseudonyms for the school and the participants were used in the study.

The study was conducted in an honest and transparent manner. Participants were informed of the aims of the study, which was to explore leadership development in the LRC structure in their school. I strived to “be honest about the purpose of the study and about the conditions of the research” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 57). Teachers and learners were asked to voluntarily be part of the study, and to provide their in-depth knowledge and experience of learner leadership development in their school. The learner participants were between the ages of 16- 18, therefore they were given consent letters to give to their parents (Appendix I & J).

During every step of the research process, I tried to be accountable and responsible by negotiating access to the school by seeking written permission from the Educational Director of the region where the study took place (Appendix F). In addition, I pledged to be responsible and take intentional precautions to ensure that information would not become public, by keeping materials in a locked desk drawer and soft (digital) copies saved on the cloud (Berg, 2001).

Finally, I acted professionally throughout the research study. The information that surfaced during the study was treated confidentially. Only my supervisors have full access to the interviews and transcripts, observation notes, questionnaires and journaling. Where I used quotes from the data I have used pseudonyms as a reference. As the researcher, I did not encourage political, racial, gender-based, religious, or other biased comments.

### **3.8 Trustworthiness of the research study**

According to Gay, Mills, & Airasian (2009, p. 608) “along with understanding, a feature essential to the validity of qualitative research is established by addressing the validity, reliability and objectivity of the study findings”. Below I discuss how I made the findings of this research study trustworthy.

### ***3.8.1 Validity***

This section presents the matters that relate to validity, reliability, and objectivity in the study. There were different measures taken to strengthen the validity of the study. Firstly, the study had collected sufficient data and arguments provided were rigorous enough to provide justifications. Secondly, two class monitors were given questionnaires prior to the main study; this piloting was done with the intention “to check for clarity and to remove ambiguities” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 402). Furthermore, interviews were recorded and the participants were given an opportunity to change any wording that they felt did not capture the exactness of their words. I also built a very good rapport before the commencement of the interviews. The mentor teacher for the LRC members and the principal were curious and had an interest in the Rhodes Education Programmes, while the HoD being a Master’s degree holder from Rhodes was more interested in the whereabouts of her former lecturers at Rhodes. The conversations minimised my influence on the participants and made them more relaxed.

The nature of the research study accorded the use of visual resources for mirroring data during the Change Laboratory workshops. These may have strengthened validity as the learners were able to see what they said. Finally, the use of triangulation, which is the use of multiple methods to collect data, strengthened the validity of the qualitative data (Gay et al., 2009). This occurred by corroborating the findings using internal rigour, which helped me to validate my findings from one data tool collection with reference to another (van der Mescht, 2002).

### ***3.8.2 Positionality***

I am a Senior Education Officer at the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture and I am aware of my insider positionality in this study, having worked at the school some years back. According to Chavez (2008), insider positionality is about “sharing multiple identities such as race, ethnicity, and class with participants” (p. 475). The advantage of insider positionality is that I had commonalities with the participants and this helped me to gather efficacious data from the participants (*ibid.*). I minimised my influence by building rapport with the teacher participants before the interview.

In addition, in my position in the Ministry and my relationship with the school, I negotiated access with the teachers who were interviewed, since “gaining access to the school does not necessarily mean access to the classroom” (Setati, 2005, p. 93). I made an effort to build a relationship of trust by listening genuinely to the staff and learners’ contributions. I code switched using Oshiwambo, the language that the participants were most comfortable with.

My personal attributes could have influenced the data collected because of my positionality. In contrast, Chavez (2008, p. 475) indicates that positionality at times can be effectual for the researcher and benefit the study, since it provides a “nuanced perspective for observation, interpretation and representation”. To sum up, I viewed my position in the school as an ongoing, negotiated relationship.

### **3.9 Coda**

This chapter discussed the methodology embraced during the research study. In summary, this was a case study conducted in a secondary school in the Oshana Region, in Namibia. I employed multiple data collection tools to explore the development of learner leadership. The use of different methods helped me to triangulate the data and enhance the trustworthiness of my study. The chapter further went on to present and explain how the data was analysed, and how I observed the ethical standards of consent and confidentiality appropriate to an interventionist research study. The chapter concluded with an explanation as to how I handled my positionality, and ensured the trustworthiness and validity of the data, guaranteeing that the findings were not compromised. My attention now turns to the next chapter where I present and discuss the findings of my research study.

# **CHAPTER FOUR**

## **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to present the data gathered in the phases mentioned in the previous chapter, thereby providing the readers with the authentic views of participants regarding the understanding of learner leadership development in a secondary school in Namibia. This chapter presents the findings as themes and draws on relevant literature to support the claims being made. Furthermore, CHAT is used to surface the contradictions in the activity system. This sheds a nuanced deeper understanding of these contradictions that hamper leadership development. Finally, the Change Laboratory workshops are discussed and this highlights the solutions generated and the learning that took place in the activity system.

The data was gathered through interviews, questionnaires, observation, document analysis and journaling as highlighted in the methodology chapter of the thesis. This chapter is organised in response to the following research questions:

1. How is the term learner leadership understood by teachers and learners at the school?
2. What are the roles of the LRC members at the school?
3. What factors enable and constrain learner leadership development in the school?
4. How can the LRC voice be invoked through Change Laboratory workshops?

The data gathered in response to these questions is presented and discussed according to the following themes generated:

1. Understanding of learner leadership amongst teachers and learners;
2. The roles of LRC members at the school;
3. Enabling factors that aid the development of learner leadership in the school;
4. Constraining factors that hinder the learner leadership development in the school;
5. Contradictions arising from the constraining factors

## 6. Invoking LRC voice in Change Laboratory Workshops

Next, I present the participant profiles and codes and then move to the data presentation structured according to the themes identified.

### **4.2 Profiles of the research participants and coding**

The participants' profiles are presented to provide a better understanding to the reader interpreting the study. It provides the participants' information in terms of their teaching interest and experience, thus enabling the reader to appreciate and make sense of who the research participants were. I now proceed to give a description of the Learner Representative Council (LRC) as well as that of the three teacher participants in the study.

#### ***4.2.1 Learner Representative Council: L1-12***

These are the 12 LRC members who participated in the study. There was an equal representation of gender with six girls and six boys in the LRC. This could be attributed to the Namibian Education Act 16 of 2001, which states that the Learner Representative Council must be composed of an "equal number of elected boys and girls rounded off to the nearest even number" (Namibia. MBESC, 2002, p. 18). Five learners were from Grade 12, four from Grade 11 and the other three were from Grade 10. They ranged from 16 to 18 years of age and this is the average age at a secondary school.

#### ***4.2.2 Mr Lyavahenge (pseudonym): Principal (PR)***

He is 35 years old. He began his teaching career in 2006 at a school in the Khomas Region. He was then transferred to a school in the Oshana Region in 2007. In 2010 he was appointed at another school in the region as a Head of Department for Science and Mathematics. He became a principal of Makuva (pseudonym) Secondary school which is also in the Oshana Region. Mr Lyavahenge holds a Bachelor of Education from the University of Namibia (UNAM).

#### ***4.2.3 Mr Nguyu (pseudonym): Mentor teacher for LRC (MT)***

He is 38 years of age. He started his teaching career in 2002 at a school in the Zambezi region. He was transferred to this school which is in the Oshana Region in 2011. He is responsible for teaching life skills Grade 8-12. Mr Nguyu has a Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD) from Caprivi College of Education and an Advanced Diploma in Education.

#### ***4.2.4 Mrs Shimba (pseudonym): Head of Department (HOD)***

She started her teaching career in 2006 at a school in the Omusati Region. In 2014, she was appointed as a Head of Department for Science and Mathematics at Makuva Secondary school in the Oshana Region. Mrs Shimba has a Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD) from Ongwediva College of Education and an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) from Northwest University, South Africa. She is also a holder of a Bachelor of Education Honours and Master's in Education from Rhodes University, South Africa.

I now turn my attention to the coding of data. Data was coded to facilitate the presentation of findings. It also facilitates the keeping of an audit trail. In addition, pseudonyms are used for ethical reasons to uphold the anonymity of research participants. Wiles, Crow, Heath and Charles (2008) state that the findings should be presented “in ways that ensure individuals cannot be identified chiefly through anonymisation”, as offered by codes (p. 418). In practice, this means I would, for example, use the code LQ1 in the study when referring to the data drawn from questionnaire one completed by a learner.

The table below shows the coding of the data tools for the study:

<b>Instruments</b>	<b>Label codes</b>
Questionnaires	LQ1-12
Interview with principal	IPR
Interview with mentor teacher for LRC	IMT
Interview with Head of Department	IHOD
Observation notes	OBN1-2
Journal entries	JE 1-7
Document analysis: Agenda for the meeting	DA1
Document analysis: Minutes of LRC	DA2
Document analysis: Code of conduct for learners/school rules	DA3
Document analysis: LRC portfolio	DA4
Document analysis: SDP 2015	DA5
Document analysis: SDP 2017	DA6
Document analysis: Invitation/submission for LRC Training	DA7

***Table 4.1: Coding of the data tools***

In the next section, I present and discuss my findings of the research study. The findings are organised around themes and in response to the research questions.

### 4.3 Understanding learner leadership

The study focused on learner leadership development. It was therefore important to find out how the concept of learner leadership was understood. Learner leadership being derived from leadership seemed to be a complex phenomenon as research participants defined it differently. It is thus not surprising that the data collected from interviews, document analysis and questionnaires summarised leadership in various ways. I could identify four themes. Firstly, leadership is about having certain abilities such as influencing, leading, directing and motivating. Secondly, leadership is about being a role model and setting examples. Thirdly, leadership is about having power to influence adherence to school rules and finally, leadership is innate.

#### 4.3.1 Learner leaders need to have certain qualities

Most of the research participants indicated that learner leadership was about having certain abilities or qualities which included the ability to influence, lead, direct, guide and motivate other learners. One of the respondents expressed that learner leadership was the “*ability to influence others*” (LQ6). Similarly, another respondent stated that learner leadership was having “*the ability to guide, direct and influence other learners in a positive way*” (LQ10). Another statement from a participant also supported this notion by mentioning that “*a leader is involved in directing and guiding others*”(IMT). In addition, a participant in the interview remarked that learner leadership occurred when “*a batch of learners are entrusted with a responsibility of leading others*” (IPR). The data concurred with the view expressed in the literature that leadership is a process of influencing others (Bush, 2003, Spillane, 2005; Christie, 2010; Gillies, 2013). Participants in the study further revealed that influencing and leading should lead to a positive situation, and other learners should be “*guided well*” (LQ10) ... “*in order to achieve a better future*” (LQ11). One respondent put it this way: “*leading others so that they can improve themselves, making them do something what their future self will thank them for*” (LQ2). This view resonates with Hoy and Miskel who indicate that followers are developed through mentoring and guiding (1996). Furthermore, the need for leadership to result in a change as revealed in the study, concurs with the literature which argues that leadership is related to people and their conduct in order to effect change (Gillies, 2013).

Apart from having the abilities mentioned above, the findings further indicated that learner leadership was also about having abilities to motivate others. One of the respondents expressed that learner leadership was about “*encouraging and motivating other learners to do the right things at school*” (LQ1). A participant from the interview further added that leadership was about “*motivating others*” in a positive way (IPR). Similarly, one of the respondents mentioned that learner leadership centred on “*motivating learners about their school work*” (LQ7), while another felt that learner leadership would guide learners on “*the good path and motivate them on how to improve their behaviours*” (LQ5). The above views align with de Villiers who mentions that leadership influences motivation, therefore those that are entrusted with leadership roles should ensure that they motivate other learners from time to time (2010). In a similar vein, the data indicated that a leader should have abilities to motivate and this speaks to transformational leadership which advocates for leaders to inspire their subordinates (Tng, 2009).

In addition to having abilities to motivate, learner leadership was a key factor influencing innovation in the school. The findings pointed out that the school viewed learner leadership as a platform to take on initiatives. Documents revealed that learner leadership was about taking initiative, both academic and non-academic, to better the school ((DA1, DA2). The initiatives taken by the LRC members included, “*cleaning campaigns*”, social activities meant to entertain other learners, attempts to ensure teachers attend classes and activities meant to beautify the school (see for example IMT, IHOD, IPR, DA1 & DA2). This concurs with the literature (Namibia. MBESC, 2002, p. 19) which advocates that:

The LRC as leaders of the learners at the school must, with the approval of the principal, undertake projects and programs aimed at, improving and maintaining the school environment and facilities, providing cultural, social, sports activities for learners

Based on the number of activities that the LRC are involved in, the LRC members are strategically placed and they have an ideal environment for a shared approach to leadership (Vaeta, 2015). Similarly, the school seemed to foster a type of leadership that facilitated the production and implementation of new ideas. This resonates with contemporary leadership thinking, distributed leadership in particular, which allows for other people apart from the individual leaders to initiate and bring about changes. The participants viewed leadership as an

aspect influencing innovation. Innovations were viewed as constructive mechanisms in the school as they are usually transformative. This opinion was expressed by other studies, for example, Grant indicated that leadership is a process which works towards a movement and transformation in an organisation (2009).

This subsection focused on leadership as playing an influencing role. Next, I present the idea of leadership linked to being a role model.

#### ***4.3.2 Leadership is about being a role model***

The LRC members were expected to be exemplary to other learners in the school. A respondent stated that *“the biggest role to play is being an exemplary learner”* (LQ10). Other respondents mentioned that learner leadership was about leading others by being a *“good example”* (LQ1, LQ2 & LQ6). In addition, the data from the two other sets indicated that learner leadership was about being *“exemplary and having good behaviour”* (IPR, DA2). The LRC members were expected to behave well and set a good example that other learners could emulate. The literature supports this notion by highlighting the fact that a leader has to lead by example, be it by working harder or by being at the forefront of events (Hermalin, 1998). In order to illustrate leading by example, one could for instance use the likes of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a civil rights activist who is well known for the speech *‘I have a dream’* and for being at the head of civil rights marches in the USA (*ibid.*). This civil rights activist was known to lead other people by being at the forefront of protests. In a school situation the LRC members were expected to be leading the school activities, events and functions. Other learners would then follow what the LRC members were doing.

In addition, the school attempted to make sure that the LRC members stood out from other learners to make it easier for other learners to see them and to follow their example. The document revealed that the school *“purchased blazers for Head boy, Head girl and their deputies”* (DA5). In addition, I noted that *“one of the LRC was wearing a blazer during an LRC meeting”* (JE1, p. 25). I further noted that *“all the LRC have name tags”* (JE1, p. 25). Furthermore, *“the LRC members were dressed differently from the rest of the learners”* (JE1, p.

25). The findings indicated that the school tried to ensure that the LRC members were not only neatly dressed but that they remain visible on the school grounds. The findings further seemed to indicate that if the LRC members set a good example then leadership was taking place. This is in line with the contingency theory of leadership which suggests that leaders are responsible for helping followers develop appropriate behaviour (Horner, 1997). This shows that leading by example is considered a vital component of leadership across diverse work settings.

My attention now turns to leadership as having power to influence adherence to the school rules.

#### ***4.3.3 Leadership is about having power to influence adherence to the school rules***

Learner leadership is about having some kind of power to ensure that other learners follow the school rules. There seemed to be a consensus across the data sets regarding rules and power. Four of the five data sets revealed that the LRC members needed “*power to ensure school rules*” (LQ12) and “*policies and regulations*” were followed (DA3). In addition, one of the participants in the interview stated that learner leadership occurred when the LRC members were “*given power to control others*” (IHOD). Similarly, a learner respondent explained that “*leadership is when a person has power to lead*” (LQ4). Another interviewee added that the LRC members were “*in a position of controlling others*” (IMT). Also, a learner respondent indicated that the LRC members were taking “*control of everything that cannot be seen by teachers or principal*” and that the LRC members were “*there as the eyes of the school to make sure that everything within the school is going well*” (LQ3).

The findings also revealed that leadership within the LRC was viewed as a support for teachers to fulfill disciplinary roles. A similar view was expressed by Fielding (2004) who states that “student voice is primarily an instrument of school effectiveness driven by adult purposes” (p. 205). It was all about control and compliance as highlighted in the quote (IHOD)below:

Once the bell rings, the LRC are supposed to control and make others [learners] move into their classes. They are also supposed to control how other learners put on school uniform. It is supposed to be the duty of the LRC but because they do not have power, they do not deal with that responsibility.

The data above points out that leadership was viewed as policing, controlling and ensuring there was order in the school. Although the policing role involved the LRC members in decision-making in the school ground, it is an outdated traditional view of leadership (Uushona, 2012). This revealed that learner leadership in the school was understood from a traditional view.

The participants in the study expressed that in order for the LRC members to lead other learners, they should be given power. This highlights that power was considered as something that can be given from one person to another. It might not be completely off mark as literature pointed out that although leadership is mutual, it involves the use of power (Laios, Thedorakis, & Gargalions, 2003). Therefore, the LRC members could use their positional power to influence the behaviour and attitude of other learners in the school. However, the issue of power might be deemed unnecessary if the school uses distributed leadership since it inspires other people to take on leadership responsibilities on their own (Spillane, 2006)

I will next present and discuss my findings around the theme of leadership as innate.

#### ***4.3.4 Leadership is innate***

The data on leadership as innate was limited as it was revealed by one participant only. I, however found that piece of data significant and intriguing because it was raised by the principal. In an interview the principal stated that “*leadership qualities are inherited, it is [an] inherited kind of thing*” (IPR). In addition, the participant indicated that the LRC “*capability supposed to be inherently in there*” (IPR). The same participant further added that the LRC members were elected because they “*displayed to others their inherent character*” of being a leader (IPR). This finding resonates with the traditional views` on leadership which state that people are born with inherent characteristics that make them leaders (Conger & Kanungo, as cited in Knott-Craig, 2007). Likewise, a person who was born a leader would have certain traits (Tng, 2009). Consequently, they would somehow display those characters and this is what would make other learners to elect them in leadership positions (Ibid). This simply means that only those with such characters could be appointed and promoted to leadership positions. Any other learner who did not show those qualities was regarded as incapable of a leadership position. The characteristics

perceived to be signs of leadership qualities were, for example, emotional intelligence, charismatic, dominance and conservatism (Conger & Kanungo, as cited in Knott-Craig, 2007, p. 25). On the contrary, the literature highlights the fact that no universal traits for leadership could be established and thus no specific traits could be agreed on (Tng, 2009). Furthermore, what makes the organization work effectively is not only the leader, but the abilities of workers, creativeness, shared purpose and coordination of activities (Hartley, 2007).

In summary, various definitions of learner leadership emerged from the study. The difference in the participants' understanding could be caused by the fact that learner leadership is a new concept and is still an under researched area in Namibia (Shekupakela-Nelulu, 2008). Firstly, the findings revealed that learner leadership was about having certain abilities to influence, innovate and motivate, coincides with the meaning of leadership in terms of influence, from other authors such as Christie (2010) and Gillies (2013) as discussed earlier in subsection 4.3.1. This however depicts leadership in a traditional view as a practice that requires certain abilities. Secondly, the data that revealed that leadership is about having power to influence adherence to school rules also seemed to view leadership as policing which is a traditional view of leadership. Thirdly, leadership being innate although supported by the traditional theory of leadership, it is refuted by contemporary views of leadership which view leadership as a shared process (Grant, 2008) and distributed throughout the organization (Gronn, 2000). The literature further argues that leadership is "fluid and emergent rather than a fixed phenomenon" (Gronn, 2000, p. 324). This implies that leadership is permeable thus learners at any level in the school can become leaders in absence of the traits.

In the next section, I present the roles of the LRC members at the school.

#### **4.4 The roles of LRC members at the school: managerial to leadership**

The study found that there are 12 LRC members at the school and each LRC member is given a portfolio to serve (DA4). It is possible to say that for the LRC members to really make a mark, there should be opportunities for them in the school to execute leadership roles. The data gathered across all the data sets indicated that the LRC members were involved in managerial and leadership roles. I acknowledge that leadership and management are interrelated (see Section

2.2). However, for the purposes of analysis, I have tried to distinguish between them by focusing on whether leadership or management is being privileged.

This section discusses the managerial roles fulfilled by the LRC members such as, supervision of study and tests, monitoring other learners in the school and organising events. I also focused on liaison with other learners as a leadership role.

#### ***4.4.1 Managerial roles undertaken by the LRC members in the school***

The following discussion focuses on managerial roles conducted by the LRC members. Lumby states that entrusting others with activities empowers them (2013). I do acknowledge that these roles might have leadership aspects to them.

##### ***4.4.1.1 Supervision of study and tests***

The managerial role of supervision was perceived as a leadership opportunity by the participants in the study. The learners in the Representative Council were *“involved in supervising during the study to control the noise”* (IMT). Similarly, another teacher added that *“like now we use them to supervise study and they are not enough to oversee all the classes”* (IHOD). During my stay at the school, I noted that the LRC members, apart from supervising the studies, also *“supervised tests across all grades that were written in the afternoon”* (JE4, p. 26). The LRC members seemed to take their supervision role seriously. As a result, the school has created a habit of writing tests in the afternoon. By sharing the roles with the LRC members, the school had distributed the leadership and thus lessened the workload of the teachers (De Villiers, 2010). In addition, supervision involves ensuring that the learners were quiet in the classes and that those that want to study can do so without the disturbance of others. I argue that these activities serve as a management function as they are required to maintain the status quo in the school. The supervision would thus ensure that the school activities, which were study or tests in this case ran smoothly. Studies have indicated that preservation and maintenance of the organisational structure are considered as management (Van der Mescht, 2008; Grant, 2009; Christie, 2010). Thus, concluding that supervision is a managerial role.

#### ***4.4.1.2 Monitoring of learners on the school property***

The participants in the study indicated that it is the role of the LRC members to monitor others around the school. The findings further revealed that the LRC members were “*tasked with collecting other learners for the assembly*” (IPR). During my observation of the morning devotion, I noted “*three LRC members going around the school telling other learners to gather at the assembly point for the morning devotion*” (JE4, p. 26). In addition, the LRC members were tasked to “*monitor latecomers when they are coming in the morning*” (IMT). The learners in the Representative Council were expected to arrive earlier compared to other learners and stand at the school entrance gate, noting down other learners who came a few minutes late (IMT). Whilst at the gate, the LRC members “*advised the latecomers to improve their time management and change the habit of coming late to school*” (IMT).

The activities and tasks executed by the LRC members were meant to maintain the functionality of the school, hence are considered as management tasks (Bush, 2003). I argue that standing at the gate and noting down those that are late, is a managerial role. It is a managerial role of upholding the institutional goals by maintaining the effectiveness of the institutional arrangements (Bush, 2003). My attention now turns to taking the lead.

#### ***4.4.1.3 Taking the lead: The organisation of social events and activities***

The LRC members organised social events at Makuva Secondary School. The findings from the document analysis indicated that the LRC members “*organised cleaning campaigns for the school and its immediate surrounding*” (DA). The learners in the Representative Council, moreover, planned and “*organised social activities*” meant to entertain other learners (DA2). This view was confirmed by one of the participants in the interview who mentioned that the LRC members were involved in “*organising Miss Valentine, they initiated that activity and organised it*” (IMT). In addition, the findings indicated that other social activities organised by the LRC members are for example: “*sports tournaments, Grade 12 farewell party*” and many others (IPR, IHOD). Through the organisation and hosting of events, Grant indicates that the interest of the individual in the school is promoted in collective actions (2008).

In addition to organising events, the LRC members gave speeches during the morning devotion. During my stay at the school, I noted down that “*an LRC gave a motivational speech at the morning devotion*” (JE4, p. 26). Similarly, a participant in the interview revealed that “*Time to time you will hear one or two organising a speech for the assembly to motivate others*” (IPR). The LRC member “*stood on the podium and motivated other learners to study hard and to stay disciplined. The teachers and the learners listened attentively and seemed like they enjoyed the speech judging from the loud applause at the end of the speech*” (JE, p. 26). The learners are given a platform at the assembly to advise and motivate other learners (Mitra & Gross, 2009); this is evidence that the school is an engaging place, where learners are granted active roles (Smyth, 2006).

The leadership opportunity of organising events at the school lay solely in the hands of the LRC members. The learners in the Representative Council expressed how they sat and “*organised events on their own, without the assistance of any other person in the school*” (JE6, p. 27). This was confirmed by one of the teacher participants who stated that the learners organised events on their own since “*there was no involvement of teachers*” (IHOD).

The findings of the study pertaining to the LRC role of organising events revealed that the school was indeed carrying out the functions as stipulated by the *Educational Act 16 of 2001*. In the Regulations made under the *Education Act 16*, it stipulated that the LRC are expected to promote the best interest and welfare of the school and its learners (Namibia. MBESC, 2002). Therefore, when learners in the representative Council organized various events mentioned earlier, they were in a way promoting the interest and welfare of the school and that of other learners.

The LRC members were tasked with organising and planning of events because of the positions that they held in the school. These responsibilities were concerned with the internal operation of institutions and are thus categorised as management tasks (Bush, 2003). In addition, the literature clarifies that management is about carrying out approved procedures and policies as well as maintenance, directed towards the achievement of identified goals (Bush, 2003). There are certain managerial activities that might require leadership skills for them to take shape, such as

organisation of a class tournament, learners' shows and Valentines' Day. In order to ensure materialisation of these events, the LRC members would be involved in leadership initiatives. In a similar vein, Spillane et al. (2004) maintain that leadership practice involves innovation. The engagement of LRC members in activities that involve interaction with other learners in a school context around specific tasks would thus be considered as leadership (*ibid.*). I next discuss liaising as a leadership opportunity in the school.

#### ***4.4.2 Leading through creating communication channels and resolving conflicts***

The findings indicated that one of the leadership opportunities for the LRC members was to liaise between other learners and the teachers. The liaison involved acting as a communication link between the learners and the teachers, as well as being a conflict resolver between the learners in the school. One of the participants in the interview indicated that the “*LRC keeps the connection between the teachers and the learners*” (IHOD). She further added that “*they help communicate from learners down there to the top management of the school*” (IHOD). The learners in the Representative Council raise concerns expressed by other learners to the teachers and the School Management Team. They relay information from the teachers and the school management to the rest of the learners at the school. The role of liaison seemed to show that the view of leadership in the school was not centered on the principal only, but that it was distributed across the school and involved the practice of the LRC as well (Spillane, 2005; Hamatwi, 2015)

Apart from keeping the communication line open, the LRC members were expected to resolve conflicts that occurred on the school grounds. One of the participants in the interview mentioned that, “*LRC members are to be on the school grounds even when the teachers are not there in order to resolve conflict*” (IPR). The role of conflict resolver requires the learners to have interpersonal leadership skills, which could allow them to build proper interactions with other learners and to resolve issues. This calls for quite a high level of emotional intelligence and interaction.

In addition to liaising as mentioned above, the LRC team were expected to advise the School Management Team (SMT). A participant in the interview claimed that the LRC members

*“suggest to the school management on what can be done”* (IMT). The LRC members advised the SMT on various issues, including issues related to learners' affairs. During the interview, a participant indicated that it is better to listen to the suggestions of LRC members on issues related to other learners because *“those are the people who can understand other learners' problems ... as a teacher or a principal, you do not really understand their situation”* (IHOD). Although the teacher participants in the interviews indicated the liaison role of the LRC as a leadership opportunity, it was noted by other data gathering tools that the LRC members felt that were not thoroughly involved in this role (OBN1, p. 23).

Furthermore, the document revealed that the LRC members were assigned to different portfolios. The portfolios were *“hygiene, disciplinary affairs, sport and culture, entertainment and academic affairs”* (DA4). Each LRC member was expected to liaise with the school on issues related to the portfolio that she/he was designated to. Literature shows that the leadership opportunity of liaising emerged from the Namibian *Education Act 16 of 2001*, which indicates that the Learners Representative Council body was established to, amongst other functions, liaise between learners and school management (Namibia. MBEC, 2001, p. 19).

In summary, liaising with other learners and teachers in the school is a leadership role. Similarly, the role of organising events may require leadership skills, as it requires many people to complete numerous tasks that will lead to the successful hosting of the events. This resonates with distributed leadership which promotes the involvement of different people in leadership activities (Harris, 2004). Other LRC roles that emerged from the data, such as monitoring and supervising learners for study and tests were more managerial tasks than leadership roles. The participants could view a set of processes such as planning, supervision and monitoring as leadership roles, because they might not see the crucial difference between leadership and management or the vital functions that each role plays. Furthermore, the participants might associate everyone at the top of the hierarchy as a leader, therefore whatever tasks they might execute could be considered as a leadership role; this is not surprising since the two concepts are interrelated and at times used interchangeably. However, literature argues that managerial roles help the school to predictably do what it knows, while maintaining the status quo and stability (Bush, 2003), while leadership roles bring about transformation.

Furthermore, literature indicates that leadership and management have a close link and a great deal of similarity as far as inspiring, as well as directing people to the purpose of the organisation (Bush, 2003). Leadership and management are vital if schools are to function effectively and achieve the set goals. The school which is poorly managed but yet has a strong leader, may fail just like a school which is over-managed but under-led may lose any sense of the schools' set goals, thus, a balance in terms of leadership and management is needed for an institution to reach goals and objectives (Bush, 2003). Therefore, the LRC members might need to be entrusted with both leadership and management roles for the LRC structure to function effectively and efficiently.

The preceding section answered research question two of the study. In the next section, I present the factors enabling leadership development in the school.

#### **4.5 Factors enabling learner leadership development in the school**

One of the aims of the study was to develop leadership in the LRC structure. Therefore, it was significant to explore factors that assisted in learner leadership development. It is worth noting that evidence has shown that some of these factors were enabling, but room for further strengthening did exist. In addition to the data collection tools utilised thus far in the study, Change Laboratory workshops were also observed and documented. The presentation and discussion of findings is organised around the following factors: cooperation with other learners, meetings conducted with LRC members and training offered to LRC members.

##### ***4.5.1 Cooperation with other learners enables learner leadership development***

It was evident from the data that cooperation between the LRC members and other learners has helped in developing learner leadership. Respondents revealed that cooperation amongst the learners have contributed to the development of leadership in the school (LQ2; LQ5; LQ12; IMT; IHOD & IPR). The learners in the Representative Council reported that the “*good cooperation between them and other learners made it easier for them to plan and organise events*” (JE6, p. 27). The LRC members organised a number of events thus far and “*they were all*

*well received, they were all received quite well, the class tournament went well, the show was good, and the cleaning campaign went quite well – as well as all the initiatives went well”* (IPR). This view was confirmed by one of the teachers who remarked that *“you know learners like those events, they really do and it was a good initiative and you can see the way they did it, I think the whole school participated”* (IHOD). The learners did not only enjoy the events, but they helped in executing different tasks meant to contribute to the events. For example, during the planning of Miss Valentine’s day different tasks were carried out by different learners (OBN1, p. 23).

It was noted (JE6, p. 27) that:

The learners who were good at drawing helped the LRC to design advertorial posters for the event. On the day of the event, some learners cleaned and organised the chairs in the hall. Some decorated the hall and put newspaper at the windows to keep the light out. Some facilitated other learners when they were entering the hall and collected the entrance fees.

The idea of different tasks executed by various people resonates with distributed leadership which advocates for involvement and engagement of the expertise within a school, instead of looking for experts outside the school (Grant, 2008). The cooperation allows a network of individuals to pool their expertise (Harris, 2004).

The LRC members further expressed that in order to *“keep the cooperation positive, they announced the shows and tournaments a week or two in advance”* (JE6, p. 27). The early announcements gave learners a chance *“to source funds for the entrance fees. When learners have money for the events, they usually cooperated”* (JE6, p. 27). One of the learners indicated that if the event was not announced earlier, *“it might fail because those who could not find finances in a short time would end up disturbing those who were watching the event”* (JE6, p. 27; OBN1, p. 23).

In addition, the findings from the interview implied that the LRC members cooperated with outside people and organisations (IMT). The mentor teacher for the LRC stated that *“during the organising of Miss Valentine, they cooperated with some outsiders”* (IMT). The outsiders gave *“clothes that the participants in the pageant wore during the show”* (JE6, p. 27). The fact that

the LRC members were involved in an event and went in the community to seek solutions to their imminent challenges shows leadership skills. This view aligns with the view that when learners are aware of their leadership potential they could widen social interaction (Knott-Craig, 2007).

#### ***4.5.2 Meetings: A tool for leadership development***

It emerged from the study that the meetings conducted with the LRC members helped to develop learner leadership. The participants in the study indicated that meetings with the LRC members were conducted regularly (IMT; IPR; IHOD; JE1, p. 23). During the meetings, the LRC members were “*motivated and encouraged in their leadership functions*” (LQ8; IPR). Furthermore, they served as a platform where the mentor teacher “*motivated them and gave them any support or any guidance which they may require*” (IMT). In addition, one of the participants in the interview stated that the meetings with the LRC members discussed problems encountered in the school and ways to solve those problems (IMT). Meetings provided a good platform for the development of the LRC voice. This view is in line with Mitra and Gross, who advocate for the collaboration of learners with adults to make changes in and around their schools (2009). Similarly, the LRC meetings provided a good platform for communication between the LRC members and whosoever was entrusted with the conduct of the meetings. Giving learners a voice leads to student participation in developing their schools (Grant, 2015). It also provides adults with valuable insights into the dynamics of the school, through the lens of the learners (Hine, 2011). During these meetings, the learners were able to identify potential stumbling blocks to leadership and how these obstacles could be challenged and overcome (Mitra, 2007; Udjombala, 2006).

Although this was an enabling factor, there was still room to strengthen and improve the meetings. Having attended one of the LRC meetings, I noted that “*the mentor teacher chaired the meeting and was more focused on planning the initiatives of the council and discussing the LRC roles rather than giving the LRC an opportunity to really discuss and initiate new ideas*” (JE1, p. 23). The data seemed to contradict with the literature which mentions that amongst the LRC members, one of the learners should be appointed as a chairperson. The chairperson for the

LRC must chair all meetings of the LRC (Namibia. MBESC, 2002). Although the school documents were analysed, there was no evidence of other LRC meetings apart from the one I attended. The literature emphasises that the LRC members must hold at least two meetings during each school term. In addition, the secretary of the LRC must keep minutes of the proceedings of all LRC meetings (*ibid.*).

The findings indicated that the LRC members wanted more people to be involved in the meetings. They explained that “*meetings needed to be addressed by teachers, principals, parents, concerned leaders or any other person who was a good speaker*” (LQ5; LQ3 & LQ4). The learners further mentioned that “*the school needed a schedule of such meetings*” (JE6, p. 27). In summary, although meetings promoted leadership there was a need for this to happen more often.

#### ***4.5.3 Training: Is it a case of a restricted reality?***

The findings indicated that the training offered to the LRC members developed their leadership skills. Training seemed to be a popular way of developing leadership because the majority of the learner respondents indicated that leadership development training enhanced their leadership skills (LQ1; LQ3; LQ4; LQ6; LQ7; LQ9 & LQ10). The data from the interviews conducted with teachers revealed that the LRC members were “*coached and empowered through the training*” in their leadership roles (IPR; IMT & IHOD). During the interview, the principal stated that “*all the LRC members were given training on teamwork and building confidence at the beginning of the year*” (IPR). The literature supports the idea of training by highlighting the fact that training improves knowledge, skills and attitudes in the trainee and results in increased confidence, motivation and commitment (Udjombala, 2006).

The findings indicated that the LRC members might have benefited from leadership development training (LQ1; LQ10 & LQ9). The teachers noted that the LRC members were “*more active, their self-esteem was raised*” and they had “*brought tangible changes in the school after their training*” (IHOD; IPR & IMT). The documents attested that the “*LRC members were seeking funds to repaint toilets in the school*” (DA2). In addition, they were at an advanced stage to “*open a tuck shop at the school*”. The tuck shop was meant to “*generate extra money for the*

*school*” (DA2) and at the same time, it would end the practice of hawkers selling under the trees at the school (DA8). Furthermore, the LRC members were in the “*process of building a room at the gate for the security guard in order to protect him from all weather conditions*” (JE6, p. 26). The learners seemed to have gained a lot from the training. This is in keeping with the literature, as Udjombala (2006) advocates that training is a learning experience that seeks a permanent change in an individual. He further explains that the learning experience brought by training might modify the attitudes, skills and behaviour of a person and result in improved abilities as well as effective performance (*ibid.*).

Training could not be distinctly categorised as an enhancer of learner leadership development and the data discussed below is indicative of this. Firstly, the findings indicated that only “*four members of the council were trained in Okahandja*”, that was the “*head girl, head boy and their deputies*” (OBN1, p. 23; DA7). In addition, documents revealed that a “*one-week training took place in a town about 600 kilometres away from the school and it was offered by a leadership institute*” (DA7; JE6, p. 27). Findings have revealed the following shortcomings in this particular training: a restricted number of LRC members attended the training and the LRC members might have experienced issues of epistemological access because the programme was run by facilitators that are far removed from their school context. The positionality of the trainer might have also influenced the LRC members.

Secondly, although there was evidence of training attendance, the training component could not be determined by the study. This emerged from the fact that the “*absence of LRC files made it hard to retrieve further information disseminated to the LRC*” (JE1, p. 23). In addition, the mentor teacher and the four learners who attended the training “*could not provide any material issued at the training*” (JE7, p. 27). Furthermore, there was “*no feedback*” from the training given to the rest of the LRC members (JE7, p. 27; IHOD). As a result, “*the majority of the LRC had requested the head boy and head girl to offer internal training in what they were trained in*” (OBN2; JE7, p. 27). The school might benefit from offering further training to all LRC members, since Udjombala notes that training develops abilities of the individual to satisfy the current and future needs of the school (2006).

The findings revealed what the teachers expect from future learner leadership development trainings. The interview participants elaborated on a need to have levels of training. *“On Level one, the LRC needed to be introduced to the concept of leadership. At Level two, the LRC needed to be given a platform for leadership practice. At Level three, there was a need to introduce evaluation and assessment of the LRC members and their leadership practice”* (IMT; IPR). It was further added that the LRC members needed to be *“transformed by the leadership”* training and *“embark on changes initiatives in their communities”* (IPR; IHOD). In the same vein, Spillane indicates that there is a need to first build and develop leadership capabilities in those that will be trusted with the tasks (2006). Similarly, the learners indicated that they needed the *“leadership training to come from different people and organisations”* (LQ3; LQ10). Finally, one of the teachers interviewed stated that *“every year the learners should go there for training”* (IHOD). The expectation expressed was for the Oshana Educational Regional Office to budget for the training at the Leadership Institute on a yearly basis (IHOD). This view implied that learners could continue benefiting from the regional initiative.

The study discovered that although there were enhancing factors for learner leadership development in the school, there were limiting factors as well. I discuss these in terms of CHAT, as outlined in Chapter Two.

## **4.6 Factors constraining learner leadership development in the school**

The following section discusses factors that are hindering the development of learner leadership. The discussion considers CHAT in terms of the historical and cultural context of the factors. The findings are organised and presented under the following sub themes: policy limitation, and lack of confidence which is further divided into two categories, which are: peer pressure and language as a barrier.

### ***4.6.1 Policy limitation constrains learner leadership development***

The absence of a national LRC policy constrains learner leadership development. The findings revealed that policies were limiting the development of learner leadership at the school (IPR;

IHOD; IMT & JE6, p. 26). One of the teachers interviewed said that “*there were no learner policies at the school*” (IMT). The view was confirmed by document analysis, as I noted that “*no policy, guidelines or book guide were found on learner leadership at the school*” (JE1, p. 23). The teachers further explained that they “*relied on the Educational Act when dealing with LRC issues*” (IPR & IMT).

In addition, during the Change Laboratory workshops, the LRC members revealed that there were “*no LRC schedules or programmes for the year to guide their activities*” (JE6, p. 27). The fact that there was no set year programme meant that the LRC members conducted meetings and planned for any upcoming activities on an ad hoc basis. They indicated that they needed a “*schedule of activities for the year*” because it would make their planning easier (JE7, p. 27).

The issue of a lack of policies on the LRC in Namibia has been reported by earlier studies conducted by Shekupakela-Nelulu (2008) and Uushona (2012). Although there are no LRC policies as such, there are Regulations made in 2002 under the *Education Act 16 of 2001* which guides the LRC in terms of the election, nominations, power and functions (Namibia. MBESC, 2002). This document was however not found at the research site as the school relied on *Educational Act 16 of 2001* as a guide when dealing with LRC affairs (IPR; IMT).

The lack of policies to guide and direct the learners in the Representative Council proved to be an obstacle in achieving the object of the study which is leadership development in the LRC structure. For instance, since the school does not have a copy of the Regulations made under the *Education Act of 2001*, the constitution of the LRC at the school consists of learners in Grade 10, 11 and 12 but the Regulations 29(c) clearly stipulates that “only a learner who will be in one of the two highest grades at the school in the following year may be nominated” for a LRC position (Namibia. MBESC, 2002, p.18).

In addition, the Regulations indicated that the LRC members must conduct a minimum of two meetings per term and that the minutes of such meetings should be kept. However, no minutes of the LRC meetings were found at the school. The absence of the policies (rules) equates to the

inadequate guidance of LRC (subject) and thus remains as a hindrance for leadership development (object). The possible cause of this is the culture of the school. The unavailability of certain documents at the school might have been caused by the way the school records and stores the documents. For example, on the issue of the LRC file, it was evident that the LRC members went for training but yet no materials were found at the school site. The absence of files might have spiralled from other issues, for instance, the school managers might not have placed value on or recognised some of these documents. There is a possibility that the school managers are not aware of how to implement these documents. Similarly, there might be problems in policy dissemination resulting in some schools not receiving some of the important policies.

#### ***4.6.2 Lack of confidence amongst the LRC members***

In this sub-theme I present and discuss lack of confidence as a constraining factor. Findings revealed that lack of confidence was caused by other aspects such as peer pressure and language barriers which are also discussed in this subtheme.

The findings revealed that a lack of confidence limited leadership development amongst the members of the Representative Council (LQ3; LQ5; LQ6; LQ8 & LQ9). The LRC members explained how they found it *“hard to stand at the podium in order to address other learners”* (JE6, p. 27). The teacher participants reiterated that the LRC members were expected to *“be bold and confident, a character trait that had only been noticed in the head boy”* so far (IPR). This view corresponded with findings from my observation that *“the head boy was very confident and had an aura around him that commanded respect from other LRC members”* (OBN1, p. 23). In addition, one of the teachers stated that if a LRC member was not confident, other learners might not respect him/her (IHOD). Similarly, another teacher elaborated that if a LRC member lacked confidence *“one can really tell you that maybe even if he finds other learners doing something wrong, he will not address them”* (IPR). The above views seemed to imply that the learners might even misbehave in front of a LRC member, but the LRC member would not be able to act on it.

It was noted that only three members of the LRC were “*really active during the first workshop*” (JE6, p. 27). The other nine members were “*shy and reserved. They talked and contributed only when they were specifically asked for something. The girls were the least confident*” (JE6, p. 17 & OBN1, p. 23).

Lack of confidence is located in the LRC members themselves. This challenge is causing the LRC members to shy away from addressing issues of other learners and involving themselves in other responsibilities. This serves as an impediment for the LRC (subject) to grow and develop in terms of leadership (object). The study revealed that the lack of confidence was caused by peer pressure and language barriers and a discussion of this now follows.

#### ***4.6.2.1 Peer pressure has an effect on LRC members’ confidence***

The findings pointed out that peer pressure affected the confidence of the LRC members in the school. The learners indicated that the views, behaviours and attitudes of other learners affected their self-esteem (LQ1; LQ2 & LQ11). One of the learners said: “*I am an LRC member, but my friends are not, so I have to be careful or I will not have my friends*” (JE6, p. 26). Issues of peer pressure imply that her behaviour needed to conform to her friends’ behaviour, meaning her peers determined how she acted and executed her leadership role. The data concurs with the view expressed in the literature that learners at the adolescent stage are vulnerable to peer pressure, as a result they seek for validation from others, even at the cost of their independence just so that they can maintain relationships with their friends (Allan, Porter, & McFarland, 2006).

In terms of CHAT, peer pressure is located between the LRC (subject) and the community where learners are positioned. Peer pressure is hindering the LRC members from executing their leadership roles and from reaching the object of the activity system. Peer pressure seemed to be more of a social factor, hence the LRC members might either be influenced or influence others (*ibid.*). In line with this thinking, an LRC member with an uncertain social status is likely to seek acceptance from others by doing what others are doing (Allan et al., 2006). The result of peer pressure might affect the LRC members differently, depending on the individual cultural capital.

#### ***4.6.2.2 Language barriers dampen confidence levels***

The findings revealed that the confidence of the LRC members was affected by the issue of a language barrier (IPR; OBN1, p. 23; OBN2, p. 23; JE6, p. 27 & JE7, p. 27). The findings pointed out that “*the LRC members with poor English language skills were discouraged from participating in activities that needed interactions*” (JE6, p. 27). One of the reasons was given earlier in this section. For instance, “*if they pronounced a word wrongly other learners would laugh at them and sometimes name them after that word*” (JE6, p. 27). The data concurred with the view expressed in the literature that language barriers affect confidence and a person might avoid participating in a discussion in order to avoid a *loss of face* (Harzing & Freely, 2007). In addition, persons with a language barrier might also avoid saying something so that they might not be considered stupid, ill-informed or slow on the uptake (*ibid.*). Similarly, one of the teachers interviewed felt that the “*LRC members who are fluent in English talk to visitors and other learners just fine, but those that are not fluent in English find it hard to convey something to others*” so they were usually reluctant to address visitors and other learners during formal gatherings (IPR).

In terms of CHAT, the language barrier occurs within one element (the LRC) of a single activity system. The language barrier was limiting learners from being outspoken and from fulfilling the tasks required for leadership development (object). The English language as a challenge arises from history. The introduction of English as a medium of instruction in schools was made for political reasons (Töttemeyer, 2010). English was never a colonial language in Namibia, thus a sudden transition to English as a medium of instruction from Afrikaans was problematic, since the majority of Namibians could not speak and or understand the English language well (Töttemeyer, 2010). Literature emphasises that the effect of a utopian language on the learners is that they are rendered voiceless, and not able to make themselves heard in public owing to lack of command of the official language (*ibid.*).

In summary, the LRC leadership development was probably affected by the country’s history. I next discuss the contradictions in terms of Cultural Historical Activity Theory that emerged from the various data sets.

## **4.7 Contradictions in the activity system**

This section starts with a brief discussion on contradictions that surfaced in the data. Thereafter, the findings are discussed under the following subthemes: lack of support from the school, disciplinary matters and silence of the LRC voice.

### ***4.7.1 Contradictions***

The study used CHAT as an analytical tool; therefore, it is significant that I reiterate the meaning of contradictions before they are discussed. The term contradictions are used to show cultural-historical misfits within or between elements of a single activity system (Foot, 2001). Although there are four different levels of contradictions, only the primary and secondary contradictions were found in this study. The primary contradiction is used to refer to a contradiction which occurs within one element of a single activity system, while a secondary contradiction develops between elements of an activity system (Foot, 2014). Contradictions were surfaced by digging deeper into the cultural-historical background and asking the ‘why’ question – they are thus tentative, as they have not been surfaced through direct data. The first contradiction in the study is discussed next.

### ***4.7.2 Lack of support from the school restricts learner leadership development***

I commence by discussing the lack of support from the teachers, thereafter I present and discuss this issue of lack of support by focusing on the principal.

#### ***4.7.2.1 Lack of teachers support hinders the development of leadership in LRC***

The findings revealed that the teachers are not giving the necessary support to the LRC members. The majority of the participants in the study reported that there was lack of support from the teachers in terms of learner leadership development as well as the aforementioned activities (JE6, p. 26; JE7, p. 27; OBN1; OBN2, p. 23; IPR; IHOD & IMT). During the Change Laboratory workshops, the learners expressed that when they “*reported other learners who had committed offences in the school, the teachers recorded the offences. However, they did not take up the issues with those who committed the offence or the victims in the issues*” (JE7, p. 27). One of the

learners was quoted saying, *“If I tell a learner go to class, that learner will insult me and then I will get angry and then I will go tell the teacher and then that teacher will only say ‘I will go deal with him’ but nothing is done. That learner will continue insulting me”* (JE7, p. 27). The data concurs with the view from Smyth that when teachers are unresponsive and ignorant to the cries of the LRC members, it causes frustrations amongst them (2006).

In addition, the LRC members revealed that *“at times, the teachers did not attend to learners in the representative Council whenever they came to discuss something with them. Sometimes the LRC were referred to the mentor teacher who likewise did not act on the offences or the culprits”* (JE7, p. 27). This kind of behaviour discouraged the learners in the Representative Council from *“reporting issues and they also felt discouraged when offences were committed over and over again without any actions from the school”*, although such conducts were reported (JE7, p. 27). This view aligns with Grant (2015) who mentions that learners tend to feel that their lives and hopes are undervalued when they are not taken seriously.

Furthermore, the LRC members discussed that *“the teachers only helped the LRC when there was a need for transport or issues of finances”* (JE6, p. 27; OBN1, p. 23). Findings further revealed that *“only two teachers at the school fully cooperated with the LRC members (IMT), and this was because the two were attached to learners’ affairs”* (JE6, p. 27). The teacher participants felt that if there were issues that needed their attention, *“the mentor teacher would bring those issues to their desks”* (IPR; IHOD). They further added that they *“expected the LRC to inform the two teachers (Mentors) of any problem they might come across”* (IPR) and then the teachers would *“judge whether the issue was important enough to be brought to the attention of the rest of the staff”* (JE6, p. 27).

The teachers interviewed mentioned that there was lack of support on the part of the teachers (IPR; IHOD & IMT). One of the teachers remarked that when it came to activities in the school, the *“majority [teachers] did not show interest, they did not attend, see or even go to check what was going on”* (IMT). These views were confirmed by another teacher (IPR) who pointed out that:

Teachers are not able to do much, they instead complain that the LRC members are not doing anything. They are in fact forgetting that it is also their responsibility to provide support and suggest to the committee in place that I have this idea, why don't the LRC do A and B.

The interview gave me opportunities to determine the causes of lack of support. One of the interviewees explained that it was hard for the teachers to offer support: *"Imagine you as a teacher were never involved in any of these leadership positions, so it can be a problem because you may actually not know how to assist the LRC"* (IPR). Similarly, another teacher added that *"I have never been an LRC before so what do I tell them?"* (IHOD). This implies that the background of the teachers did not prepare them to offer support to learner leadership development.

The fact that the teachers were not aware of how to help, indicates that they were not familiar with learner leadership development. It might be based on the school culture, which is its norms, values and beliefs. The literature points out that culture gives an organisation such as a school, a sense of identity and determines the values, ideas and language (Donnell & Boyle, as cited in Nangolo, 2015, p.10). Probably, the school does not reflect a culture of learner leadership development that the teachers could follow. A school with a positive culture has a social environment in which learners' views are valued. In addition, schools which embrace a positive culture have functional structures where learners are provided with an opportunity to be heard. Furthermore, learners in such schools are involved in solving problems and making decisions that affect them (Schein, as cited in Nangolo, 2015, p. 10). There are however, schools with an undesirable culture. These schools do the same thing every year regardless of whether what is being done is appropriate or not. Such schools have leadership practices that are more autocratic and do not cater for other people's views and opinions (Nangolo, 2015). The data gathered seem to indicate that learners do not get the necessary support from their teachers and this could be associated with a negative school culture as explained by Nangolo (2015).

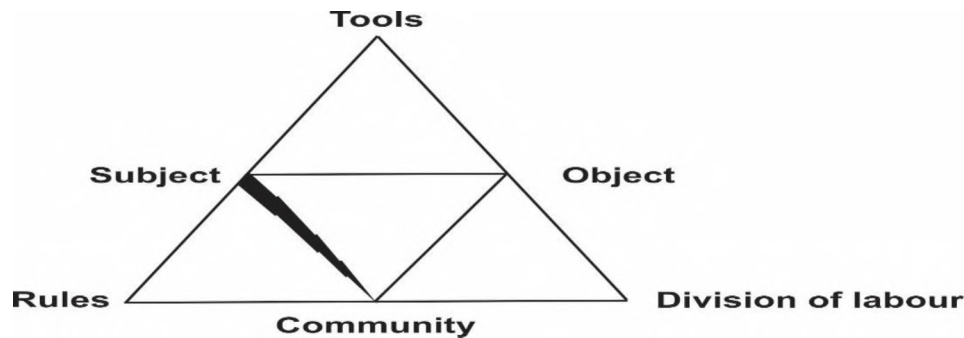
In addition, one of the teachers indicated that the lack of support was caused by the fact that *"the school was not performing well academically"* (IMT). The teacher further explained that *"the poor performance negatively affected the staff morale. The teachers no longer saw the*

*importance of LRC activities in the school as they looked at the activities as barriers to their teaching*” (IMT). The negativity caused low interest in the activities organised by the learners in the Representative Council. The interviewed teacher further added that teachers wanted to *“concentrate on their lessons only and that they did not view learner leadership as a contribution to the core curriculum for their subjects”* (IMT). The fact that teachers did not view leadership as part of schooling, leaves one to wonder as to what is schooling? Another teacher remarked that *“some teachers for certain reasons do not want to be associated with the LRC”* (IHOD). The teacher further explained that those are the teachers who would make comments such as *“you are an LRC, you should behave better or perform better”* (IHOD). This implies that some teachers seemed to have a negative attitude towards the LRC members as evident by the comment above.

#### ***4.7.2.2 Lack of support from the principal is hampering learner leadership development***

The LRC members pointed out that the principal’s lack of support is hindering the development of leadership in the LRC structure. The principal is responsible for the overall leadership in the school and needs an alternative approach to leadership which promotes team work and collaboration (de Villiers, 2010). However, the learners pointed out that at times they *“approached the principal to alert him of the situation on the school grounds. However, the principal used to send them to the mentor teacher and encouraged them to follow the right channel of communication”* (JE7, p. 27; OBN2, p. 23). The responses from the principal indicate that the attitude of the principal is hence not supporting collaboration, which is needed for effective leadership. Similarly, the principal seemed to maintain a traditional leadership structure, whereby ideas flow from top to down (Black et al., 2014). I argue for a need to adopt an alternative to leadership which is shared amongst the group and has a supportive environment for the betterment of the people (Grant, 2008).

In terms of CHAT, a lack of support from the teachers and from the principal is a secondary contradiction. The contradiction is between the subject (LRC) and the communities where the teachers/principal are located as shown by the diagram below.



***Figure 4.1: Lack of support as a contradiction***

This is a contradiction because when the LRC members are not getting the support they need from the teachers/principal, it impedes them from fulfilling the tasks meant to develop leadership in them, which is the object of the activity system. Culturally, there is a tendency towards marginal interaction between adults and children. Commonly, adults talk and command, while children listen and obey. A teacher/principal with a strong cultural background might view learners as children, and therefore may opt not to listen to them. Therefore, cultural aspects might have caused teachers not to be supportive.

Another possible reason for a lack of support might be historicity. Teachers/principal who have never seen the LRC members being supported are likely not to give the support as well, based either on the fact that they do not know how to, or that they do not see the need for providing support. Finally, a school could only expect teachers to provide support if they are aware of leadership practices. Williams (2011) highlights that implementers in a school setting may not be able to implement a new style of leadership, if they are not adequately motivated and trained on it.

#### ***4.7.3 Disciplinary matters around the school restrict learner leadership development***

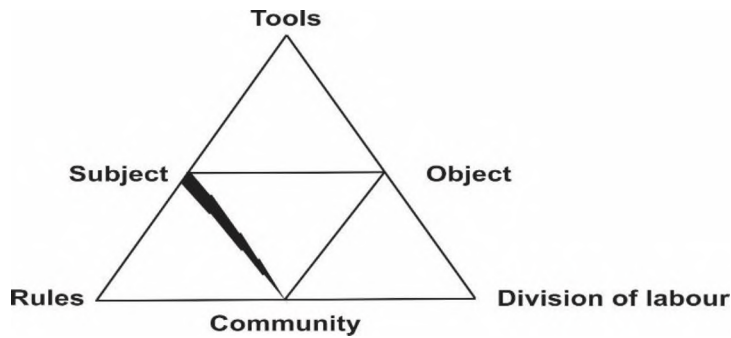
The findings revealed that disciplinary matters obstruct the development of learner leadership. The data emerged indicated that one of the populous contradictions of leadership development centred on disciplinary issues in the school (LQ1; LQ2; LQ4; LQ5; LQ6; LQ8; LQ9 & LQ10). The learners in the Representative Council strongly expressed that the manners and behaviour of

other learners were hindering their leadership development. One of the learner respondents reported that *“they are bossy towards us”* (LQ2). Another learner indicated that there were *“lots of fights in the school”* (LQ10). The LRC members reported that there were cases of *“bullying”* (LQ4) and *“discriminating”* (LQ6). The data further revealed that *“fighting on the school premises, carrying of dangerous weapons, usage of abusive language, bullying and threatening”* were some of the common disciplinary issues in the school (DA3). The LRC members felt that these issues affected their work as *“they avoided becoming victims of the known perpetrators”* (JE6, p. 27). The LRC members implied that they might not carry out specific LRC roles because they did not want to be bullied, threatened, disrespected or insulted. Disciplinary matters thus became contradictions in terms of learner leadership development.

The findings indicated that there are *“disciplinary measures taken when a learner does something wrong at the school”* (IPR). The teacher further added that *“if a case is serious, parents or guardians are called to hear what their child did”* and that the decisions of what to be done next were discussed in the presence of parents or guardians (IPR). The teacher further noted that the *“disciplinary issues had decreased compared to a few years back”* (IPR).

The LRC members for disciplinary affairs were reported *“not to have been involved in disciplinary issues at the school”* (JE6, p. 27). Literature however suggests that the LRC members *“assist the principal and teachers to ensure adherence to the code of conduct of the school by all learners so as to create and maintain an orderly and disciplined school environment conducive to learning”* (Namibia. MBESC, 2002, p. 19).

In terms of CHAT, disciplinary issues are secondary contradictions because they occur between the subjects and the community where other learners are located, as indicated by Figure 4.3 below.



**Figure 4.2: Disciplinary matters as a contradiction**

The issues related to discipline are discouraging the subject (the LRC) of the activity system from developing leadership. Disciplinary problems might be arising from historical aspects. For instance, literature suggests that discipline in Namibian schools has deteriorated to an alarming level because learners are frustrated with having to communicate in a language that they do not understand well (Töttemeyer, 2010). The literature further reveals that “some learners had become so rebellious and aggressive that teachers were afraid of them” (Töttemeyer, 2010, p. 16). This implies that the causes of disciplinary issues might have to do with deeper issues which are outside the scope of this study. The following subsection discusses learner voice.

#### **4.7.4 Silence of LRC voice**

The findings pointed out that there are limitations to LRC voice and consequently to learner leadership development. The learners’ responses expressed that they were not fully given a voice by the principal and the School Board at the school (LQ2; LQ3 & LQ5). These views were further confirmed by the observation notes whereby the LRC members explained that *“the way things are now working, you go to the principal and then he tells you to go to the mentor teacher. When you go to the mentor teacher he takes ten days to go to the principal, you know things are just slow and then the due date is fast approaching”* (OBN1, p. 23). Another learner (OBN1, p. 23) added:

The thing is now, we take an issue to mentor teacher, then the mentor teacher maybe he does not take the issue to the principal or he delays us or things are not done. When we are doing things, they are not just going forward but if we take issues straight to the principal then he will know what is happening.

They above views revealed that the channel of communication at the school was blocking the LRC voices since they were expected to bring all their issues to the mentor teachers only. The LRC members had however emphasised their wish to “*communicate with the principal directly*” (JE6, p. 26; JE7, p. 27). The above desire is in contrast with the Regulations made under the *Education Act 16 of 2001* which indicates that a teacher be appointed to liaise between the LRC members and the school management. This implies that the expectation of the document is that the LRC members brings issues to a designated teacher or a mentor teacher as called in their school, who will in turn forward the issues to the school management. The need for a proper channel of communication, as revealed in the study, concurs with the literature which argues that the prospects for learners to partake meaningfully in schools’ leadership could be delimited by the hierarchical system (Black et al., 2014). The structure is made to accommodate ideas from the top to bottom, and thus the principal might find it hard to actually accept ideas from the bottom up.

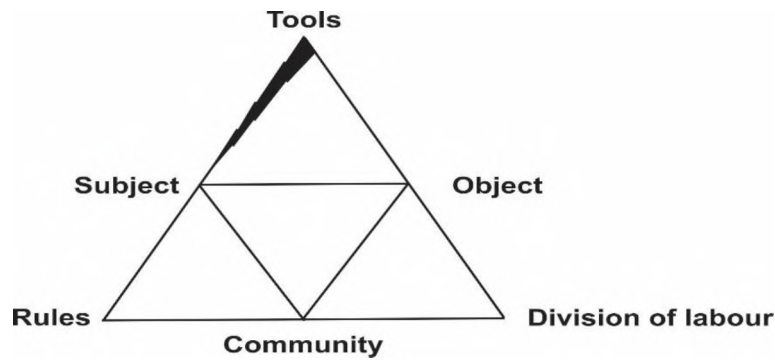
The findings further indicated that although there were “*two learners appointed to serve on the School Board committee*” (DA4), which was the highest decisioning body in the school, “*they were never invited to attend such meetings*” (JE6, p. 27). The fact that the learners were not represented means that “*LRC’s points of view are not taken into consideration by the School Board members*” (LQ3). In an attempt to find the previous minutes of the School Board, the principal confirmed that “*they had not invited the LRC members to School Board meetings*”. He further said that “*it was not a deliberate thing; they just forgot to invite the learners*” (JE2, p. 25). During the Change Laboratory workshops, the LRC members specified that “*the former LRC used to be invited and to attend the School Boards meetings*” (OBN2, p. 23). In the same vein, one of the teachers indicated that “*it was not really easy for the school to invite the kids to School Board meetings because sometimes they discuss serious and confidential things*” (JE2, p. 25). However, the teacher added that “*they maybe needed to invite them, just so that they could hear and assist the LRC more*” (JE2, p. 25). The issue of not inviting the LRC School Board members to the School Board meetings might be caused by the culture. Traditionally, it is taboo for children to be in the presence of adults when significant issues are being deliberated on (Shekupakela-Nelulu, 2008). When adults are discussing things that need to be resolved, children

are sent far away where they cannot eavesdrop. Teachers who are from this background, might find it surreal to invite learners and therefore might opt to forget to invite them.

The LRC meeting attended was “*chaired by a mentor teacher*” (JE1, p. 23). The mentor teacher “*guided the proceedings and gave chances to learners to contribute their views. The learners were not really outspoken and listened more as the teacher instructed them on what needed to be done and how it was going to be done*” (JE1, p. 23). The data above indicated that the mentor teacher viewed himself as the only capable person to navigate the gathering, instead of giving a voice to the LRC chairperson by entrusting him/her with chairpersonship.

The literature urges principals who are gatekeepers of schools to give opportunities to learners to lead meaningfully, by encouraging them to take part in problem solving and decision-making (Hamatwi, 2015). This could materialise by involving the LRC members in School Board meetings. In addition, the Namibian education system was organised around participation in decision-making of all stakeholders in education (Namibia. MEC, 1993). The inclusion of learners was aimed at creating a democratic society as called for by the policy document guideline of the Ministry of Education. The government further called for a learner's legislative body to be involved in decision-making on behalf of other learners, as discussed earlier. The idea for the above was to ensure that learners have a platform where they could express themselves. A similar view was pointed out that learner voice could be heard by giving learners opportunities to participate in school decision-making, by being given a platform where they can learn democratic principles, by sharing their opinions and working to improve school conditions for themselves (Mitra & Gross, 2009).

In terms of CHAT, learner's voice is a secondary contradiction between the learners (subject) in the Representative Council and the mediated tools as shown in the diagram below.



**Figure 4.3: Learner voice as a contradiction**

Learners' voices were not being heard because of the established channel of communication (tool) which was hampering the subjects (the LRC) from reaching the object which was learner leadership development. The policy has a hand in hindering learner voice since it stipulates that a teacher is appointed from the senior teachers to be a liaison between the LRC members and school management (Namibia. MBESC, 2002).

Having discussed the contradictions that surfaced in the study in terms of literature and CHAT, next I present how LRC voice can be invoked through the Change Laboratory workshops.

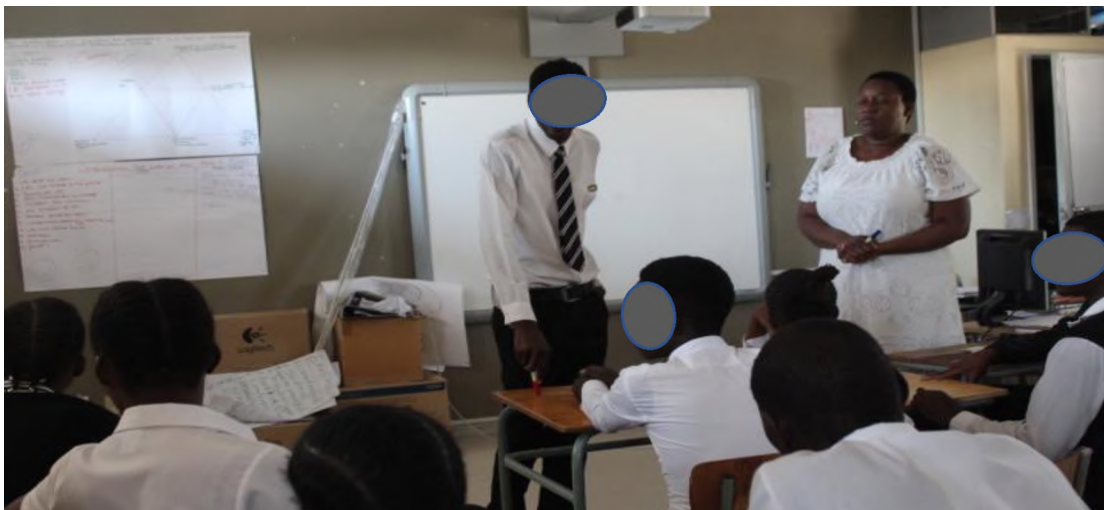
#### **4.8 Invoking LRC voice in Change Laboratory workshops**

In this section, I present an overview of the two Change Laboratory workshops (CLW) held on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2017 and 4<sup>th</sup> July 2017. The Change Laboratory is a formative intervention method that was used to mirror the contradictions that emerged in learner leadership development and to create new models for the activity system. The findings indicated that the CLWs were partially successful. The partial success was attributed to the fact that learners in the Representative Council sought solutions and planned on how to address contradictions and challenges. In addition, a plan of activities of what the LRC members would be doing for the rest of the year, was drawn up. As a researcher-interventionist, my role was to intervene by asking provoking questions and supporting the process, while ensuring that the LRC members led and owned the process (Sannino et al., 2016). The section is presented and organised as follows: The Change Laboratory workshops, solutions to the contradictions that surfaced in the study, solutions to

some challenges that emerged in the study and the outcome of the Change Laboratory workshops.

#### ***4.8.1 The Change Laboratory workshops***

The first Change Laboratory workshop focused on mirroring the data. This was attended by all 12 LRC members and a mentor teacher whose duty was to take pictures and video only. I introduced Engeström's second generation triangle to the LRC members and discussed how contradictions can exist within and between the elements of the system (Engeström, 2001). The mirror data which comprised contradictions and challenges, was used as a stimulus for workshop discussions while the object of the activity system offered the second stimulus (Ploettner & Tresseras, 2016). Therefore, double stimulation was employed in the research study. Engeström's model is characterised by a principle of multivoicedness, whereby the LRC members were involved in debate, negotiation and orchestration (Engeström & Sannino, 2010, p. 5). During the discussions, the LRC members felt that some of the challenges and contradictions were similar, so they started combining what they understood to be similar or related. By the end of the first workshop, the LRC members had discussed all the constraints and had placed the contradictions on the CHAT triangle. The picture below was taken during the first Change Laboratory workshop.



***Figure 4.4: The LRC members during the first CLW***

On reflection of the first day of the CLW, I noted a need to encourage the LRC members to use their mother tongue. I hoped that it would encourage more learners to participate in the second workshop. Literature advocates that language is a means of transmitting culture and cultural identity (Namibia. MBESC, 2003). The usage of the mother tongue might help in retaining cultural values embedded in it and traditional ways of expression which might be obscured by the use of another language (*ibid.*). Similar views were expressed by other studies. For example, one of the well-known Zimbabwean authors and Shona-speaker, Dambudzo Marechera was quoted describing the effect his second language, had on him (Töttemeyer, 2010). He said that "I lost the ability to express the simplest things ... I incessantly talked disjointed nonsense ... I felt raped inside through the conflict between Shona and English ... I felt literally as if my words had been stolen" (p. 27). This basically implies that some people find themselves passive, helpless and confused when expected to express themselves in a second language. The picture below depicts an LRC member facilitating the first Change Laboratory workshop.



***Figure 4.5: An LRC member facilitating the first CLW***

In addition, I also recognised a need to encourage female learners to take part in facilitating the workshop. The idea was to ascertain whether there would be a change in the interactions. The notion was to redistribute power in terms of gender.

The second Change Laboratory workshop focused on finding solutions to the contradictions and to the challenges that emerged (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013). It was conducted with nine learners only and no teacher was present. The discussion started with how the contradictions listed in the posters were resolved in the past. Most of the learners seemed not to have ideas of the past solutions. One of the learners presented on what she could remember concerning historical changes in learner leadership development with reference to the contradictions. Thereafter, the focus changed to the mirroring of the future which is used to present solutions (*ibid.*). Sannino asserts that mirrors are used as stimulus for stimulating and provoking discussions during Change Laboratory workshops (2009).

#### ***4.8.1.1 Solutions generated in the CLW***

The LRC members deliberated and sought a model solution for the lack of support from the side of the teachers. The learners in the Representative Council recommended that the principal “*delegate teachers on a rotational basis to guide and facilitate any initiative that the LRC might come up with*” (OBN2, p. 23). The LRC members further emphasised a need for the “*principal to organise short training on leadership for all the teachers in the school*” (JE7, p. 27). Udjombala highlights that training equips individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to address the needs of the organisation (2006, p. 23). Thus, training might develop teachers’ understanding of contemporary leadership practices.

#### ***4.8.1.2 The model solutions to disciplinary issues***

The LRC members emphasised that the “*teachers should make a follow-up on offences reported by the LRC and punitive measures needed to be implemented to the offenders*” (OBN2, p. 23). They further explained that the discipline in the school would only “*change if the LRC were given the power*” (OBN2, p. 23) to help the teachers maintain discipline within the school surrounds.

#### ***4.8.1.3 The model solution to silence of learner voice***

The LRC members argued that the *“two learners assigned to the School Board be invited to future School Board meetings”* (JE7, p. 27). In addition, the LRC members emphasised that *“they want to be free and able to give their ideas or suggestions straight to the principal and not follow the established channel of communication”* (OBN2, p. 23).

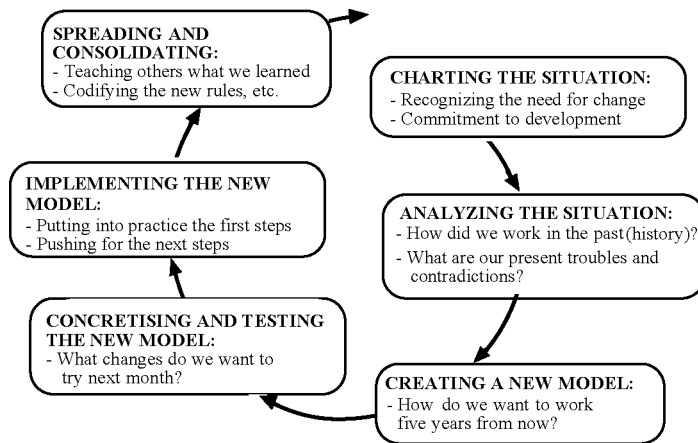
#### ***4.8.1.4 Solutions to factors constraining learner leadership development***

Apart from modelling the solution, the learners sought ways to overcome the challenges hindering learner leadership development. On policy limitations, the LRC members did not deliberate on policy as such, but on the LRC schedule at the school. It was resolved that there was a need to have a *“schedule to guide the activities of the year. The schedule would make planning easier. The LRC agreed to draw up a draft of activities for the rest of the year at the end of the Change Laboratory workshops”* (OBN2, p. 23).

The solution to the challenge of lack of confidence could not be resolved straight away by the LRC members. The discussion moved to the causes of low confidence levels. Further discussions led to the revelation that *“their roles were not really clear to them which also had an impact on their confidence”* (JE, p. 27). For instance, they commented that *“other learners approached them on certain issues and because they were not clear on their roles, they ended up not able to help and that made other learners look down on the LRC members”* (JE, p. 27). The learners in the Representative Council emphasised the need to have *“their roles explicitly explained to them”* (OBN1, p. 23). They also recommended that the *“LRC be introduced to other learners at the assembly whereby other learners would also be informed of the LRC duties”* (JE, p. 27).

Throughout the Change Laboratory workshops, the learners in the Representative Council were involved in solving contradictions which are starting points for expansive learning (Foot, 2001). During the expansive learning process, the participants search for solutions to contradictions and moved towards their zone of proximal development which is the space of expansive transition (Sannino et al., 2009, p. 302). The Change Laboratory workshops allowed the LRC members to be involved in three different stages of the expansive learning cycle (See Figure 4.6). The first

stage is when learners were involved in questioning and critiquing the practice of learner leadership development in the school. During the second stage, they tried to trace the history of learner leadership development. In the third stage, the LRC members engaged in modelling new solutions (Engeström, 2016).



**Figure 4.6: The phases of Change Laboratory process** (adapted from Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013, p. 46)

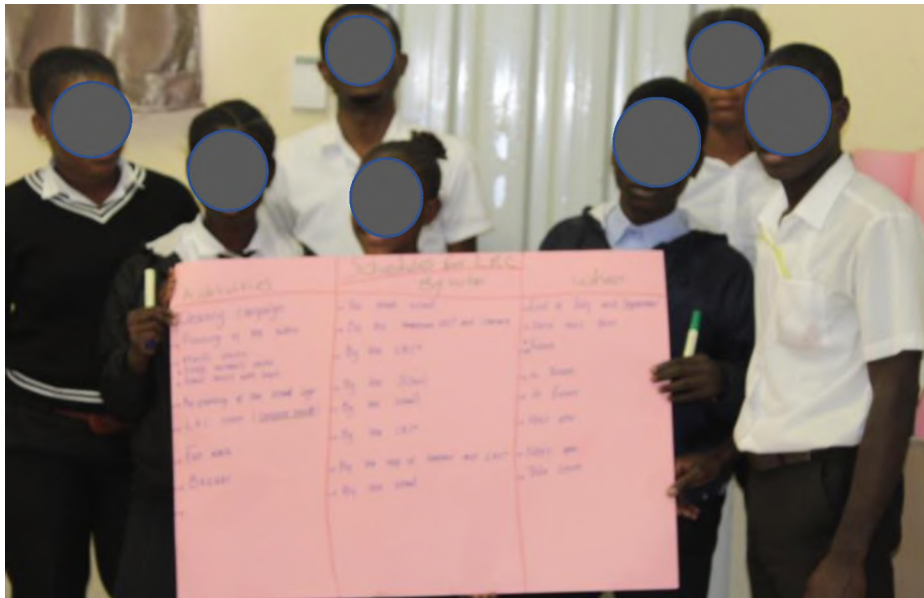
In addition, the Change Laboratory workshop facilitated the principle of ascending from abstract to the concrete which is connected to expansive learning (Ploettner & Tresseras, 2016). As a researcher-interventionist, I invited participants to think differently, that is to think dialectically about their activity, therefore, triggering participants to acquire a different type of thinking about their leadership practice (Ploettner & Tresseras, 2016).

Upon careful reflection of the second CLW, it was evident that a female learner did not stick to her mother tongue during the presentation. She instead code switched between Oshiwambo (which is her mother tongue) and English (which is the medium of instruction at the school). This seemed to arouse the interest of all the learners during the CLW. They would code switch as they questioned and probed further during the facilitation process. Literature suggests that code switching allows learners to discuss ideas that they might not express in English and disclose ideas which would have been concealed if they were to observe exclusive English use in

the workshop (Kamati, 2011). In addition, the LRC members seemed to find it easier to interact with the female facilitator rather than the head boy and deputy head boy. This implies that power sharing and code switching might invoke learner voice during the Change Laboratory workshops.

#### ***4.8.2 The outcome of the Change Laboratory workshops***

The Change Laboratory success is attributed to the drawing up of the LRC plan of activities for the rest of the year. This implies that by the time I left the school, the LRC members had an idea of what activities they would be conducting and when.



***Figure 4.7: The LRC members holding a poster with planned activities for the rest of the year***

Activities	Schedules for LRC By who	when
Cleaning Campaign	→ The whole school	→ End of July and September
→ Painting of the toilets	→ By the teachers LRC <sup>s</sup> and learners	→ Done next term
→ Matric shirts → Staff member's shirts → School shirts with logos	→ By the LRC <sup>s</sup>	→ Future
→ Re-painting of the school logo	→ By the School	→ In Future
→ LRC room (computer inside)	→ By the school	→ In Future
→ Fun walk	→ By the LRC <sup>s</sup>	→ Next year
→ Bazaar	→ By the help of teachers and LRC <sup>s</sup>	→ Next year
→	→ By the school	→ This term

**Figure 4.8:** The poster with planned activities for the rest of the year

To conclude, this section gave an overview of the Change Laboratory workshops. It further presented new solutions. I move on to a few concluding thoughts.

## 4.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, the picture that emerged was that learner leadership was not understood as a distributed form of leadership, whereby any learner could be involved in shared leadership. It seemed to be about enforcing the code of conduct at the school. The data presented indicated that leadership was viewed as a means of having certain abilities to lead or as an innate trait – which aligns with a traditional view of leadership. The study further revealed that the LRC members were more engaged in management roles instead of leadership roles at the school. The data further highlighted that there were factors that were enabling learner leadership development in the school, such as cooperation and training. However, challenges to learner leadership development in the form of policy limitation and a lack of confidence, also existed. A lack of support, disciplinary issues and silence of LRC voice, are some of the contradictions which seemed to hinder leadership development at the school. The chapter concluded with an overview of the Change Laboratory workshops. Next, I present the concluding chapter to this thesis.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I described and analysed the data generated to address my research questions. In this closing chapter I begin by providing a brief explanation of the research findings of this study (a detailed description of these findings were presented in the previous chapter). The potential value of this study, and some recommendations for the improvement of learner leadership development is provided. These suggestions provided will not only benefit learner leadership development practices at the case study school, but schools across Namibia. This chapter then provides the reader with some suggestions for further research. As a researcher, I am aware of the limitations of this study and these are addressed in Section 5.5. Finally, I share my thoughts on CHAT as an analytical framework and conclude with my reflections. Before turning my attention to the summary of the key research findings, I remind the reader of the aim and the research questions guiding the study.

### 5.2 Aim and research questions

The overall goal of this study was to critically engage learners and teachers with the purpose of developing learner leadership in the structure of the LRC through Change Laboratory workshops which were conducted with the LRC members at a public secondary school. The study was guided by the following question: **How can learner leadership be developed in the LRC?** To answer this central research question, the study sought to answer the following sub-questions:

- How is the term learner leadership understood by teachers and learners at the school?
- What are the roles of LRC members in the school?
- What factors enable and constrain learner leadership development in the school?
- How can the LRC voice be invoked through Change Laboratory workshops?

My attention now turns to provide a summary of the key research findings.

### **5.3 Summary of key research findings**

In this section, I present the summary of the key findings of the study organised under the following themes: understanding of learner leadership amongst teachers and learners; the roles of LRC members at the school; enabling factors that aid the development of learner leadership in the school; constraining factors that hinder the learner leadership development in the school; contradictions arising from the constraining factors; and invoking LRC voice in Change Laboratory workshops.

#### ***5.3.1 Understanding of learner leadership amongst teachers and learners***

The study found that various definitions of learner leadership exist. Firstly, the findings revealed that learner leadership was about having certain abilities such as influencing, leading, directing, motivating and providing good examples through role modelling. A leader was understood as someone with certain leadership traits, for example, emotional intelligence, charisma, dominance and conservatism (Conger & Kanungo, as cited in Knott-Craig, 2007). Secondly, learner leadership was about having power to influence adherence to the school rules. LRC members were expected to enforce school rules as well as support teachers to fulfil disciplinary roles. This type of leadership included controlling and policing other learners, to ensure that there was order in the school. Hence, leadership was understood as a means of control, instead of it being a shared process that could be developed. Thirdly, leadership was understood as innate, a quality that is inherited. This depicted the view that leaders are born with certain traits that makes them leaders and others were not (Tng, 2009). However, research shows that a trait view could not be established, as no universal traits of leaders were ever found. The findings of my study seemed to imply that leadership was attached to an individual person, instead of it being a practice that could be distributed across multiple people in the school (Spillane, 2005). Finally, to classify someone as a leader because of their characteristics or traits, indicated that the participants' understanding of leadership was narrow and oriented by a traditional view of leadership. Next, I discuss the managerial and leadership roles played by LRC members.

### ***5.3.2 The roles of LRC members at the school: From managerial to leadership***

This subsection presents the managerial and leadership roles played by the LRC members in the school. Findings indicated that the LRC members were involved in a number of managerial roles at the school such as, supervision of study and tests, monitoring other learners on the school grounds and organising events meant to entertain other learners at the school. The roles mentioned were considered managerial roles, since they involved assisting the school to carry out their usual activities or plans and thus served to maintain the status quo of the school (Bush, 2003; Grant, 2009; Christie, 2010). The findings recognised that the role of organising events might require leadership skills as well, since it involves actions by multiple people meant to contribute to the main activity, the event.

My research showed that roles expressed by the participants cohere with research conducted by Uushona (2012), who notes that learner leadership roles are more managerial and reminiscent of traditional leadership. The reason the LRC members were entrusted with managerial roles could possibly be attributed to a lack of awareness due to the novelty of the concept learner leadership in Namibia. It might also stem from the fact that participants view everyone at the top of the hierarchy as a leader and hence referred to their roles as leadership roles. On a different note, findings revealed that the LRC members liaised with other learners in the school. The liaison role involved active participation by the LRC members and collaboration between the LRC members and other learners. These roles would require certain leadership skills. Next, I discuss factors enabling learner leadership development at the school.

### ***5.3.3 Factors enabling learner leadership development in the school***

The study found that cooperation between the LRC members and other learners, meetings conducted with the LRC members and training offered to the LRC members, were some of the factors enabling learner leadership development. A discussion of this now follows.

The findings revealed that cooperation between the LRC members and other learners helped in developing learner leadership. The LRC members indicated that cooperation was evident through the assistance the LRC members got from other learners, such as in designing advertorial posters

for events, cleaning and organising the chairs in the hall, decorating the hall and so forth. The involvement and engagement of other learners in various activities was in line with distributed leadership. The findings further revealed that conducting meetings with LRC members developed learner leadership. There was evidence that during the meetings, the LRC members could collaborate with adults towards a shared purpose. Meetings served as a platform to seek solutions to challenges facing learner leadership development practice (Mitra, 2007).

The study indicated that training of LRC members by the school and by the Leadership Institute enabled leadership development amongst the LRC members. Training developed abilities in learners to fulfill existing and emerging needs of the school. Although the training attended was restrictive in terms of days conducted and number of attendees, the LRC members leadership capabilities were built and developed. The pro-activeness of the LRC members towards school developmental projects such as repainting, opening of a school tuck shop and building a room for the security guard, seemed to indicate that training had a positive influence on the development of LRC members. My attention now turns to factors constraining learner leadership development.

### ***5.3.4 Factors constraining learner leadership development in the school***

The study found out that there were constraining factors inhibiting the development of LRC members at the school. Some of these findings included the lack of national LRC policy to guide and facilitate the roles of LRC members in the school. The school did not have an internal school policy to guide LRC members and as a result, the LRC activities were carried out on an ad hoc basis.

In addition, findings indicated that lack of confidence constrained leadership development amongst the LRC members. It further emerged that the attitudes of other learners towards the LRC members affected the LRC members' self-esteem. Peer pressure had a negative impact on the confidence of the LRC members and consequently on learner leadership development. Furthermore, the LRC members' confidence was negatively affected by the language barrier. As a result, there was reluctance in spearheading activities that required English oral

communication. Next, I discuss contradictions hindering learner leadership development in the school.

### ***5.3.5 Contradictions hindering learner leadership development***

The study used CHAT to surface the contradictions from challenges experienced and to intervene in the practice in order to promote change (Engeström, 2001). The following were identified and will be discussed as contradictions hampering the development of learner leadership in the school.

- Lack of support;
- Disciplinary matters;
- Silence of learner voice.

The findings revealed that lack of support from the teachers and from the principal was a contradiction hindering the development of learner leadership. It emerged that teachers and the principal were unresponsive to the needs of the LRC members. As a result, their attitudes discouraged the LRC members from reporting offences to them.

The teachers and the principal seemed to have historical and cultural influences which were causing them to be unsupportive towards learner leadership development. For instance, it emerged that the majority of the teachers did not attend any of the events hosted by the LRC members in the school. Furthermore, the findings also indicated that disciplinary matters such as bullying, fighting and use of foul language hindered learner leadership development. As a result, the LRC members could not carry out some of their roles, to avoid being bullied or insulted. For example, if they mispronounced a word during a gathering, then they would be named after that word. Hence, some of the LRC members would be hesitant to take on a role that would require him/her to speak the official language. The findings also revealed that the LRC members were expected to liaise with the mentor teachers in the school only. The LRC members indicated that the established channel of communication was blocking their views and voices. As such, the lack of a platform to voice out issues and opinions was a contradiction and constrained learner

leadership development. My attention now turns to invoking the LRC voice through Change Laboratory workshops.

### ***5.3.6 Invoking LRC voice through Change Laboratory Workshops***

The LRC members attended two Change Laboratory Workshops where they were involved in surfacing tensions and contradictions affecting learner leadership development. Change Laboratory workshops enabled the expansive learning process, in which the LRC members had an opportunity to model solutions to the contradictions (Sannino, Engeström, & Lemos, 2016).

## **5.4 Potential value of the research**

My chief hope is that schools can use the findings of this study to develop learner leadership practices.

### ***5.4.1 Recommendation for practice***

Having undertaken this study, I make a few recommendations that could perhaps improve practice. My attention now turns to a list of these suggestions which commences from a micro level to a macro level.

- Teachers and learners should collaborate and draw up an internal LRC policy for the school. The policy should serve as a guide on roles and responsibilities of the LRC members. A file should be created for LRC affairs where internal LRC policy, minutes, artefacts and other important documents are safely kept.
- The school should offer incoming LRC members induction training. In this regard, learners' leadership development seminars and talks should be arranged for the LRC members and any other interested learner two to three times a year to harness the LRC members' leadership skills. I also suggest that the school start leadership training from Grade 8 to ensure that when the learners finally get chosen for the LRC council in the final two grades, 11 and 12, they are ready and able to take on the responsibility.
- My suggestion is that the school should invite the LRC members to School Board meetings, and when sensitive issues such as staff issues are discussed the LRC members

can be asked to leave the room. It would allow learners to partake in decision-making that affects them and to gain democratic education as pledged by the educational policy document, *Towards Education for All*.

- In the absence of a national LRC policy, my suggestion is that the Regional Directorate of Education, Arts and Culture should draw up a regional LRC policy to guide and facilitate learner leadership development in schools under their jurisdiction.
- The Regional Directorate of Education, Arts and Culture should include distributed leadership in their annual principal leadership training. It would help the principals to understand and view leadership as a joint practice involving others. In turn, it would lessen the workload of the principals.
- I am also suggesting that the Regional Directorate of Education, Arts and Culture should appoint somebody to coordinate LRC affairs in the region.
- The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture with the assistance of policy makers, should draw up a national policy to guide and direct the Learner Representative Council in schools.
- The University of Namibia and other institutes of higher learning involved in training teachers should include a component of learner leadership in their leadership curriculum.
- Beyond policy and practice, the study also contributes to knowledge creation on leadership development within an LRC structure in the Namibian context.

#### ***5.4.2 Recommendations for further research***

Learner leadership is an under-researched area in Namibian schools. As a result, the academic research on the practice of learner leadership development is still at an infant stage in the country and more studies are needed to grow the body of knowledge in this subdivision of educational leadership. My research topic focused on exploring leadership development in an LRC structure in a secondary school. This involved getting an understanding of how learner leadership can be developed. It also involved collaborating with the LRC members in an intervention which meant to bring forth transformation in the LRC structure. I feel that there are more aspects which the study of learner leadership can look at; hence I recommend that future researchers can tap into the possibilities described below.

The study was conducted at one secondary school in Oshana Region. A replication of this study in another secondary school in the region or other regions can be conducted to gain a holistic understanding of the practice. Furthermore, a more comprehensive picture of learner leadership development could be developed through large-scale studies covering urban and rural schools, perhaps incorporating quantitative and qualitative data collection tools. Finally, future researchers could use the third generation of CHAT to analyse learner leadership development, using multiple activity systems to shed light on the phenomenon under study. For example, parents, School Board members and educational officers could be subjects of the multiple activity systems.

### **5.5 Limitations of this study**

Firstly, this is a case study and this means that findings cannot be statistically generalised. As a researcher I might not claim generalisability, but the findings may allow for naturalistic generalisation, implying that the findings of this research study can be used to recognise similarities and differences to cases that a reader might be familiar with.

A second limitation is that the research study was for a Master's degree which was restricted to one year. Perhaps a prolonged engagement in the field collecting data and a larger sample size could have been more beneficial.

Thirdly, there might have been issues of positionality as discussed in Section 3.8.2. I could not guarantee that my position would not influence the responses of the research participants. Having acknowledged my effect, I carefully followed ethical procedures by seeking permission, negotiating access, informing participants about the nature of research study and grounding my findings in the data collected.

Fourthly, the study was situated in second generation of CHAT, using one activity system. Perhaps moving into third generation of CHAT as discussed earlier, and having activity systems of School Board members, teachers and then the LRC members, might have added more value on how leadership can be developed in schools.

## **5.6 Significance of CHAT in the study**

Cultural Historical Activity Theory was useful for my study since it provided a language to use in analysing the data and explaining the findings. In addition, CHAT offered me a nuanced understanding of the context and historical aspects of learner leadership development and thus I gained a holistic view of the practice. On a different note, I grappled with the issue of power during Change Laboratory workshops, as the theory does not address this aspect directly. I had to draw on literature from other authors such as Lumby (2013) to help me mitigate through power issues.

## **5.7 Final reflections**

My research journey has been an exciting learning experience. I have gained valuable knowledge from literature on the field, methodology and activity theory. I was privileged to be welcomed well in the region and at the school where the data was gathered from. Both the school principal and the Deputy Director showed an interest in the study and asked to be provided with the summary of research findings. A few teachers approached me requesting input on the CHAT triangle they saw on the posters meant for Change Laboratory workshops. The learners were eager to talk to me. Working with the data sets and seeing it coming together through triangulation, was an invaluable academically rewarding experience. Capturing the data to retain and maintain the essence was wonderful and I had a lot of “aha” moments. Finally, the acquired knowledge can be used in the Directorate of Adult Education. I am feeling highly motivated as I take my next steps forward.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to explore learner leadership development in the LRC structure. This study found that while there was an LRC body at the school as stipulated by the Namibian Educational Act, the LRC members were mostly involved in enforcing the established routine

within the structure. In fact, they were simply fulfilling managerial roles such as, supporting teachers with disciplinary matters in the school and not actually leading per se. The hindering factors uncovered in this study were systemic, where history and culture still hamper leadership development. In 2003, Harris in an article entitled “*Teacher leadership as distributed leadership: heresy, fantasy or possibility*” wondered what the future of distributed leadership would be. Similarly, I wonder if the possibility of distributed leadership amongst learners is a heresy, fantasy or a possibility.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: Document analysis

Learner Leadership

No.:	Document to be analysed	Comments
	LRC meeting's Agenda	..... ..... .....
	LRC Meetings' minutes	..... ..... .....
	School Board Minutes with LRC presence	..... ..... .....
	LRC Constitution/ policy	..... ..... .....
	School PAAI/SDP	..... ..... .....
	School rules and regulations	..... ..... .....
	Other relevant documents	..... ..... .....

## APPENDIX B: Sample of the questionnaire

Questionnaires for learners

Grade:

Gender:

Portfolio:

1. How do you understand the term learner leadership?

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2. What can the school do to develop the LRC?

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3. What are the roles of LRC in your school?

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4. What are the factors that are assisting the development of learner leadership in the school?

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---

---

5. What are the factors that are limiting the development of learner leadership at your school?

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6. What will you learn from being an LRC at the school? (FOR LRC)

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---

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7. What will encourage you to become an LRC at your school? (FOR NON LRC)

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## **APPENDIX C: Interview questions**

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR TEACHERS**

#### **BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION**

Leadership position: -----

Gender: -----

Age: -----

Years of experience: -----

Formal qualification; -----

1. What is your understanding of the concept of ‘learner leadership?’
2. How can learner leadership be developed among the LRC structure?
3. What opportunities have been there/ are there now/ could be there?
4. What is the significance of developing learners to take on leadership roles?
5. What are some of the initiatives that the LRC take? How was initiative received? What was done to sustain the initiative? Do learners take on tasks willingly, why? Why not?
6. What do the LRC do in the school? What are their duties? What they don’t do but they supposed to do?
7. What do you think learners can learn from being LRC?
8. What do the teachers do to assist learners to develop their leadership skills?
9. Do you see a need for an extra body of leadership at the school apart from LRC? What extra can they do?

**APPENDIX D: Observation schedule**

Observation Schedule

Topic:

DAY:

DATE:

Observation

• Aspects to be considered	What is observed:
What are the LRC doing daily? Execution of duties by LRC.	Morning:  Day:
Power relations, gender, age, grade, language (in meetings/CLW)	
Visibility of LRC in the school.	
Meetings – what happened? Presence of LRC?	
Briefings	
Commitment	
Relations with teachers	

Other comments:-----  
-----  
-----

## APPENDIX E: Ethical certificate from the department



**RHODES UNIVERSITY**

Grahamstown • 6140 • South Africa

EDUCATION FACULTY • PO Box 94, Grahamstown, 6140  
Tel: (046) 603 8385 / (046) 603 8393 • Fax: (046) 622 8028 • e-mail: [d.wilmot@ru.ac.za](mailto:d.wilmot@ru.ac.za)

### PROPOSAL AND ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL

**Ethical clearance number 2017.06.02.03**

The minute of the EHDC meeting of 1 June 2017 reflect the following:

**2017.06.02 CLASS B RESTRICTED MATTERS  
MASTER OF EDUCATION RESEARCH PROPOSALS (FULL)**

*To consider the following research proposal for the degree of Master of Education in the Faculty of Education:*

***Selma Ndeyapo Kadhepa-Kandjengo (13K6746)***

*Topic: An exploration of leadership development in a learner representative structure in a secondary school, Oshana region, Namibia.*

*Supervisors: Professor H van der Mescht  
Professor C Grant  
Ms F Kajee*

*Decision: Approved*



This letter confirms the approval of the above proposal at a meeting of the Faculty of Education Higher Degrees' Committee on the 1 June 2017.

The proposal demonstrates an awareness of ethical responsibilities and a commitment to ethical research processes. The approval of the proposal by the committee thus constitutes ethical clearance.

Sincerely

Prof Marc Schäfer  
Chair of the EHDC, Rhodes University  
8 June 2017

## APPENDIX F: Permission from the Director

 REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA 

**OSHANA REGIONAL COUNCIL**  
**DIRECTORATE OF EDUCATION, ARTS AND CULTURE**  
*Aspiring to excellence in Education for All*

Tel: 065 229800  
Fax: 065 229833  
Enquiries: Gerhard S. Ndafenongo  
E-mail: [ndafenongogs@gmail.com](mailto:ndafenongogs@gmail.com)  
Ref no: 11/1/1

906 Sam Nujoma Road  
Private Bag 5518  
Oshakati, Namibia


**MS SELMA KANDJENGO**  
HILLSVIEW 11ST  
GRAHAMSTOWN  
SOUTH AFRICA

Dear Ms S. Kandjengo

**RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT  
SECONDARY SCHOOL IN OSHANA REGION**

1. I acknowledge receipt of your letter 28<sup>th</sup> May 2017 and therefore it bears reference;
2. Kindly be informed that permission is hereby granted to conduct the study entitled: **exploring learner leadership development opportunities at [redacted] Secondary School in Oshana Region**. You are hereby requested to present this letter of approval to the principal to ensure that the research is authorised, authentic and procedures are adhered to.
3. This permission is subject to the following strict conditions; (i) There should be minimal or no interruption on normal teaching and learning, during a class or scheduled afternoon session, (ii) Ethical issues of confidentiality and anonymity should be respected and retained throughout this activity i.e. voluntary participation, and consent from participants, and (iii) the permission is valid for entire academic year 2017.
4. Both parties should understand that this permission could be revoked without explanation at any time.
5. Furthermore, we humbly request you to share with us your research findings with the Directorate of Education, Arts and Culture Oshana Region. You may contact Mr GS Ndafenongo, the Deputy Director: Programs and Quality Assurance (PQA) for the provision of summary of your research findings.
6. I wish you the best in conducting your study.

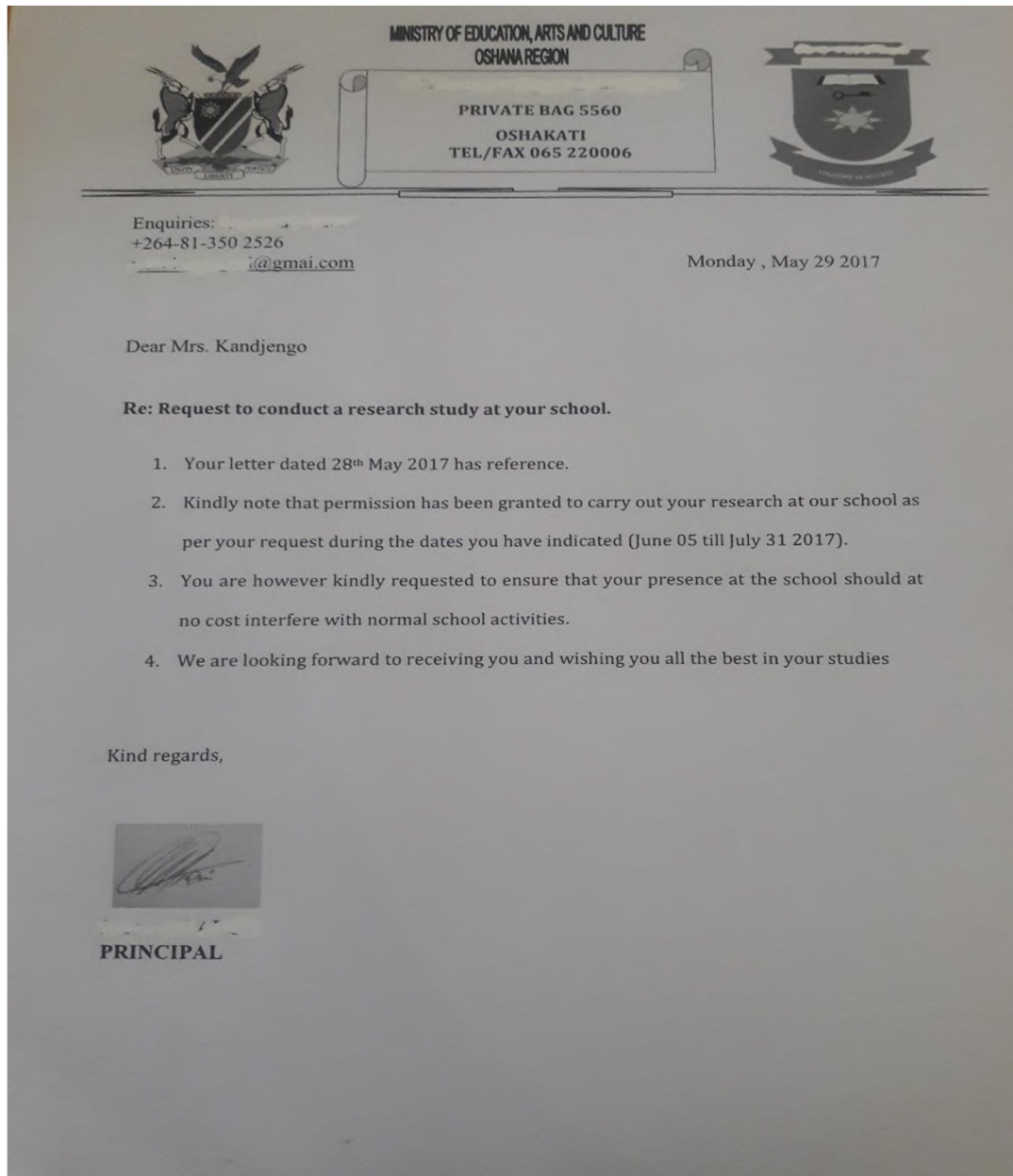
Yours Sincerely

 30/05/2017  
HILENI M. AMUKANA  
REGIONAL DIRECTOR

30 MAY 2017

*All correspondence should be addressed to the Director of Education, Arts & Culture*

## APPENDIX G: Permission from the principal



## APPENDIX H: Sample letter to teachers

Consent letter to teacher

Invitation to take part in a research study

11 Hillsvie  
Grahamstown  
South Africa  
1<sup>st</sup> June 2017

Inquiries: Selma Kandjengo

Cell: +27 61005 1639 / 0811488139

Email address: [skadhepakandjengo@gmail.com](mailto:skadhepakandjengo@gmail.com)

Dear Teacher

I am hereby inviting you to participate in my research study on exploring learner leadership within the structure of LRC at your school. I am a full-time student at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, Eastern Cape in South Africa, researching towards a Master's Degree in Educational leadership and Management (ELM). I have chosen your school as a research site for convenience reasons. I plan to undertake the study from the 05 June 2017 to 31 July 2017.

I would like to work with you as I conduct the research on learner leadership practice at your school. Please note that this is not an evaluation of your performance. I further undertake to uphold your autonomy and you will be free to withdraw from the research study at any time without negative 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 this 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,



Selma Kandjengo

Research Student

## APPENDIX I: Sample letter to guardians

Consent letter to parents

Invitation to take part in a research study

11 Hillsvie  
Grahamstown  
South Africa  
1<sup>st</sup> June 2017

Inquiries: Selma Kandjengo

Cell: +27 61005 1639 / 0811488139

Email address: [skadhepakandjengo@gmail.com](mailto:skadhepakandjengo@gmail.com)

Dear Parent

### **Request for permission to allow your child to take part in the research study**

My name is Selma Kandjengo, a full time Masters of Education student in the field of Educational Leadership and Management at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa. I am sending this invitation and request for permission to allow ..... to participate in a research study to be undertaken at ..... Secondary School.

I would like to work with learners as I conduct the research on learner leadership practice at their school. Please note that this is not an evaluation of your child's performance or competence. I undertake 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. In this regard, you are asked to complete a declaration form attached.

It is against this background that I am humbly inviting and requesting you to allow your child to participate in the research study during break times or after school. Kindly complete a consent form attached. Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have any queries or questions you would like answered.

Yours faithfully,



Selma Kandjengo

Research Student

## **APPENDIX J: Participant declaration**

Declaration

I ..... (full names of the participant)  
hereby confirm that I understand the content and nature of this research study project. I am  
willing to participate in the research project. I understand that I reserve the right to withdraw  
from this research study project at any time.

.....  
Signature of participant

.....  
Date