STORIES OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP:

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ENGLISH SUBJECT COORDINATORS

IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN ABU DHABI

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Education in the Discipline Education Leadership, Management and Policy, School of Education, College of Humanities, University of Kwazulu-Natal

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DATE: DECEMBER 2018

DECLARATION

I, Desiree Sangeetha Pandaram declare that:

(i) The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated is my original work.

(ii) This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

(iii)This dissertation does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs, or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.

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a) their words have been re-written, but the general information attributed to them has been referenced;

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ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

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17 January 2017

Ms Desiree S Pandaram 912425091
School of Education
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Dear Ms Pandaram

Protocol reference number: HSS/0028/017M
Project title: Stories of Teacher Leadership: Lived Experiences of English subject coordinators in public schools in Abu Dhabi.

Expedited Approval

In response to your application dated 04 January 2017, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **FULL APPROVAL.**

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

....
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/px

cc Supervisor: Dr I Naicker
cc Academic Leader Research: Dr SB Khoza
cc School Administrators: Mrs B Mnguni, Ms P Ncayiyana, Ms M Ngcobo & Ms T Khumalo

SUPERVISORS' AUTHORISATION

This dissertation is submitted with my approval.

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Supervisor: Professor Inbanathan Naicker

_____

Date

DEDICATION

TO MY PARENTS, DANNY & SHEILA, WITH MY EVERLASTING LOVE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

As the notion of teacher leadership becomes embedded in the educational arena, it begins to manifest in schools as a form of distributed or shared leadership. The practice of teacher leadership in Abu Dhabi, one of the fastest growing cities in the United Arab Emirates, has begun to blossom. This qualitative study focusses on the storied narratives of three English subject coordinators in three Abu Dhabi public schools. It examines three key questions surrounding the role of English subject coordinators namely, How do the English subject coordinators enact leadership on a day-to-day basis? Why do the English subject coordinators enact leadership the way they do? and What challenges do the English subject coordinators encounter in enacting leadership? The study is framed using distributed leadership theory and Crowther's Model of teacher leadership. Narrative inquiry is employed as methodology and data was generated using narrative interviews, collage inquiry and artefact inquiry. Data analysis occurred at two levels. The first level was the narrative analysis that involved the construction of the stories. The second level entailed analysis of narratives which entailed the deconstruction of the stories in order to answer the three critical questions. The findings of the study reveal that when teachers are given the chance to lead, they are committed to the process and inspire both their colleagues and their students. Their role however is not without challenges. They face the challenge of leading the English department which has both English 2nd language speakers as well as English native speakers. The English subject coordinator does not hold a formal portfolio and as a result, their role fluctuates from teacher to teacher leader. One of the important recommendations that stem from this study is that the principals of Abu Dhabi public schools need to create the necessary professional milieu in order to allow teacher leadership to flourish.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS

ADEC: Abu Dhabi Education Council

ADSM: Abu Dhabi School Model

AQIO: Academic Quality Improvement Officer

AVP: Academic Vice Principal

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment

SLT: School Leadership Team

UAE: United Arab Emirates

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CHAPTER ONE

SAND DUNES IN MY MIDST – A BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Worldwide research confirms that the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers. Furthermore, the success of any educational system is not limited to a single person. It is a shared or collective responsibility (Donaldson, 2006). School teams who are able to share skills, knowledge and expertise are by far, more effective than those teams where leadership is focussed around a single individual like the school head (known as school principals, head teachers or headmasters in some contexts) (Hulpia & Devos, 2010). My study on teacher leadership focusses on the day-to-day experiences of English subject coordinators in Abu Dhabi public schools (I note that the term should be subject coordinators of English, however, this is the nomenclature that is used in the Abu Dhabi context).

I draw upon a sand dune, as a metaphor to show that leadership, like a sand dune, can be fluid and malleable. As Nathalie Vriend (2016) so aptly describes it, "A sand dune may look like a monolithic mass of sand, but there are multiple layers and structures within it" (p.1). So too, can we describe the complex and multi-layered phenomenon of leadership and teacher leadership, that has impacted my own life, as a teacher, teacher leader and more than all else, as a lifelong learner.

This chapter provides a background to my study, followed by its rationale and motivation. I then present the key research questions and key concepts, thereby concluding the chapter with an overview of the study.

1.2 Setting the Scene

The notion of teacher leadership is gaining currency internationally as it begins to manifest in schools in more democratic, participative and consultative ways (McMahon, 2011). Abu Dhabi, one of the fastest growing cities in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and perhaps in the World itself, is home to the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC), which was established in 2005.

The Council aims to "develop education and educational institutions in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, implement innovative educational policies, plans and programs that aim to improve education, and support educational institutions and staff to achieve the objectives of national development in accordance with the highest international standards" (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013). At the time of writing this dissertation, there was major structural reform in the governance of education in UAE. All public school education was in the process of falling directly under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education in UAE.

There is little doubt that education remains Abu Dhabi's number one priority as every effort is made towards transformation in P-12 education (a system which organizes education from kindergarten to Grade 12), private education and higher education. The past decade has seen monumental changes in education in Abu Dhabi. In 2009, ADEC launched its 10-year Strategic Plan with an introduction to the Abu Dhabi School Model (ADSM) in kindergarten and Grade 1-3 classes in all Abu Dhabi public schools in 2010. The ADSM centres on "developing students' Arabic and English literacy; consistent use of student learning outcomes; continuous support and professional development of teachers through curriculum guides, teacher resources and the consistent resourcing of all classrooms with a variety of carefully selected materials and supplies". At the heart of the Abu Dhabi School Model is the student as "communicator, thinker and problem solver" (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013).

As per the Abu Dhabi Education Council (2013), the ADSM was established in all cycles since August 2016. Kindergarten comprises KG 1 and KG 2. Grades 1 – 5 form part of Cycle 1. Grades 6 – 9 form part of Cycle 2 while Grades 10 – 12 make up Cycle 3. There is a well-developed scope and sequence for all subject areas, and a set of learning outcomes with a clear set of expectations for students, in each grade. Each phase is geared towards preparing the student to meet the challenges of a global society. The chief aim is to produce critical thinkers, who can ultimately contribute to the social and economic development of the United Arab Emirates. This also dovetails into the Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030, an intricate government plan to create a well- balanced economy, which fell into place in 2008.

One of the main stakeholders at the heart of this transformation are the teachers in Abu Dhabi. They comprise both Emiratis as well as Arab and Western expatriates. According to the ground-breaking study carried out by Al Suwaidi and Schoepp (2015), there were approximately 4 000 Emirati teachers in Abu Dhabi in the academic year 2012-2013. This number comprised almost 40 % of the total teaching faculty. In the same period, there were 144,931 Emirati students and a total of 265 schools. As at the time of my research, as per the Statistical Yearbook of Abu Dhabi (2016), the total teaching faculty comprised 11,288 teachers.

The school management structure at public schools in Abu Dhabi generally comprises the principal, an academic vice principal as well as a student services vice principal, depending on the size of the school. The position of subject coordinator in Abu Dhabi public schools is not a formally recognised leadership position. Rather it is an informal leadership position entrusted to teachers through the office of the school head. To borrow from Gunter (2005), it is a form of authorised distributed leadership. Al Suwaidi and Schoepp (2015) observe that the practice of teacher leadership is still in a nascent stage and therefore more needs to be known about this form of leadership in this context. Schools are still uncertain about how shared and collaborative leadership should be enacted (Harris, 2005). More so in contexts such as the UAE where leadership as position has historically been foregrounded (Muijs & Harris, 2003).

1.3 Rationale for this Study

This section describes the personal, practical and social justifications for the study (Clandinin, 2013).

1.3.1 Personal Justifications

My parents were teachers – great ones – during a time when teaching was a revered and noble profession. The students whom they taught went on to become biochemists, administrative clerks, professors, doctors of all sorts, journalists, physicists, lawyers and teachers, among a multitude of other jobs. I doubt that a single student who passed through their classrooms, sat idle.

My mom, for that matter, (a firm believer in what was called *'the busy book')* would not have tolerated it. In a way, '*Teaching*' chose me. It surrounded me from the very moment I blinked for

the first time and I have remained in that world of Teachers and Students ever since. It is my personal belief that to reach our highest potential, people need to have voice, agency as well as vision. These characteristics are the core ingredients for personal and professional transformation. It is through seeing ourselves as leaders that we can improve the lot of others. This philosophy has also prompted me to see the leadership in others as well as in myself.

1.3.2   Practical Justifications

The concept leadership, in particular teacher leadership has resonated deeply with me ever since I became a teacher in 1988. In my early years of teaching, I felt the impact of school leadership on my own life, and in time I realised that when leadership is fluid and malleable it not only expands leadership capacity, but it also improves collaboration and helps teachers to share best practice, thus giving them opportunities to develop their craft.

I have worked as an advisor to English subject coordinators and teachers, across several schools for the past 9 years. I have observed that no formal job description has been developed for the subject coordinator. Whilst no formal job description exists, the subject coordinator acts as team leader, is responsible for representing the team at meetings as well as assisting in administrative duties pertaining to the team. In order to obtain a more nuanced picture of the lived experiences of leadership of the English subject coordinators, a study of their day-to-day practices is essential.

1.3.3   Social Justifications

From a theoretical perspective, there is limited scholarship on teacher leadership in schools in Abu Dhabi. From my literature search, thus far, I have come across only one study by Al Suwaidi and Schoepp (2015). Their quantitative study was carried out at an all-girls school in Abu Dhabi and used descriptive statistics to explain teacher perceptions about teacher leadership. Thus, there is a need for further studies of the phenomenon of teacher leadership using different approaches and methodologies in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the practice of teacher leadership in schools in Abu Dhabi. My study aims to extend the scholarship of teacher leadership in Abu Dhabi by studying a particular sector of teachers (English subject coordinators) using narrative inquiry as methodology. This may lead to a different knowing about teacher leadership in this under-researched context.

1.4. Key Research Questions

These critical questions focus on the ways in which the English subject coordinators enact leadership, the reasons behind why they enact leadership in these ways, and the challenges which they face.

1.4.1   How do the English subject coordinators enact leadership on a day-to-day basis?

(This question seeks to describe the way in which English subject coordinators enact leadership daily, alternating between their roles as teacher leaders within a classroom and leaders of a team. It affords a perspective of the different roles of the English subject coordinator.)

1.4.2   Why do the English subject coordinators enact leadership the way they do?

(This question focusses on circumstances leading coordinators to lead their teams in the way they do. It seeks to ascertain what factors in their personal and professional lives drives their practice of leadership.)

1.4.3   What challenges do the English subject co-ordinators encounter in enacting leadership?

(The English subject coordinators face both successes and challenges. This question seeks to find out what their specific challenges are.)

1.5 Significance of Study

A study such as this will have enormous impact on subject coordinators in Abu Dhabi as well as all members of the management and teaching staff. As part of the teaching fraternity and the teacher-leader community, subject coordinators are found hovering between their roles as leaders and teachers. This study will hopefully lend clarity to both these roles.

The study is important because the role of the subject coordinator needs to be more fully understood especially in the Abu Dhabi context, where subject coordinators play a significant role in an informal position. Such a study will also add to the existing body of qualitative research on teacher leadership not just within the UAE but in the world, itself. It will certainly provide a forum for further research and dialogue.

1.6 Key Concepts

This study engages with three key concepts: Leadership, Distributed leadership and Teacher leadership.

1.6.1   Leadership

Leadership is a contested concept. In recent years, there has been a move from traditional views that leadership is the domain of a single individual to a view of leadership as a behaviour which facilitates collective action towards a mutual goal (Harris, 2005). At the same time, there has also been a move towards recognising the differences between leadership and management and an acknowledgement that both processes are essential when assessing the competence of educational leaders (Bush, 2003). The underlying idea is that leadership is something that *many* people are able to enact and not exclusively the domain of some people (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995) while management is concerned with the effective operation of an organization, linked closely to its aims and objectives. (Bush, 2003).

1.6.2 Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership is based on the premise that leadership is filtered through organisations via multiple personnel rather than on authority or position (Murphy, Smylie, Mayrowetz & Louis, 2009). The role of the principal in fostering the development of distributed leadership is paramount. The principal must acknowledge multiple sources of leadership in building capacity of the organisation (Bishop, Tinley & Berman, 1997). Distributed leadership is based on the assumption that leadership activity comprises 3 key elements - leaders, followers and situation; and that leadership is distributed across multiple groups within schools (Spillane, Diamond & Jita, 2003).

1.6.3 Teacher Leadership

So, what is teacher leadership? A mutable concept which seems to defy precise definition, teacher leadership lends itself to multiple meanings. As a result, it has become associated with a repertoire of activities, roles and behaviours. The core belief in all of these are that teacher leaders focus on student learning, are lifelong learners themselves, are facilitators and presenters, and have a vision which is shared with their colleagues (Angelle and DeHart, 2011).

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) describe teacher leaders as those who lead "within and beyond the classroom, influence others towards improved educational practice, and identify with and contribute to a community of teacher leaders." (p. 6). Crowther, Hann, McMaster and Ferguson (2000) view teacher leadership as a process of parallel leadership in which principals and teachers divide leadership responsibilities. Principals focus on strategic leadership while teachers assume primary responsibility for pedagogical leadership.

1.7 Overview of the Chapters

Chapter One provides the background giving context to the study. The rationale, significance of the study, the objectives, the key research questions and purpose of the study is presented. Further, the key concepts and overview of the chapters is presented.

Chapter Two focusses on the literature review as well as an explicit discussion of my theoretical framework which provides a lens for my study.

Chapter Three is concerned with my research design and my methodology which is narrative inquiry. It also gives the justification for using this methodology as well as detailed methods of data collection and an overall reflection if how it worked for me.

Chapter Four focusses on the three narratives (narrative analysis) of the English subject coordinators, built from narrative interviews, collage inquiry and artefact inquiry. These are entitled *Mariam's Story: Mountain Dunes – Leading through Sharing*; *Zainab's Story: Dunes in the Mist – Leading through Challenge* and *Ahmed's Story: The Singing Dunes – Leading through Opportunity*.

Chapter Five presents the analysis of the narratives in response to the three key research questions. For each of the research questions I present the findings that emerged and discuss the findings using relevant literature.

Chapter Six presents the summary, conclusions, reflections and the recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

TO SEE A WORLD IN A GRAIN OF SAND …

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 provided the context and background to this study together with my rationale, key questions of research and the key concepts. I have decided to call this Chapter "To see a world in a grain of sand" in order to convey the magnitude of the phenomenon of Teacher Leadership. The concept lends itself to a very rich world of literature and theory. This Chapter which presents the review of related literature and theoretical framework is divided into two parts. Part One presents the literature review. After some contemplation, I decided that I would present my review under key debates which stem from the literature. These include the contested nature of teacher leadership, the enactment of teacher leadership, teacher leadership as empowerment, organisational conditions for teacher leadership, benefits of teacher leadership and obstacles to teacher leadership. Part Two presents my theoretical framework which rests on two theories, Distributed Leadership and Teacher Leadership.

2.2 PART ONE – LITERATURE REVIEW

Herein follows an in-depth review of the literature on teacher leadership.

2.2.1 Contested Nature of Teacher Leadership

There are many models, perspectives and theories on teacher leadership. The core belief in all of these are that teacher leaders focus on student learning, are lifelong learners themselves, are facilitators and presenters, and have a vision which is shared with their colleagues (Angelle and DeHart (2011). Teacher leaders as those who lead "within and beyond the classroom, influence others towards improved educational practice, and identify with and contribute to a community of teacher leaders" (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001, p. 6). Amidst the myriad descriptions of teacher leadership, lie Harris and Lambert's (2003) description of teacher leadership as a collective endeavour where everyone has the potential and the power to contribute towards

leadership. Then there is Donaldson (2007), who refers to teacher leadership as a "complex role, located somewhere between administrative and almost invisible leadership" (p.1). As I delve deeper into the literature, I am intrigued by the various definitions of teacher leadership. Many researchers have claimed and in my experience, I am inclined to agree, that teacher leaders are able to lead schools in the following ways: They have the capacity

- To increase teacher collaboration
- To assist with pedagogical issues like differentiation and other content specific aspects
- To foster professional development
- To spread best practice

(Curtis, 2013; Muijs & Harris, 2003,2006; Wenner & Campbell, 2016).

Juntrasook (2014) identified four meanings of leadership as articulated in his study of academics at a university in Aotearoa/ New Zealand. The four meanings were leadership as: position, practice, performance and professional role model. Leadership as position is a much-discussed phenomenon in literature. In this context, to be a leader is to occupy a formal leadership position. Leadership as performance is about ''competency and accomplishment in professional contexts'' (p.24). It is focussed on performance at work and can be either official or unofficial, depending on its context. The third meaning of leadership, leadership as practice, is a wide - ranging concept which encompasses interactions with others. Distributed leadership falls into these parameters. The fourth meaning of leadership, leadership as professional role model, implies that leaders are meant to be exemplary and a source of inspiration to others. The focus of leadership in this instance is on the professional identity of leaders in their everyday lives. What I found particularly interesting is Juntrasook's idea that the way in which we perceive leadership is always shaped by its organisational and sociocultural perspectives and that it is embedded within a field of power relations.

Wenner and Campbell's (2016) study, in particular, reveal some interesting findings. In their full review of 72 pieces of literature, they note that very few authors offered an explicit definition of teacher leadership. Furthermore, the research on teacher leadership is not always theoretically grounded, and very little of teacher leadership research focusses on issues of social justice and

equity. It is no wonder therefore that teacher leadership theory is a highly-contested arena in which there exists several meanings and understandings, partly due to the lack of clarity surrounding its definition. I am hoping that my research will allow me to further demystify the concept, teacher leadership.

It makes sense to me why the concept teacher leadership remains unconsolidated (Juntrasook, 2014). Harking back to the title of this chapter then, **To see the world in a grain of sand** … and linking it to the concept teacher leadership, we can concur that there are as many different worlds as there are 'grains of sand'. So, this would mean that ultimately what we construe as leadership will depend on what we perceive that reality to be. As a result, leadership will mean different things to different people. At this point, the conceptualisation of teacher leadership which resonates most deeply with me, is one by Angelle and DeHart (2011) where they explain "teacher leaders are those teachers who maintain focus on student learning, seek lifelong learning for themselves, use creative facilitation and presentation skills, engage others in shared vision and meaning, develop and maintain relationships, work with a sense of integrity and plan and organize" (p.143). In my own experience, teacher leaders are individuals who are creative and collaborative. They encourage students' learning and they manage to inspire their teams towards higher standards of excellence in their teaching endeavours as well as in their own.

2.2.2 Enacting Teacher Leadership

There are certain key components in the enactment of teacher leadership. As Naicker (2016) succinctly puts it, ''Teacher leadership simply does not happen by chance. It requires a symbiosis between the appointed school leadership team and teachers in the school'' (p.5). School leadership teams need to create an atmosphere that fosters teacher leadership. They need to encourage teachers to take on leadership roles and to support them in their leadership practice.

In his study on teacher leadership, Naicker (2016) draws on Grant's model of teacher leadership which identifies 4 zones of enactment of teacher leadership viz leading within the classroom, working with other teachers, involvement in whole school development and engagement beyond the school and into the community. Naicker's study shows that the enactment of teacher leadership diminishes as one moves away from the classroom into the wider school community.

In the same vein, Muijs and Harris (2003), identify four teacher leadership roles which teachers can perform namely a brokering role, a participative role, a mediating role and a role involving the forging of close relationships. The first role – the brokering role – focusses on the teacher's role within the classroom. The second role – a participative role – is where the teacher leader participates in activities to enhance the school environment. The third role – a mediating role – reveals the teacher as an expert of his or her craft and a mentor to other teachers. The fourth role is a collaborative role in which the teacher works with others towards informing best practice. My research looks at the enactment of teacher leadership in Abu Dhabi public schools and in particular the role played by English subject coordinators. I trust that my research will give further clarity to the nature of these roles.

According to York-Barr and Duke (2004), teacher leadership practices include these seven dimensions:

- coordination and management
- curriculum work
- professional development of colleagues
- participation in school change and improvement initiatives
- parent and community involvement
- participating in professional organizations
- pre – service teacher education

Muijs and Harris (2007) have developed a typology of teacher leadership based on the extent to which it is prevalent in a school. They describe the level of teacher leadership enactment within a school as ''developed'', ''emergent'' or ''restricted''. Teacher leadership is said to be **developed** in a school when it is thriving with few or no obstacles. It is said to be **emergent** when it exists but with some obstacles, and it is said to be **restricted** in a context where there are several obstacles to teacher leadership.

Sinha and Hanuscin (2017), conducted a multiple case study of three high school science teachers, showing how they developed their identity as teacher leaders by practicing leadership within and outside the classroom and school.

Their findings were as follows:

- o Teachers widen their perspectives of leadership as they develop as teacher leaders
- o Newer teachers as opposed to seasoned staff, appear to begin leading within the classroom then venturing to lead outside
- o The way in which leadership pathways develop for teachers, depends on the priorities and context of the individual teacher

It will be interesting to discover how the priorities and contexts of the teacher leaders in my study have lead them to enact teacher leadership in the ways in which they do.

2.2.3 Teacher Leadership as Empowerment

In their quantitative study conducted in a selected all – girls' primary school in Abu Dhabi, using descriptive statistics to explain teacher perceptions about teacher leadership, Al Suwaidi and Schoepp (2015) noted that teacher leadership is valued by both Emirati and expatriate teachers alike. Furthermore, teacher leadership is regarded as a practical activity and teachers see it as a vehicle to improve teaching and learning. My study will add to this picture in that it will provide a qualitative perspective of teacher leadership in Abu Dhabi public schools. It will be interesting to discover the themes that unfold from my methods of data collection: narrative interviews, collage inquiry and artefacts inquiry.

School teams that have strong, well developed professional learning communities report examples of leadership based on expertise. In such schools, skilful teachers are asked to share best practice so others may benefit (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). In an interesting study by Hurt (2008), it is suggested that principals who share power with teachers, in schools in which decisions are made collectively, result in the empowerment of teacher leaders to make critical decisions on how to best impact student learning. Hurt also suggests that grade level teams provide an organizational setting for teachers to collaborate and make decisions about students and issues pertaining to their grade levels. Committees and grade level teams also provide the impetus to institute collective empowerment.

Anderson (2016) in his article, 'Letting the light shine: How Teacher Leadership made me a better teacher', writes about how, in his 9th year of teaching, he has ''moved into a love of influence and

a desire to share his 'light' '' (p.1). According to Anderson (2016), teacher leadership has enabled him to share best practice within his own classroom as well as among the rest of the staff and other classrooms. Anderson's (2016) idea that teachers value professional development that comes from experts who are teachers themselves rather than from those who have never been in the classroom or have very little classroom experience, is especially profound. More so, that I believe this to be true.

Having worked very closely with teachers over the past 3 decades, in my own capacity as a teacher and a teacher advisor, I can vouch that teachers are generally sceptical about professional development that comes from outside entities with no teaching experience. Teacher leadership therefore builds a specific expertise which is directly linked to the classroom and it helps to spread best pedagogical practices.

2.2.4 Organisational Conditions for Teacher Leadership

Hurt's (2008) study corroborates Boyd, Dimock and Mcgree (1995) research which proposes that three conditions are necessary if teacher leadership is to thrive. Firstly, there should exist a broad vision that embraces the expectation that *teachers are leaders*. Secondly, a structure should be in place that allows leaders to be elected and committees to be formed; the focus of which should be school improvement. Thirdly, teachers should be allowed time to "experiment, reflect and create" as well as have access to information and training (p 1).

Scribner, Sawyer, Watson and Myers (2007) explored distributed leadership in relationship to two teams in a public secondary school. One of the questions that guided their work was: What organisational conditions foster or impede leadership within teacher work teams? Their most important finding is that leadership effectiveness of teacher teams is related to both the organisational context as well as discourse patterns. Their recommendation is that in the case of teacher teams, teachers and formal leaders must work toward building capacities in *facilitation*, *interaction* and *communication*.

In a thought-provoking case study carried out in two middle schools in the UAE in 2009-2010, Stephenson, Dada and Harold (2012) corroborates Al Suwaidi and Schoepp (2015) research that teacher leadership in the Emirates is still in its nascent stage. They also noted that teacher

leadership had begun to sprout across the Emirates. Stephenson et al (2012) point out that although a great leader may well have a positive effect on student performance and school improvement, centralised leadership is not sustainable for there is a gap when this leader leaves. However, it is teacher leaders who can fill the gap and become the conduit between principals and sustainable school programmes.

Moreover, in such schools where teacher leadership is beginning to emerge, leadership is a shared practice and the focus is on leadership practice rather than the roles and functions of leadership. This form of leadership develops in the interactions between leaders, followers and their situation (Spillane, 2006).

Stephenson et al (2012) research corroborates Mangin's (2005) research that principals with a solid understanding of teacher leadership and a knowledge of how it contributes to whole school improvement, are better able to sustain teacher leadership. In my own experience working with subject coordinators, I have witnessed first-hand the positive effects of shared leadership in schools. In schools where teacher leaders receive support from their principals, there are more opportunities for them to foster school improvement and support professional learning within their teams. Stephenson et al (2012) confirm this in that the principals of the two schools in their case study were very supportive and focussed on collaboration and shared leadership. As a result, teachers were able to work collaboratively on their planning, in the development of learning material and resources, and in their support of their learners. As time passed, the researchers noted that there was "a shift from individual motivation to collective intrinsic and extrinsic motivation" and that this led to an improvement in student and teacher performance (p.59).

Another interesting finding in the Stephenson et al (2012) case study is the idea that significant change occurred when participants attended leadership training, and this allowed them to develop stronger leadership skills. This enabled them to take note of school and cross-cultural undertones. This new understanding led to greater collaboration and better relationships.

It also led to a mind shift where teacher leaders were no longer viewed with suspicion but as pillars of support, who shared best practice and who could guide teachers towards better resources. Stephenson et al (2012) confirm Portin's (2009) study that teacher leaders, when given

the opportunity, can model both their formal role as well as informal roles such as "critical friend, advocate, guide, coach and mentor" (p.61).

These findings prompt me to perceive teacher leadership as a multifaceted, social phenomenon that can manifest in a variety of ways, in different contexts. It is not limited to a specific role or behaviour. For my study, it would be interesting to see how these conditions pertain to the English subject coordinators in Abu Dhabi public schools.

2.2.5 Benefits of Teacher Leadership

There appears to be a common perception among researchers that teacher leaders can have a dramatic impact not just on their own growth, but on the capacities of their colleagues, on student learning and on the school, itself (Frost & Durrant, 2003). Evidence exists to suggest that leadership roles tend to enhance teacher leaders' self-esteem and job satisfaction and this in turn leads to better performance and longer professional service (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). I trust that my research will help me to better understand this perception; and ultimately contribute to a better understanding of the overall benefits of teacher leadership.

Barth (2001) contended that community development via teacher leadership unfolds as a democratic process. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) asserted that teacher leaders affect teaching and learning throughout the school as they become secure in their abilities to lead and take on more responsibilities within the school. Smylie, Conley and Marks (2002) claimed that teacher leadership contributes to school improvement and student outcomes. Muijs and Harris (2002) conducted British research and concluded that teacher leadership is the vehicle whereby principals' leadership on student achievement is facilitated.

Durrant (2004) surmised from their British research that teacher leadership must be recognised via agency, authority and action in order that holistic school reform is complete. Then we have the claim by Katyal and Evers (2004) Hong Kong research that teacher leaders possess an erudite pedagogical and social nature which enable them to influence student engagement beyond the boundaries of the classroom.

Some of the benefits of teacher leadership as highlighted by Chumun (2007) are:

- When teachers are given the opportunity to lead, they are able to contribute to school improvement by sharing best practices. Hence, working in collaboration with other teachers, improves the effectiveness of schools.

- There are positive effects of teacher participation in decision making.

- There is a decrease in teacher absenteeism.

What about the impact of teacher leadership on student learning and attainment? Hargreaves, Halász & Pont (2007) explored the relationship between leadership and school improvement in Finland. They discovered that trust, cooperation and responsibility are central to the Finnish school system. They use the example of when the principal is ill or unable to be in office, then the teachers simply carry on with whatever is supposed to be done. "In Finland, teacher leadership is not a plan, a career structure, or a set of tasks but a defining feature of how the entire national system operates. In Finland, teachers are able and expected to lead because there are things of substance worth leading'' (Crowther, 2009, p.11). I am not surprised therefore that Finland is one of the World's highest performers in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and one of the countries with the narrowest achievement gaps.

Another thought that crossed my mind is that teacher leadership can lead to improved self-confidence and a more positive outlook. In my own experience, I found that when teachers spread their expertise, it helps to build their self-confidence as well increase their creativity. This also leads to a collaborative learning culture within schools. Cole's (2012) research suggests that a school that has a rich professional learning culture is paramount to school effectiveness.

Wenner and Campbell (2016) also discovered that the effects of teacher leadership were limited to the effects on the teacher leaders themselves and their fellow colleagues. Accordingly, "the effects of teacher leadership on the teacher leaders themselves fit into four general themes: *the stresses/difficulties, changing relationships with peers and administration, increased positive feelings and professional growth, and increased leadership capacity*" (p.17).

The literature thus confirms that the most powerful effect of teacher leadership is on the teacher leaders themselves.

2.2.6 Obstacles to Teacher Leadership

As mentioned previously, teacher leadership becomes a powerful, living, breathing entity when it is based on trust and directed towards authentic student learning. The problem occurs when it is compromised by the implementation of government or system priorities. Research has shown how the age of standardization has impacted the amount and quality of professional collaboration and how meetings focussed on the implementation of unwanted government priorities (Hargreaves et al, 2007). This impacted teacher leadership as teachers either retreated to their classrooms or became active in teacher unions in an attempt to establish their own voice (Crowther, 2009).

Naicker and Somduth (2014) in their qualitative case study of a South African high school indicated that leadership by novice teachers is limited to the classroom. There are few opportunities for novice teachers to lead beyond the classroom. Findings also suggest that novice teachers are marginalised when it comes to school decision-making. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) also point out that several obstacles hamper the progress of teacher leadership. Teacher leaders often feel isolated from colleagues (Lieberman, Saxl & Miles, 2000) and acceptance of their leadership does not come easily (Little, 1990).

Wenner and Campbell (2016) confirm that 15 % of the literature they reviewed, revealed that teacher leaders' relationships with their peers as well as administration was another issue affected by teacher leadership. More often than not, the changes in relationships were not positive. The peers resented teacher leaders because they viewed them as disrupting the democratic nature of schools. Wenner and Campbell (2016) quote an example of a teacher leader in Margolis (2012) study who felt so attacked by her peers that she joked, "I have to wear a bullet-proof vest to those [eighth-grade] meetings" (p.18). In a similar vein, the colleagues of teacher leaders in Podjasek's (2009) study felt teacher leaders had more power and this led to a breakdown in relationships between teacher leaders and their colleagues.

2.3 PART TWO: THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

My study draws on two theories, Distributed Leadership and Teacher Leadership.

2.3.1 DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP

Distributed leadership is based on the premise that leadership is filtered through organisations via multiple personnel rather than on authority or position (Murphy, Smylie, Mayrowetz & Louis, 2009). The role of the principal in fostering the development of distributed leadership is paramount. The principal must acknowledge multiple sources of leadership in building capacity of the organisation (Bishop, Tinley & Berman, 1997).

Distributed leadership comprises 3 key elements - leaders, followers and situation; and that leadership is distributed across multiple groups within schools (Spillane, Diamond & Jita, 2003). As a result, the focus of any study using distributed leadership as a lens, should focus on the *interactional* process, in an attempt to analyse how people interact with each other, within their situations in schools, school-systems and communities (Diamond & Spillane, 2016).

According to Diamond & Spillane (2016), adopting a distributed perspective is not simply acknowledging that leadership is distributed. We are compelled to explore *the ways* in which it is distributed. The distributed perspective highlights interdependencies across what may appear to be different activities by rooting the analysis in leadership practice. Spillane (2006) outlines a way of framing how leadership is distributed. According to his outline, there are three types of distribution:

- o Collaborated distribution when 2 or more people work together on a specific activity, at the same time in the same place
- o Collective distribution when 2 or more people work separately but interdependently
- o Coordinated distribution when interdependent tasks are performed together in a specific sequence

Gunter, Hall & Bragg (2013) produced an analysis of the literature surrounding distributed leadership. I am captivated by the way in which Gunter et al (2013) go about their analysis.

They selected 90 out of a total of over 500 school leadership texts. The majority of these texts imply a connection between distributed leadership and effective practice in schools. Gunter et al (2013) validate Juntrasook's (2014) point about the power processes that underpin perspectives. They acknowledge Youngs' (2009) finding that while critiques of distributed leadership are available, ''the field has yet to articulate a critique of distributed leadership with respect to power relations and fully critique distributed leadership against policy forces that shape it'' (p.389). Gunter et al (2013) use a conceptual framework in which texts are described as ''functional – descriptive'', ''functional – normative'', ''critical'' or socially critical''. These positions are examined through examples which illustrate specific authors and research projects, in an attempt to unravel the power relations that frame the field of knowledge. This mapping approach allows the purposes of the work to be scrutinised in specific ways. Whilst the functionalist narratives focus on targets, training and plans, the critical analyses concentrate on everyday work realities using narratives that focus on agency and power. Within these functional approaches, lies the claim that school principals are not able to transform schools **alone** (Spillane, 2005). Normative research thus presents models for school improvement as well as rationales as to why distributed leadership is imperative for building powerful school structures. There exists a tendency for the descriptive-normative (functional) barrier to be unclear as there are instances where the research overlaps as is evident in the case of Spillane endorsing Harris (2008) and Harris (2005) acknowledging Spillane's research.

The descriptive and normative stances make many claims about the positive impact of distributed leadership. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) suggest that there should be a move towards harnessing substantial empirical evidence that such situations truly exist, and that distributed leadership is happening effectively in schools. It is my hope to harness such evidence in my study. According to Gunter et al (2013), critical approaches to educational leadership provide a wider perspective as they not only examine organisational practice, but their analyses also focus on power issues. The socially critical stance advocates more socially equitable forms of research. Socially critical researchers focus on subjectivity, with special emphasis on the individual, society, community and the environment.

According to Gunter et al (2013), social critical researchers focus on "the meanings and practices of social justice (Bogotch, Beachum, Blount, Brooks, English and Jansen 2008) with cases to illustrate how the democratisation of knowledge and emancipatory activism can and do take place" (Apple and Beane, 1999; Gandin and Apple, 2003; Normore, 2008) (p.570). Gunter et al (2013) suggest that functional and critical approaches (via their descriptive and critical rationale) might be better able to explore issues of power within work places. While such critiques are emerging however, there still remains a gap when it comes to critiquing distributed leadership in terms of the power relations that shape it (Youngs, 2009). One of the implications of the Gunter et al (2013) study which I find particularly thought-provoking is that researchers "do not seem to explore and actively use or reject the full range of research evidence and ideas by crossing both epistemic and national borders" (p. 573). Woods (2004, 2005) examined the differences between distributed and democratic leadership. He proposes that democratic leadership has intellectual underpinnings with a moral flavour; whilst distributed leadership narrows its focus towards an individual's contribution to the workplace sans reference to citizenship and rights.

Critical writers argue that more emphasis should be placed on recognising the context in which professional practice is located rather than on training and development of skills. Wallace (2001) argues for a recognition of a ''synergy'' between ''sharing leadership which works towards equal contribution'' and ''an occasional regression to hierarchy'' (p.166).

It is at this juncture where Gronn (2003) focusses his study. His focus is on the reality of how schools work and the tensions that lie between leaders and organisational members. After a decade of research, Gronn (2009) concludes that the optimal stance is to perceive leadership through "hybridity" or a "hybrid leadership" mix, a point where formal leadership and distributed leadership co-exist, and are always in operation (p.33). Gronn (2009) sees leadership as synonymous with influence. Gunter et al (2013) describes this as "overt and covert," as well as "inter-relational where some agents are more influential than others, and all of this is located in context as well as in a moment of time" (p.568). Gronn (2009) questions the ways in which leadership is categorised and whether these labels (distributed leadership, differentiated leadership, shared leadership, teacher leadership) can validate the reality of how the work gets done.

2.3.2 TEACHER LEADERSHIP

In my study, I draw on Crowther (2009, cited in Lai & Cheung, 2014) who proposes that

the work of a teacher leader comprises six elements, namely:

1. conveying a conviction of a better world

2. facilitating communities of learning

3. striving for pedagogical excellence

4. confronting barriers in the school's culture and structures

5. translating ideas into sustainable systems of action

6. nurturing a culture of success.

In their phenomenal work, *Developing Teacher Leaders – How Teacher Leaders Enhance School Success*, Crowther, Ferguson and Hann (2009) recognise the outstanding potential of teachers to provide new forms of leadership in schools. I intend to use *The Teachers as Leaders Framework* as devised by Crowther et al to profile the three subject coordinators in my study. This particular Framework for Teacher Leadership is an amalgamation of research and developmental work conducted by Crowther, Ferguson and Hann over the last decade. Its assertions are also consistent with research conducted by Barth (2001), Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001), Smylie et al (2002), Muijs and Harris (2002), Durrant (2004) and Katyal and Evers (2004).

Crowther's framework is reflective of a world view that schools are social systems

- with clearly defined roles and expectations
- in which there are interactions of personnel with personalities and needs dispositions

In this regard, it also has the characteristics of a role-based model of teacher leadership (Crowther et al 2009).

This framework can therefore be regarded as a hypothetical portrait which was used by Crowther et al (2009) to profile two schools where the team observed the enactment of teacher leadership. Crowther's framework has been found to be a very supportive model in its explanation of the work of teacher leaders. Hence, I have chosen his framework to enable me to explore and understand the role of English Subject coordinators in Abu Dhabi public schools.

The six elements within the framework have a total of sixteen descriptors. We must bear in mind that it represents ''an idealised image of how teacher leaders exercise their influence in their school communities'' (p.11). In Crowther et al's study (2009), no single teacher fulfilled every single descriptor.

Figure 1.1 *The Teachers as Leaders Framework*

Teacher leaders . . .

Convey convictions about a better world by

- articulating a positive future for all students
- contributing to an image of teaching as a profession that makes a difference

Facilitate communities of learning by

- encouraging a shared, schoolwide approach to core pedagogical processes
- approaching professional learning as consciousness-raising about complex issues
- synthesizing new ideas out of colleagues' professional discourse and reflective activities

Strive for pedagogical excellence by

- showing genuine interest in students' needs and well-being
- continuously developing and refining personal teaching gifts and talents
- seeking deep understanding of significant pedagogical practices

Confront barriers in the school's culture and structures by

- standing up for children, especially disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups
- working with administrators to find solutions to issues of equity, fairness, and justice
- encouraging student "voice" in ways that are sensitive to students' developmental stages and circumstances

Translate ideas into sustainable systems of action by

- working with the principal, administrators, and other teachers to manage projects that heighten alignment between the school's vision, values, pedagogical practices, and professional learning activities

- building alliances and nurturing external networks of support

Nurture a culture of success by

- acting on opportunities to emphasize accomplishments and high expectations
- encouraging collective responsibility in addressing schoolwide challenges
- encouraging self-respect and confidence in students' communities

What follows is a brief description of each element.

Element One: Teacher Leaders convey a conviction about a better world

This element is based on the premise that effective educational practice stems from a moral purpose, imbued with democratic ideals.

Element Two: Teacher leaders facilitate communities of learning

Crowther et al's 2009 study suggests that teacher leaders have the ability to facilitate communities of learning – places where teachers can come together to initiate whole school development. It is proposed that it is via their connection to teachers, *by being teachers themselves*, that teacher leaders are motivated to help their colleagues.

Element Three: Teacher Leaders Strive for Pedagogical Excellence

This is a contested area within teacher leadership theory. Recent models of teacher leadership, however, indicate that teacher leaders are capable of modelling best classroom practice. Crowther et al's 2009 study demonstrates this. In fact, based on their findings, Crowther et al (2009) went on to develop a five - question pedagogical scaffold that would assist teachers to work around the challenges associated with this element of the framework.

These are the five questions of the scaffold:

- What are your core values, hopes, and aspirations for the future?
- What is your special gift for teaching? How do you use it?
- What authoritative educational philosophy guides your work?
- How do you enhance your school's pedagogy through your professional learning and sharing?
- How do you contribute to your whole school workplace?
    (p.15).

Element Four: Leaders confront barriers in the school's culture and structures

According to this element, teacher leaders manifest ''conviction, courage and strategic skill'' that are ''essential to teacher leadership'' and teacher leaders ''are inclined to challenge the status quo'' ... ''when they perceive that barriers are diminishing the integrity of the school'' (p.17).

Element Five: Teacher Leaders Translate Ideas into sustainable systems of Action

The organisational and management aspects of teacher leadership are paramount to teacher leadership theory in general. Crowther et al's (2009) study indicates that the teacher leaders whom they observed, exhibited strong management abilities.

Element Six: Teacher Leaders nurture a culture of success

As per Crowther et al's (2009) evidence, teacher leaders recognise and embrace success in order to create a better future, one that is not threatened by the tensions of an ever-changing world.

Crowther et al (2009) endorse Mulford's 2007 idea of a "golden age" of school leadership (p.20).

According to Crowther et al (2009), we are living in an era where teacher leadership is a driving force, where schools- skills sets are growing rapidly. In the light of this evolving paradigm of teacher leadership, Crowther et al (2009) propose five premises on which their Teachers as Leaders framework is based.

Premise One: Teacher Leadership is a conceptual and practical entity in its own right

This first premise is an observable phenomenon. It is clear from the growing body of research on teacher leadership that it possesses qualities that can be observed.

Premise Two: Teacher leadership is grounded in authoritative theory

It is only recently that teacher leadership has gained prominence. For many, many decades, the literature on educational leadership has been rooted in authoritarian ideas. Crowther et al (2009) surmise that as educational leadership evolves, it responds to the needs of an ever-changing world; and within this evolution, teacher leadership remains one of its most dynamic developments.

Premise Three: Teacher leadership is integrally linked to pedagogical excellence

Crowther et al (2009) confirm that there is a link between individual classroom quality, schoolwide pedagogical practices, teacher leadership and overall success and improvement in student outcomes.

Premise Four: Teacher leadership is versatile and adaptive

According to Crowther et al (2009), in recent times concepts of teacher leadership appear to be "more reflective of individual capabilities and convictions than of personality factors" (p.42). They also maintain that although all teachers are potentially able to lead, not all teachers are leaders.

Premise Five: The development and sustainability of teacher leadership is inseparable from strong principalship and supportive systemic frameworks.

Crowther et al's evidence suggests it is the responsibility of the entire educator profession – principals, supervisors, researchers, students and teachers themselves – to generate and sustain teacher leadership.

Crowther et al's (2009) framework is also compatible with the principles of emotional intelligence (Goleman, Boyatzis, & Mckee, 2002). Embedded in Crowther's (2009) theory is this idea that we can build school leadership through parallel leadership. Crowther et al (2009) define parallel leadership as "a process whereby teacher leaders and their principals engage in collective action to build school capacity", underpinned by 3 specific qualities; "mutual trust, shared purpose and allowance for individual expression" (p.53). In this definition, it is a kind of shared or distributed leadership that proposes two things: firstly, there is a similarity in the importance of both teacher and principal leadership even though teachers and principals may lead in different ways. Secondly, school-based leadership is inextricably linked to the enhancement of educational outcomes. The underpinnings of this relationship are demonstrated via a model which shows these links. This brings us to the all-important business of how parallel leadership actually works in schools. Crowther's (2009) decade-long research, across several schools, illustrates that as long as parallel leadership is activated in a manner in which strong principals work aside teacher leaders, then "teacher morale, student engagement and community attitudes will follow" (p.59).

The bottom line here is that parallel leadership is essential if sustained school development is to happen; and principals need to work alongside their teacher leaders if schools are to build a solid leadership capacity.

3. Conclusion

In this chapter I presented my literature review and my theoretical framework. The first part which comprised my literature review unpacked the different dimensions of teacher leadership. Within the research surrounding the *contested nature of teacher leadership*, I discovered that while the concept of teacher leadership remains somewhat unconsolidated, for me it is a very real, very potent construct that I have witnessed in many schools and it is a phenomenon which I am keen to explore further. One of the conclusions of current research shows that the *enactment of teacher leader*ship is more evident within the classroom and the school than it is in the wider community. On examining *teacher leadership as empowerment*, it became clear that many researchers advocate that teacher leadership is an avenue for sharing best practice. In terms of the *organisational conditions for teacher leadership*, it is evident that teacher leadership is a complex phenomenon and the ways in which it may manifest itself will differ from place to place; from person to person. As far as *obstacles to teacher leadership* are concerned, I found the list slightly overwhelming. It is a path strewn with obstacles but Crowther, Ferguson & Hann (2009) offer invaluable advice about ways to overcome these barriers.

Part Two of this chapter focussed on my theoretical framework in two parts – Distributed Leadership & Teacher Leadership. *Distributed leadership* proposes that leadership is distributed in different ways and there is strong evidence to suggest that there is a connection between distributed leadership and school success. In the second part, I concentrated on Crowther's model of *teacher leadership*, a model which demonstrates what teacher leaders actually do and helps us to explore 'the teacher as leader' role further.

CHAPTER THREE

SHAPING SAND AND SANDING SHAPES ...

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

While Chapter Two covered my literature review and my theoretical base, the primary foci of Chapter Three are my research design and methodology which is narrative inquiry. I will also justify my choice of methodology as well as give a detailed account of my methods of data collection and an overall reflection of how it worked for me. I have called this chapter "Shaping Sand and Sanding Shapes". While 'Shaping Sand' refers to the act of design, 'Sanding Shapes' is about the way in which objects take their final shape, as the act of sanding helps to smooth or polish a surface. In the same way, my research design and methodology contribute largely to this process of shaping my research study.

3.2 Research Paradigm

My study takes place within the interpretive paradigm; based on the assumption that reality is co-constructed via joint understandings of the way we perceive ourselves and the world around us (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Interpretivist positions are based on the idea that what we conceive as truth is negotiated and there can be multiple, valid claims to knowledge (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Within such a paradigm, I will focus on the stories and narratives of three English subject coordinators, in an attempt to gain an insight into the processes of teacher leadership within their schools (Muijs & Harris, 2003). The storied narrative recognises that teacher leaders are not simply leaders, but they are living, breathing entities and the ways they practice leadership, occurs within the ways they interpret the world around them (Snoek, 2014).

3.3 Research Approach

I am a lover of stories and stories have been my way of recreating reality since I was a child. There was a natural tendency, therefore, for me to be geared towards a qualitative study, in particular a study that required getting as close as possible to the *lived reality* of English subject coordinators and telling their stories of experience (Creswell, 2008).

3.4 Methodology

Narrative inquiry is the methodology employed in this study. Embedded in Narrative Inquiry is the belief that we need to tell stories of individual experiences to better understand the world around us (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In *my* inquiry is the belief that we need to tell the stories of teacher leaders in their various capacities and contexts, if we are to better understand English subject coordinators work and classroom practice. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) note that learners, teachers and researchers are storytelling beings, that we are, in essence, all storytellers.

Narrative Inquiry is an exploration of life experience and like life itself, it is never static. The ultimate goal of Narrative Inquiry is to give voice to unheard stories (Creswell, 2008). The goal of my inquiry was to tell the story of those who have up until now remained silent within the realm of educational research, as in the case of English subject coordinators in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. At the same time, I was reminded to keep in mind Norton's (2008) profound words, "You must first believe you have the right to speak, the right to tell your story, to be heard. You have to believe the story you are telling is important, key to your understanding of life and key to others" (p.7).

3.5 Research Setting and Selection of Participants

My study was conducted at three schools - two all girls' schools and one all boys' schools - in   Al Ain, in the eastern region of the Abu Dhabi Emirate, in the United Arab Emirates. Al Ain is the second largest city in the Abu Dhabi Emirate and the fourth largest in the country. It is often referred to as the Oasis City alluding to its many oases. Al Ain is an important commercial hub and its services extend into the neighbouring state of Oman. It is a growing metropolis which is home to the United Arab Emirates University, Abu Dhabi University (Al Ain campus) and the Higher Colleges of Technology.

The schools selected in my study are referred to by pseudonym as Jasmine School, Palm School and Cactus School. Two of the schools , Jasmine and Cactus School were common cycle schools, accommodating students from Grade 1 – 12. Common cycle schools encompass three cycles. Cycle One is grade 1 to grade 5, Cycle Two is Grade 6 to Grade 9 and Cycle 3 is Grade 10 to Grade 12. The other school , Palm School is a Cycle 2 & 3 school. Jasmine and Cactus School are situated

about 60 -75 km away from Al Ain city, in the outlying desert areas. These areas are noted for their surrounding farms. Palm School is about 10 minutes from the city.

These schools were purposively selected for the study. Purposive selection refers to the selection of a sample unit with a 'purpose' to ensure the representation of a situation in relation to specific criteria (Richie & Lewis, 2003). My sample units were selected because they had specific features that enabled a detailed exploration and understanding of the lived experiences of English subject coordinators, which I will elaborate upon in due course.

Since my inquiry focused on the experiences of English subject coordinators, they were chosen for study in each of the selected schools (In each school there is only one appointed subject coordinator). One male and two females were selected. For the sake of confidentiality, they will be referred to as Mariam, Zainab and Ahmed. All three teachers are Arab expatriates.

Mariam, English coordinator of Jasmine School, has a total of 18 years teaching experience. She has been a subject coordinator for 4 years. Zainab, English coordinator of Cactus School, has a total of 17 years teaching experience. She has been a subject coordinator for 10 years. Ahmed, English coordinator of Palm School, has a total of 17 years teaching experience. He has been a subject coordinator for 4 years.

I selected Mariam and Zainab because I felt a great rapport with them, having worked with them closely since the last three years. During this time, I had many opportunities to observe their lessons as well as the way in which they interacted within their departments. I felt that this would give me further insight into the major questions of my research, as well as allow my participants to feel more at ease in sharing their stories with me. Choosing Ahmed as a participant was more a matter of synchronicity. The coordinator whom I had initially chosen, a choice I had made, based on the same criteria as Mariam and Zainab, was unable to fulfil his commitment due to unexpected circumstances. Ahmed was well known for his insightful contributions at subject network meetings and I decided to approach him with my request that he participate in my research. I was thrilled when he was more than happy to participate in my study. In hindsight, I believe the fact that I did not work directly with Ahmed before, helps to lend a degree of impartiality to my study and in this way, adds to its credibility.

There was also an even distribution of where the schools were situated as I covered the countryside as well as a school close to the city. The constant was that all participants were Arab expatriates. In my eyes, my selection is balanced. In terms of Gender, I have covered both Male and Female schools. All in all, I believe I have covered the Yin and Yang of my study.

3.6 Data Generation

My main method of data generation was via narrative interviews. The Narrative interview is regarded as a form of unstructured interview, moving beyond traditional question – answer technique. It uses a specific type of everyday communication that incorporates storytelling and listening to generate data (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000). Supplementary data generation will take place via collage inquiry and artefacts inquiry. Collage inquiry is gaining prominence in qualitative research. Researchers have realised that we live in an increasingly visual and non-linear world and are now keen to explore the potential of collage as a form of visual texts (Butler-Kisber, 2008). In teacher education literature, there are several examples where researchers use objects and artefacts as solid evidence of teaching and learning realities (Allender & Manke, 2004). Drawing on artefacts and collage inquiry will allow further reflection and introspection on the part of subject coordinators thus allowing for a deeper and more reflective process of data generation.

3.6.1 Narrative Interviews

Before I began my narrative interviews, I began my reading about narratives and as I read, I constructed my mind maps of my readings. According to Jovchelovitch et al (2000), a narrative is more than just a list of events, it is linked via the plot through time and it is in this way that a story becomes meaningful. Plots, therefore, are central to the creation of a narrative. The plot is configured, whole to part, and parts to whole, within a Gestalt frame of meaning. It is in this way that the story lives on beyond its sentences; and the whole evolves beyond its parts. I then discovered that there were several inherent concepts that are embedded within narratives. Firstly, as Barthes & Duisit (1975) describe it, "Narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative" (pg.237).

For me, this was the most empowering idea because I felt that this made my choice of using narrative interviews that much more legitimate. The narrative interview is strung together by storytelling and listening.

In my reading, I was cautioned that the influence of an interviewer in a narrative interview is minimal. Furthermore, the interviewer had to avoid any form of language not used by the narrator. Jovchelovitch et al (2000) suggest that the narrator gives detailed information in order to allow a fluid transition from one event to another as this would ensure adequate coverage of time, place, motives, points of orientation, plans, strategies and abilities. The narrator should also discuss the parts that pertain to their perspective or worldview, and must ultimately ensure a flow – a beginning, a middle and an end – in a continuous cycle of Life. The end can be current if the story is still continuing.

Another concept which I found particularly compelling is that <u>anyone</u> can tell a story. It is independent of education and language competence. For me, this meant that narrative interviews are an inclusive method of data collection. In this way, everyone can get to tell their story. I discovered that there are two dimensions of storytelling. *Once upon a Time* ... can either be chronological or non – chronological (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000). Chronological refers to the narrative as a sequence of events, while non – chronological is the construction of a whole from a sequence of events. Time itself is used as a point of reference, within the construction of meaning. I also learnt about immanent questions and exmanent questions (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000). Exmanent questions referred to the questions of my research. Immanent questions are concerned with the themes, topics, and events that occur within the narration.

I then focussed on the phases of the narrative interview. As per the research, I discovered there were four phases in a narrative interview. In the first phase, which took place before the interview, I explained the procedure to my participants. I informed them that their storytelling would be an uninterrupted process and that the whole process should be spontaneous and relaxed. Here I used an exmanent question which my key question was:

> Tell me about your personal and professional life (In terms of personal you can
> talk about where you were born, your family life, your education; In terms of your

professional life you can talk about your life as a teacher – what you do on a daily basis in school (the committees you are involved in; your classroom practice; your involvement in school activities; How you perform your role as subject coordinator; what you do out of school that is education related).

In the second phase, which focussed on the main narration, I ensured that I did not interrupt the narration. During the narration, I used non – verbal signals of attentive listening, example nodding my head, as well as paralinguistic supportive phrases such as *hmm, yes I see, yeah, wow* and *aha*. Once there was a clear coda, I asked my participants, "Is there anything else you would like to say?"

The third phase is when the exmanent questions are translated into immanent questions, as a way of eliciting new or additional information. As the narration came to an end, I managed to open this questioning phase, in which I asked for further clarification of concepts, in order to close the gaps within the study. I asked these questions using the language of my participants.

Example: What about the support you receive? Can you tell me how you are supported in your role as the coordinator?

In the final stage, the tape recorder was switched off and there was some time for some heart to heart 'off the record' talk as we said our goodbyes.

The narrative interview itself was an extremely powerful experience. My first interview was with Mariam. It was a beautiful June Day, in a typical desert Summer, and we sat in the coolness of her classroom, the hum of the air conditioner the only other sound aside from Mariam's voice. Before the interview, I wondered how it would actually pan out and there were several questions in my mind example: What if my participant gets nervous? What if my participant finishes in a very short time? How will I prod my participant using the correct procedure? All these fears never materialised as the interview went smoothly and naturally, to the point that after the interview, Mariam told me, "You made me remember the things I had even forgotten. You brought many beautiful memories back to my mind." During my interview with Mariam, she spoke about the death of her father, and we were both in tears as she recalled the details. This was a moment of deep connection as I recalled the death of my own father. This particular point in the interview made me recall the statement by Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), "Our representations arise from

experience and must return to that experience for their validation," (p.39). I agree that narrative inquiry is situated within the relationship between researcher and participant, and its validation occurs within this relational aspect. My second interview was with Zainab. In this interview, I began to understand that the storyteller will select specific events, and this will depend on what he or she conceives as relevant to their worldview. This is what Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) refer to as 'relevance fixation' when events emerge as per a participant's perspective.

My third and final interview was with Ahmed. As I mentioned before, I had not worked directly with Ahmed before, unlike Zainab and Mariam, with whom I shared a warm relationship, having worked with them both closely over the past few years. I am pleased to say that my interview with Ahmed was natural and unprompted. He was spontaneous in the use of his language and extremely articulate; and I felt as if he wanted his story to be heard.

On the whole, all three interviews left an indelible imprint on my life. It was the first time that I had ever conducted this type of research and it was an amazing experience. I believe that the greatest strength of the narrative interview lies in its capacity to produce an authentic story. I think as long as there is evidence of a rich Life experience, there will be in-depth data, as was in the case of my three participants.

3.6.2 Collage Inquiry

After I completed my transcription of the narrative interviews, I began a mindmap of my reading on collage inquiry.
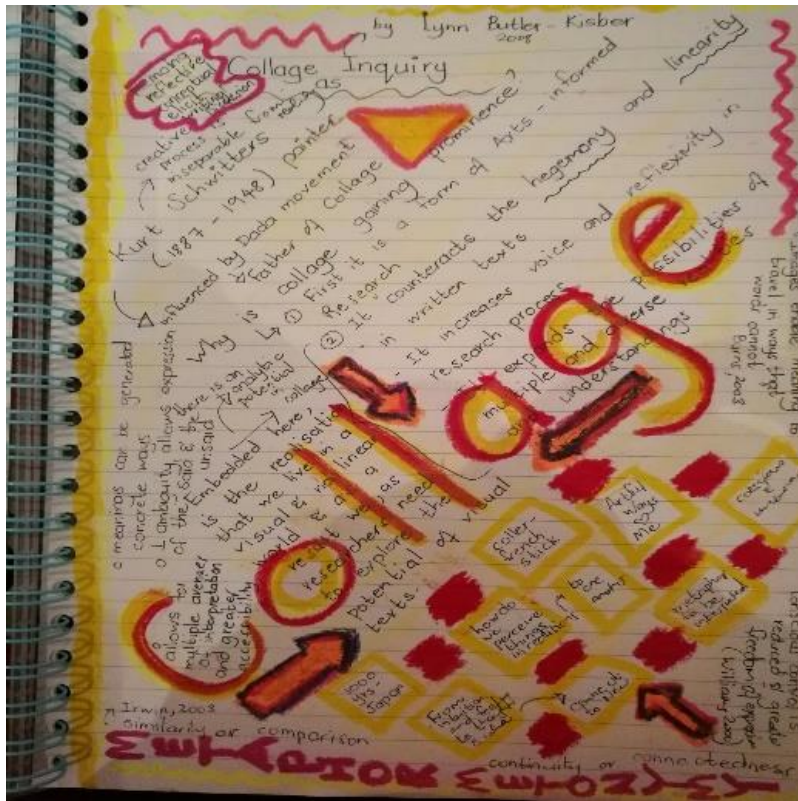
Figure 3.1 *My Collage Reading MindMap*

As per Butler-Kisber (2008), collage, a process of cutting pictures from magazines and sticking them on cardboard, is becoming increasingly popular as a form of qualitative research. Collage is an evocative art form that "provides ways of expressing the said and the unsaid, and allows for multiple avenues of interpretation and greater accessibility" (p.268).

Gerstenblatt (2013) proposes that collage portraiture can add to interview data and in this way, produce new insights and interpretation. I was excited to see how this would work out for me. Already, I had the narrative interview data. I was looking forward to discovering the new insights collage inquiry would bring to my understanding of the lives of the three subject coordinators. I found the idea by Gerstenblatt (2013) that "we need to return to literature in search of visual methods, as an additional layer of analysis", quite appealing (p.297). In this way, I could include other perspectives. Being someone who enjoys creative art, I felt that collage inquiry would add to my understanding and my portrayal of the three subject coordinators of Abu Dhabi.

I then scheduled my collage inquiry sessions with each of my participants separately, over a weekend so that we could have enough time to focus on the task. In these sessions, I was the observer to the process of collage making. This meant that I could use the artistic creation, in this instance, the collage, as data (Gerstenblatt 2013). I sent the following memo to my participants before the scheduled inquiry:

- You will need to prepare your resources for this activity. You need 10 magazines, large art sheets, scissors and glue stick.

- Budget about two hours for this activity

- You will have about 75 minutes for the collage activity itself. You will go through the magazines and select pictures and words that resonate with your life as a teacher. Cut and paste them onto the art sheet in any pattern/style/format that appeals to you. Be as creative as you want.

- Then for the next 45 minutes you will talk about your collage., explaining what each of the pictures and words depict in terms of your life as a teacher. I will audio record this conversation and take a picture of the collage.

3.6.2.1 Mariam's Collage

Figure 3.2 *Mariam's Collage in the shape of a ladder*

My first participant, Mariam, made a profound comment in our collage interview. She said, *"Here I have the picture of a woman taking photos because you know the life journey is full of photos, we take photos every day, and **our life is a big piece of collage** so photos and pictures are souvenirs and they memorise everything in your life. They something that memorises and records your life from A to Z."* This captures the whole idea of collage inquiry quite succinctly as we begin to see Life as a series of images, and these images when pieced together, give meaning to our lives. Burns (2003) supports this very idea that images have a way of conveying meaning that words may not have the power to do.

3.6.2.2 Zainab's Collage

Figure 3.3 *Zainab's Collage in the shape of a butterfly*

Zainab, who was my second participant, brought another significant dimension into collage making when she said, "I think my choice of *this* picture is actually … I meant to choose it but erm maybe it's something **unconscious** in me …"

This comment validates Williams (2000) research about the collage process reducing "conscious control over what is being presented which contributes to greater levels of expression" (p.275).

3.6.2.3 Ahmed's Collage

Figure 3.4 Ahmed's Collage in the shape of the word Grow

My last participant was Ahmed remarked,*"Before starting my collage I was thinking what a good way to just think of all the aspects of my personality and all the aspects of my teaching career **other than like a brainstorming like phase**. So, I had to jot down all the things I see in myself as a teacher and as a person and then I was going through like some pictures that would represent all those thoughts. So, I was thinking of me being goal oriented ... me being like a very active person and a person who would cross bridges over bridges and so I had to find all the pictures that would represent all those thoughts.*

So, I started with the picture of the Eagle looking somewhere just to tell that I am a goal oriented like kind of person and I always work by goals and this is how I am trying to teach my kids at home."

Butler-Kisber et al (2007) research confirms that collage is indeed an intuitive process which spontaneously teases out our more intricate thoughts and ideas.

3.6.3 Artefact Inquiry

After going through the research on artefacts, I discovered that artefact inquiry is indeed a significant form of investigation. Prown (1982) in his seminal work on material culture, refers to the importance of studying artefacts. Pithouse-Morgan and Van Laren (2012) describe an artefact as an object of cultural or historical significance. Mitchell (2011) proposes that objects can hold connotative and/or denotative meanings and that the study of objects help the researcher to enter the story that these objects carry. Connotative meanings refer to the story attached to the object while denotative meanings refer to the facts or social relevance of an object. I realised that although there is an endless supply of objects, more often than not, participants will choose objects that already exist in their environment (Pithouse- Morgan et al 2012).

With regard to my study, I felt that artefact inquiry would provide another doorway into the story of the English subject coordinators. In particular, I was hoping that my participants would be able to reflect upon the objects which they had selected and this, in turn, would trigger off particular experiences and emotions that would allow me to contemplate the key research questions of my study:

- **How do the English subject coordinators enact leadership on a day-to-day basis?**
- **Why do the English subject coordinators enact leadership the way they do?**
- **What challenges do the English subject co-ordinators encounter in enacting leadership?**

I allowed my participants to choose up to three artefacts. Then I met with them and asked them about each artefact. In the midst of the artefacts' interviews, Mother took ill. I managed to conduct Ahmed and Mariam's interviews at their respective schools, but due to time constraints, I had to reschedule Zainab's interview. Zainab, bless her, in the midst of her own hectic schedule, agreed to meet me after school where we conducted our interview in a quiet corner of the Rosie Lee's Tea Shoppe, sipping chai and café latte. Time became non-existent as I listened to Zainab avidly explain the significance of her artefacts and I myself, was reminded of the importance of the things we value in our lives and the meanings we attach to these objects.

3.6.3.1 Ahmed's Artefacts

Figure 3.5 *Ahmed's Artefact*

Ahmed chose the following artefacts:

a Musical Piece: Waltz – Mariage d'amour composed by Paul de Senneville, a photograph of his wife and two of his favourite books, Focus by Daniel Goleman and Mindset by Carol Dweck.
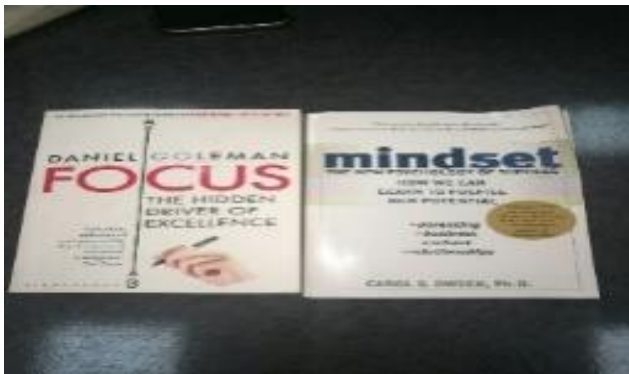
Figure 3.6 *Ahmed's Artefacts - Books*

3.6.3.2 Zainab's Artefacts

Zainab chose the following artefacts: a candle, a pen and a Tunisian ornament.

Figure 3.7 *Zainab's Artefacts*

3.6.3.3 Mariam's Artefacts

Mariam chose the following artefacts:

a tray cloth from Stamford, a pen and a miniature London bus

Figure 3.8 *Mariam's Artefacts*

3.7 Data Analysis

In terms of data analysis, analysis occurred in two stages; Narrative analysis and analysis of narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995). Narrative analysis took an inductive approach to identifying data elements to build a connected data set in storied form (Hatch, 2002). In other words, it involved re-storing the English subject co-ordinators telling of their lived experiences of their practice. Analysis of narratives was a form of qualitative data analysis that examines data to illuminate distinct themes and create generalizations (Polkinghorne, 1995).

3.7.1 Narrative Analysis

Once I had conducted all my interviews, I transcribed each of the interviews verbatim. I then sent the transcripts to my participants so they could check all the details, and ensure that everything I captured was correct. Once I had their approval, I decided that I would use the mindmap as my tool to develop each story. My initial step was to extract the central themes that "jumped" out of each of the stories. I then selected the evidence that "spoke" to each of these themes. I then looked at my artefact inquiry and my collage inquiry. I linked these with my themes. I constructed my mindmap using the evidence from all three methods of inquiry. After I had completed the mindmap, I then began writing my stories, using the major themes as building blocks. With each theme, I used the supporting material from my transcripts to construct my story. The mindmap appealed to me because it is a lateral form of thinking which allowed me to focus on the creation of my narratives rather than on the details (Broome, 2010). So, beginning with the overall themes allowed me to get more specific as my stories developed. Mindmapping also allowed me to link the visual aspects of my data collection viz my collage inquiry and my artefacts inquiry.
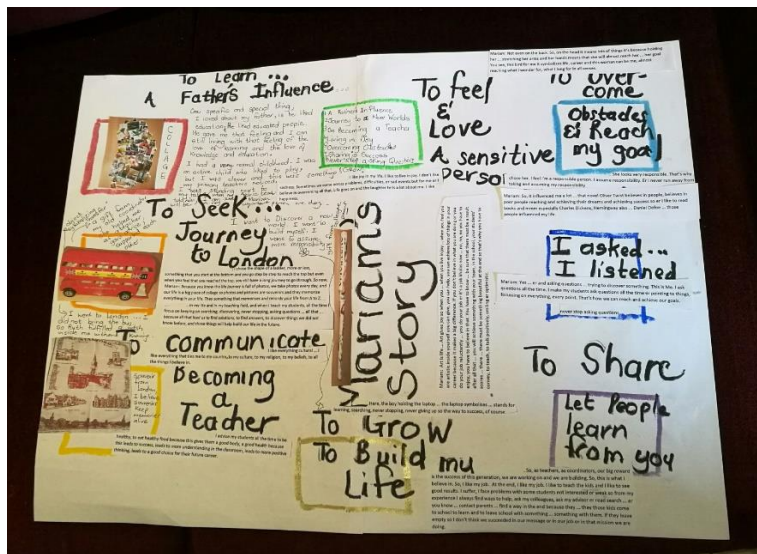
Figure 3.9 My Mindmap of Mariam's Story
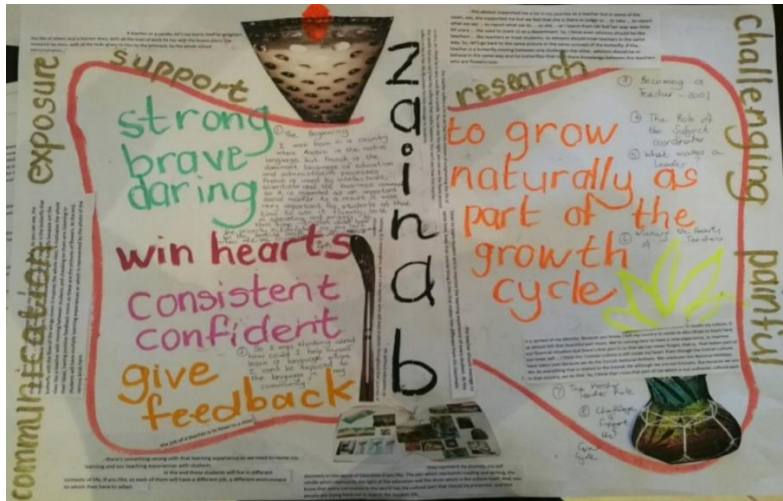
Figure 3.10 *My Mindmap of Zainab's Story*
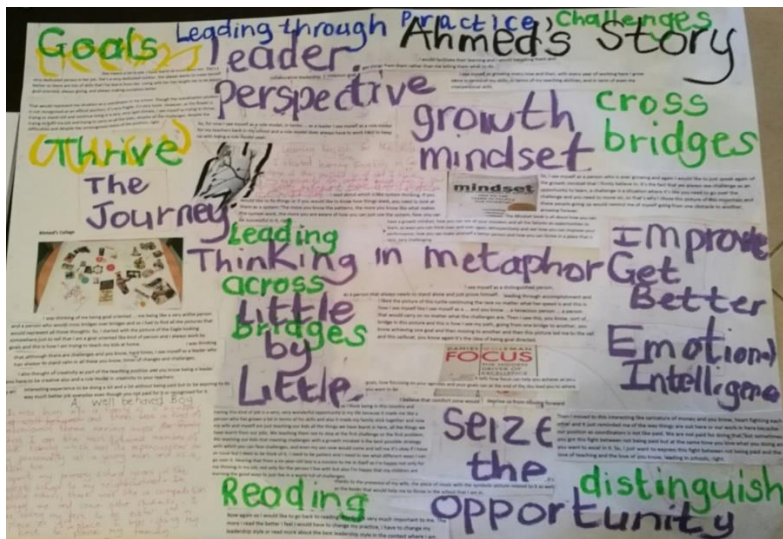
Figure 3.11 *My Mindmap of Ahmed's Story*

Date : 22 December 2017
Today is 48 days since I lost Mom. ☹
But somehow within me, a fire burns and
it's like I have to complete my studies
and I'm going to.
I am almost finished Ahmed's narrative,
just over a page to do. I've already
done Mariam's narrative. Tomorrow I'm
going to start Zainab's mindmap and then
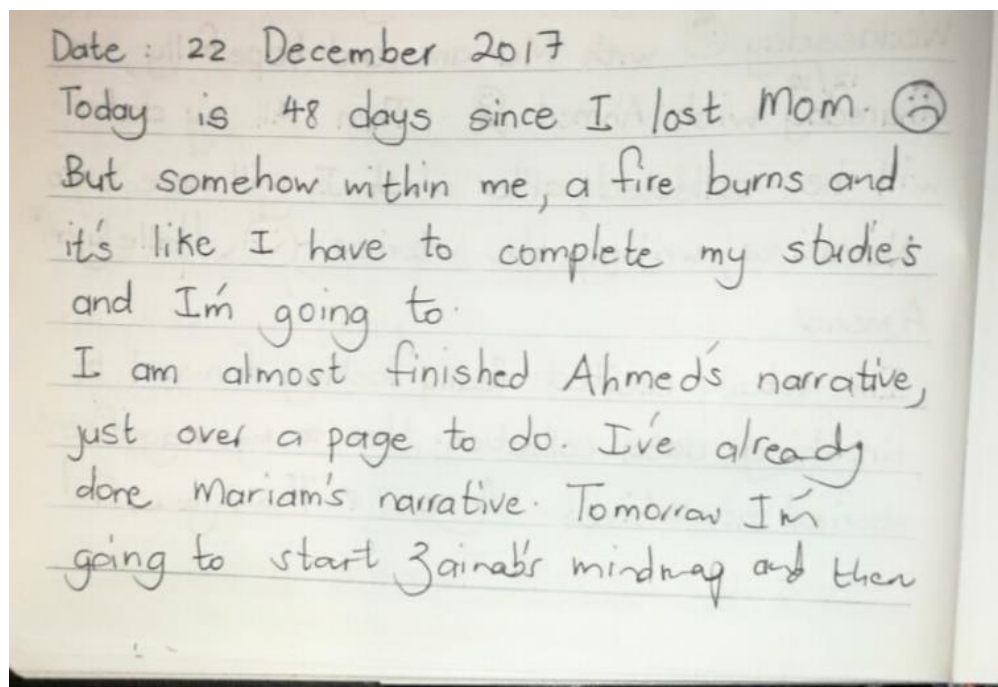
Figure 3.12 *My Journal Entry in the midst of writing my narratives*

3.7.2 Analysis of Narratives

I analysed my stories as per my three key research questions.

My analysis for Question One, **How do the English subject coordinators enact leadership on a day - to - basis?**, was informed by Crowther's (2009) *Teachers as Leaders Framework*.

For this question, after reading all three stories, I selected evidence from each story that addressed each of the aspects of Crowther's framework. Then I proceeded to support my evidence with literature.

My analysis for Question Two, **Why do the English subject coordinators enact leadership the way they do?**, was based on teacher identity theory (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2010). As per my literature search, teacher identity is shaped by the personal and professional lives of teachers. As a result, teachers will draw on their personal and professional identities in the way they enact teacher leadership. After reading all three stories, I selected six themes altogether, three themes that addressed my participants' personal lives and three themes that addressed their professional lives. I then proceeded to extract the evidence for each theme and used literature to support my evidence.

For Question Three, **What challenges do the English subject co-ordinators encounter in enacting leadership?**, I did an inductive analysis of the stories. In this way, I picked out four key challenges encountered by my participants. Thereafter I presented my evidence which was linked directly to each challenge. I then used literature to discuss the evidence.

3.8 Ethical Issues

Ethics in research is based on trust between researcher and participant (Jelsma & Clow,2005). I will observe the principles of ethics which are **anonymity, non-maleficence and beneficence** when conducting my research. All research is subject to risk. In order to minimise risk, I ensured that absolute confidentiality was observed.

First and foremost, I applied for ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Ethical clearance was granted (see page 46). Thereafter, permission was sought from the Abu Dhabi Education Council (see Appendix A, page 138) and the principals of the schools (see Appendix B, page 139) to conduct this research. Once granted, consent forms for English subject coordinators (See appendix C, page 140) to participate in the study were given to the three subject coordinators.

I was obliged to be truthful about my study. The consent forms delineated the methods of data collection, the possible risks of the study, importance of confidentiality as well as the benefits of the study. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the participants (Caine, 2016).

I am of the view that this research will be beneficial to teachers within the Abu Dhabi Emirate and throughout the world; and that these benefits will be identifiable and positive.

3.9 Trustworthiness

I have observed four criteria: **credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability**, as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (2000) to be the cornerstones of judging the quality of a study.

According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), ensuring credibility is essential in establishing trustworthiness. Triangulation is a means of ensuring trustworthiness. I also sought to evaluate my study, as it progresses, via a reflective journal. Guba and Lincoln (1989) regard this reflective practice as critical in establishing credibility.

The issue of transferability begs the question whether the findings are transferable to similar settings. I addressed transferability by providing a rich, detailed description of the research context as well as the processes of data generation and analysis.

I have ensured dependability by providing a detailed account of the processes within my study so as to enable future researchers to repeat the process, as well as for readers of my research to understand my methods. Miles and Huberman (1994) acknowledge that confirmability is based on the extent to which the researcher admits his or her own beliefs and assumptions. Again, the reflective journal becomes an important tool used to conduct an ongoing reflection of my study, my pre-conceptions and challenges. Ultimately, it is imperative that the reader should be able to track how the data was gathered and processed during the course of my research (Shenton & Dixon, 2004). I have done this by ensuring a detailed methodological description which will also allow in-depth scrutiny of research results.

3.10 Limitations

The responses of the subject coordinators do not reflect the responses of teacher leaders at the elementary levels (Cycle 1) as they are only responsible for Grades 6 – 12 (Cycle 2 & 3).

Although the study pertains to three schools, these findings are not generalizable to all schools in Abu Dhabi. I, however, believe the findings will be beneficial in helping to create a better understanding of teacher leadership in Abu Dhabi.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter focussed on my research design and methodology. I used Narrative Inquiry as my methodology. In the process, I discovered that the narrative research method is an invaluable tool in providing insight into the dynamic processes that underpinned the personal and professional lives of my participants, and the ways in which their interpretations impacted their leadership (Hulsbos, Anderson, Kessels & Wassink, 2012). I explained in great length about my process of data collection, the selection of my participants and the ways in which I analysed my data (Hatch, 2002). Finally, I looked at ethical issues, trustworthiness and limitations.

The next chapter focusses on the storied narratives of the three subject coordinators.

CHAPTER FOUR

FOOTPRINTS ON THE SANDS OF TIME: NARRATIVES OF ENGLISH SUBJECT COORDINATORS

4.1 Introduction

In Chapter Three, I focussed on the research design and methodology of my study. To remind the reader, the methodology I engaged in is narrative inquiry and I used three methods of data generation: collage inquiry and artefacts inquiry, underpinned by narrative interviews. In my interviews, I allowed my participants to tell their stories freely; uninhibited and with minimal interruption.

This chapter presents the first level of analysis of the data, namely narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995). I have borrowed the phrase "Footprints on the Sands of Time" from a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, which describes the impact that great people have on history and civilization. In the same vein, this chapter reflects the stories of Mariam, Ahmed and Zainab, stories that will leave an indelible mark on the history of Education, within the realm of teacher leadership. I constructed the stories by weaving together the data from the collage inquiry, artefact inquiry and narrative interviews. I commence the chapter by presenting Mariam's story followed by the stories of Ahmed and Zainab.

4.2   Mariam's Story: Leading through Sharing

Mariam's story is permeated with the central idea of sharing. She believes that sharing is at the heart of any successful leadership.

The love of learning: A Father's Influence

One specific and special thing I loved about my father is he liked education. He liked educated people. He gave me that feeling, and I am still living with that feeling of the love of learning and the love of knowledge and education.

I lived in a family composed of two brothers and five sisters. My mother was a housewife and my father worked in a company. My father worked hard to raise us, to provide us with everything we needed. I liked school and I was always first in my class, so that's why my father was proud.

He was proud of all of us but especially of me, because of the constant praise from teachers. They said, "She's a good student, a good girl. We expect a shining future for her."

When I graduated from High School, my dream was to be a dentist. I was good at science and my science teacher agreed that dentistry should be my first choice.

Then my mother and my father suggested law. The idea was interesting to me at the beginning, but it was my mother who helped me shape my dreams when she said, "Mariam, you are excellent in English and English is becoming more and more important these days."

I wrote English as my first choice in the choice of subjects at university because it was my favourite, and they gave me my first choice in a very famous university in my country.

So, I went and studied there. I worked very hard. In university, every year was a big challenge. You had to achieve your goals and finish that year and move on. There was no stopping.

I had a very helpful team of friends and teachers. I cannot forget my Literature teacher because I like literature. We learnt lots of things about the English language and all that influenced my life later.

When we finished our 3rd year at university, we had to undertake a training of one and a halfmonths in Great Britain. *(refer to Figure 3.8 Mariam's Artefacts)*

On becoming a Teacher – What will you lose?

I finished university and I graduated. I wanted to carry on with my education, so I applied to do my Masters.

At the time, they made a big exam to have your licence in teaching. I did not want to sit for that exam because I was not dreaming to be a teacher at all. My dream was to work as a translator somewhere I can communicate in English every day.

It was my father who said, "What will you lose? Sit for the teacher certificate exam. Get your certificate. You need it for your future." I had my oral test for that exam in my university and it was a very beautiful opportunity for me to meet my old teachers again.

I began work as a translator. I liked the job. Then, I received a letter saying that I have a job as teacher, many kilometres from my home. The idea of living so far from my home was quite shocking so I said, "No! I cannot go!"

Again, my father said, "If you refuse, Mariam, you won't have the opportunity again."

So, because I trust my father, because I love him, and I knew that he would choose the best for me, I agreed to take the job.

The vice principal at the school, Mr Abdullah, was a very kind man, who noticed my father's concern for my safety and welfare, and did his best to find a good house for me to rent. So, together with two other young ladies, both Maths teachers, he found us a house with a very nice family. The family lived downstairs and we lived upstairs.

I had a good rapport with my students and my advisors were happy with my progress as a teacher. I spent four years there. It was a beautiful four years in which I learnt many things; how to face problems in the classroom and how to interact and communicate with others. Then it was time for me to transfer to a school in my home city.

Suddenly, a paper came to the school asking teachers to apply to work in the Gulf area.

My principal and my colleagues urged me to apply. I was convinced that it was what I wanted so my father and the rest of my family agreed with my decision.

I will never forget the day I left for the UAE. It was the 16 September 2003; the rain fell heavily, and my brother said, "The sky is even sad, because you are leaving us."

UAE– A big test in my life

When we arrived at the airport in Abu Dhabi, they divided us. After three days in a hotel, we were taken to Khorfakkan which is part of Sharjah. They said I would work in a place called Kalba which is 5 km from Fujairah.

Many of us wanted to return home during that first week. I was unbearably homesick, but my father said, "Wait and see, finish your two years and come back."

This experience changed my personality. It made me stronger. I wasn't a weak person, but I was a sensitive person. Travelling to another country was a big test in my life because when you are on your own, you have two choices – either you save yourself or you fall into a big hole and you cannot get outside it.

So, those four months I spent in UAE, by myself added to my life, added to my personality, helped me face my problems by myself.

I had a Jordanian advisor at school. She supported me. She liked the way I communicated with my students. Most of my advisors focussed on this point – the way in which I communicate with my students. Maybe it's spontaneous, maybe I don't feel that but people who watch me, they feel that.

I teach in a very spontaneous way. It means in a positive way so that I make my students feel comfortable in the class, so no stress is put on them. I prepare my lesson.

I try to handle every part of it. When I prepare the lesson, I look at every child in my class. Every child takes part. When every child takes part, this makes them feel comfortable, happy with the lesson. Even though there are things they don't understand, they feel free to ask.

I feel that my eyes look at all of them. I try not to neglect any part of the classroom, I try not to neglect any child in the class. This is what I mean when I say it comes spontaneously. It's me. It's my nature, my attitude. I'm a positive person. Sometimes, I get angry of upset or sad or maybe I do not achieve what I wanted to achieve but most of the time, I feel that every time I leave a class, I achieve something, even if it is 20% of my goals.

When I ask a student to read for example, and she raises her head with eyes full of questions, telling me she doesn't know the word. I smile. I say, Who can help? I say, Let's check if we saw a word like this before. I try to find many strategies. I don't say the word straight away. It's the last resort, to answer her directly.

For example, when I find that the very good students need to read more advanced stories, I choose stories for them. I call them aside and I tell them I chose these stories for you. When she is a good student, she feels proud, she feels great. She feels that I chose her for this big thing.

That feeling comes to me, because when I was in Grade 12, my Philosophy teacher did that to me. She called me and gave me many books on philosophers and this indirect encouragement inspired me.I had four years of teaching experience in my country and three years in Kalba. I learnt a lot. I had experience in the teaching pedagogy, the way of teaching. I had the information. I had the knowledge. The way I teach, the way in which my students benefit from me, this made the difference.

The first time I went into directly into a class from university and I looked at my class for the first time, I just wanted to know their names and what they thought about English. It went in a very smooth way. I didn't complicate things for them.

Pedagogy means that when you are a teacher, you can sense every student. You know the background of every student through asking questions, through asking the social workers, through asking the administration.

If you want to focus on a specific student and work on them, if that student has a low level in English, you look at all the points that you can develop. So, pedagogy is not taught. It is acquired through teaching, from your experiences in the classroom.

Pedagogy differs from one student to another so from every experience I learn something either to avoid the weaknesses or to carry on with things that worked. Those four years in my country helped me and when I came here, I applied what suits this place, I left behind what can never work here. I learnt to judge things.

Pedagogy is not only about giving material, giving content. Students are human beings and we are human beings, so there is a human element and things come very spontaneously.

For example, when I read my students the Teeth Story, we switched off the lights to create the ambience because it's a scary story where two boys found two teeth and they don't know which animals these teeth belong to. The kids said, "Miss, you scared us!"

Saying "Miss you scared us!" told me they got the message of the Teeth Story.

Another wonderful experience that stands out in my memory is when my advisor wanted me to make an English book for kindergarten students. At that time, kindergarten students did not have any English classes. So the advisor said, "Look Mariam because you are motivated, I want you to create the book to teach Kindergarten students in June and we will see if we can implement it the coming school year."

So what did I put in that book? The first thing is, I put lots of pictures. What interested those kids are the pictures.

Under the pictures, I put experiments. The book was about hands on activities so if they want to know about colours, for example, we brought lots of stuff, lots of materials and when I taught them, we used our hands. This is what excited them.

Another thing is we moved a lot. It was as if it were Physical Education class not English. So it was actually an infusion of English, Physical Education and Art. What excited the children is that they got the very first things in the language from a colour book, a book with lots of activities, and I taught them. I wrote the book and I taught the first group. It was an exciting experience.

Then in my third year, my advisor said, "Mariam, let's start a new project."

It was a competition about the right behaviour of a Muslim and it incorporated songs about Islam. All schools in Kalba participated in the competition. I went from school to school explaining the script which I had prepared as well as the poems and songs. The year was 2005 and the project was a huge success.

This project was a great success because it was the first time there were songs about Al Haj. There were songs about prayer There were songs about Prophet Muhammed PBUH. There were songs about good behaviour for Muslims. When you teach kids in the classroom those things in a very classical way, it's okay, but when you come with a song, it adds to the learning experience.

They practiced the song. They demonstrated the song. They made a play because every school made a show. So, it was English plus theatre.

Many schools participated and the teachers were enthusiastic about that. Having the songs from Arabic, translated into English, was a different experience. It was the first time for such a thing and it was a great success.

Becoming the English Coordinator – A transition

I moved from Kalba and joined my husband in Al Ain. I started a new phase in my life. I worked in a model school for three years and it was a beautiful experience.

As a teacher, my job was clear until a transition happened three years ago, when I became the English coordinator at my school.

I became responsible for a whole staff of Cycle 2 and Cycle 3 English teachers.

Now what do I do as coordinator?

I teach and do coordination in parallel because I cannot be something else – only a teacher. So, coordination and being a coordinator is an extra job. I'm trying to do it as good as the way I teach. I meet with my staff and discuss everything.

This is the main thing in the whole story, the main thing in the work of a coordinator. I do both jobs. I teach and I am a coordinator. Maybe this is the reason I am closer to my teachers. If you are only a coordinator, you sit in your office. Maybe then you would communicate with them in a different way, maybe a rigid way. But for me, it is totally different.

I'm a teacher. I know about what we experience in the classroom altogether. I feel their happiness and their sufferings, their struggle with the curriculum, with the students, so if a teacher comes to me and says, *'I face that problem with that part in the book,'* we more or less teach the same series of book, the same curriculum so I can understand that more. I can share my experience with her and not talk to her in general … I can say, *'You can do this because it worked with me.'*

I was absent once and my team really missed me. They called me and sent messages. It was just for a day but when I got back to school, they said, Never be absent again! We missed you!

Why did they do that? Nothing would push them to do all those emotional things. One reason is I am honest with them. I don't do things in a bad way. I don't trick them. I don't cheat. When

there is something that did not work, I help them. I support them. I try to solve the problems with them. I don't create more problems for them. I try to get rid of extra problems.

For example, one of my teachers came to me and said, '*Look Mariam, I have a big behavioural problem.*'

I told her, '*Okay, Number One, we will go to the social worker. Number Two, we will talk to the parents. Number Three, you must try to see how you can change your way, what things can work, what things can't work and then you must find a solution.*'

In our team, everyone shares. We cannot solve problems by ourselves, We include the social worker and we include the parents if we need to. We also work together for joint projects like the assembly project and cultural day. We all suggest things. We have created an easy, comfortable atmosphere in which we all work freely.

I cannot be the boss and you work under me. It is not a matter of **you** do that and **you** do that. So, our environment is definitely democratic. If we are not comfortable in our work environment, then we will not succeed in our mission, which is to teach our students in the best possible way.

Keep the Good Communication

I try to keep that same good communication that I have with my team, with my students. Good communication means you don't stress your students. Say you have a lesson not on English literature but with a scientific text, then you have to plan for that, you choose the strategies which will suit every student.

Good communication also means you don't burden them with homework from the beginning of the lesson. Then you will lose them. Start free. Start with a smile. Start with a warm up that can keep them engaged and motivated.

If you doing group work, then assess the mood. Do these students get on? You need to feel the atmosphere. Choose your groups and activities. Don't embarrass students with activities that

they will not manage. You will demotivate them. We need to have a smooth atmosphere in which we can perform and achieve the biggest goal which is student achievement.

You teach. You explain. The psychology of the students is very important.

If you want to choose your best students for certain activities like Spelling Bees, many students will object and say, What about us? Instead, this is what I do. I tell them that I am making a spelling competition for the whole class, and I will choose who will get the full mark for the Spelling Bee. When they don't get the full mark, then they are satisfied that they had the chance. They realise that this is Life.

Also, those who did not participate, what do I say, Be ready for next time. This is the humane relationship.

For me, I don't teach and leave and it's finished. I have succeeded in some way to create this family environment in my class; and this is what I would like all of my team to do.

As I told you now, facial language, praising with words, praising in front of the assembly, clapping for them is important. Communication incorporates the verbal as well as non-verbal. When the parents came for the meeting, I said even the weak students need encouragement so I told the parents they are trying with their handwriting etc. I try to say something good about each child.

Aside from meetings with my staff, my advisor and my principal; I help with translation as I am the only bilingual teacher at my school.

We have a lot of English Medium Teachers (EMTs) at our school so I am very happy to help everyone. For example, one of the Maths teachers, saw me passing her classroom. She said, "Mariam come, look this girl cannot understand me. I want her to sit in a different place."

This was on the spot. So what did I do?

I talked to the student quietly. The Maths teacher was already a bit nervous so I didn't want to aggravate matters by being nervous as well. I tried to calm the teacher down. I said, Wait, I'll solve this.

I said, Look dear, why don't you want to move from your place? She said, I like this place. I asked the teacher then, Why do you want her to move? She said, Because she looks at the door and she won't focus.

Then I said to the student, Look, the teacher wants you to benefit, she wants you to listen and to understand and sitting here is not a good place for you. Please move.

I did not move her right to the back as the teacher wanted. I told the maths teacher, Let's move her one place away from the door. The teacher was happy and so was the girl.

When there are behavioural issues with other teachers, I go to the class and assist with such issues. I solve a lot of problems.

Grade 6 at our school has some disadvantages concerning learning. Some students face learning difficulties and are unable to achieve the outcomes in different subjects, not only in English. So, I decided to make an intervention to improve the students' level and encourage them to be more motivated and believe in their abilities.

First, I met with all grade 6 teachers, the SEN teacher , our English advisor , the psychology lady and the social worker. We had a long meeting during which we discussed all the issues related to Grade 6 students.

The main problem was that the students need to work harder at home and practice every part of the lesson to learn the new key words.

After that, I did my best to arrange a big meeting with their parents. We had the meeting and everyone discussed the reasons behind the failure of some students.

Teachers had a great opportunity to talk to the mothers and suggested many ways in which the parents can support their kids.

I facilitate communication between the English Medium Teachers and the administration because sometimes teachers are lost and there is misunderstanding especially as English is their language and messages and memos are in Arabic. I translate.

They say, Come with us. The Science teacher takes me with her when she goes to the principal, to convey something or to explain something. They want to get the message clear.

Working towards School Improvement

Two years ago, we had the Irtiqaa inspection and our school received a C. This year we jumped to an A. That jump did not come easily. We worked very hard to take their recommendations and make them work.

I read a lot about strategies. I listened to people. I am the kind of person who wants to learn new things and see how to apply that and see how things can match with my job as a teacher and a coordinator.

I worked with the School Leadership Team (SLT) and the social workers on behaviour issues because that was one of our targets. We put marks for good behaviour, we put prizes for good behaviour, we assigned trips for good behaviour so the girls were encouraged to behave well. We made lectures. we brought people from the community to give lectures to students on good behaviour and where it can lead us to.

So I worked as an English coordinator within my team to improve the level of the students, to improve my teachers as well as with the SLT to improve behaviour within the school.

The crucial part was working within the department itself because you know they came for English, looking for the level of reading and student participation. Irtiqaa's recommendations were Enhancing Reading for English, Innovation for Science teachers, Student Behaviour and Organisation for the Administration, so everyone worked as a team.

We enhanced the 21st century skills. We worked a lot on critical thinking. At the beginning of the lesson, we wrote a question on the board, and this was a deep question which we used to enhance thinking. We used also used Blooms taxonomy and lots of strategies.

We worked on the Irtiqaa targets for two years and we harvested a great result. The girls improved their reading and presently, we are working on a writing project.

I do my best to check that my staff is on the right path, following the ADEC curriculum, and that they remain flexible to do any necessary changes which suit students, their levels, their background and the outside community.

I try to include everything that helps to make the educational process better and successful. I do walk throughs and I take notes. Then I meet with my teachers and give them my remarks in a smooth, relaxing atmosphere. I also listen to their suggestions.

We also visit other schools and exchange ideas. We made workshops in other schools. Our workshops were about innovative strategies and creative ideas within English lessons, and about mixing two subjects, English and Science, English and Mathematics, (cross curricular projects).

We also got lots of ideas from other teachers. We observed model lessons and every time we went, we focussed on one thing for example, differentiation or technology. We also attended Maths classes, Science classes and we saw how we could use different strategies to improve the English level.

Everything is inter-related. So, creative teaching strategies and exchanging ideas were the best part about these visits.

The Secret of Success – Working Whole Circle

We do our best as teachers, but sometimes you face challenges as a coordinator. For example, if a class fails an exam, the administration will automatically put the blame on the teacher and they will ask the coordinator to solve the problem.

As a coordinator, I don't put the blame on anyone. We all share the failure of a student. We need to go back to the causes and figure out why the student did not understand the lesson. I try to look at all sides.

Teachers must be motivated. We cannot have good students, successful students with lazy teachers. We cannot have good results with teachers who come to school with their problems from home on their shoulders.

No way! Everything must stop at the door of the school. We are human beings okay, we cannot deny that, but we are teachers and we are responsible for those kids! You have to work cooperatively. Don't say Aah! she's the boss. I'm not the boss. We have to share. *(refer to Figure 3.2 Mariam's Collage in the shape of a ladder)*

We work whole circle, big circle and this is the secret of success ... sharing. Sharing makes work organised, makes people enrich their background because when you share, you have new things. You give new things and you get new things. Give and take is sharing, and sharing is beautiful.

The teacher can face a problem, but she can overcome that. She has to get the help she needs from her family or from the staff, from colleagues, from the coordinator. I try to get deeper into my teachers' psychology.

If I see a teacher not looking fine, I ask what's going on. Most of them tell me, even if it is personal. We try to find solutions all the time. We are a team. We share everything and when we share, we can get good results.

I believe in God and how He makes me do my work in the right way, and in a successful way. When I help others, I feel happier. Don't make people feel that they are not capable of achieving success. Everyone in life can achieve success. Everyone in life can fulfil something, little or big.

4.3   Ahmed's Story: Leading through Opportunity

Within Ahmed's story, lies a very potent concept – that of looking at any situation as a learning opportunity. In this way, Ahmed is able to see the opportunity to lead as an opportunity to learn.

A well-behaved boy - Doing my best to please my family

I was born into a family of eleven members, and there was a kind of behavioural theme running across, that I am the most well-behaved member of the family, which had its repercussions on my personality as a young man and as a father too.

I spent my primary school years in the school closest to my neighbourhood. Then, in middle school, there was like a competition amongst me and some other students. I was doing my best to be either 2nd or 3rd in place. My friends and fellow students knew that I was somebody who was doing his best to please his family.

Lots of my friends liked me, not because I had money, not because I was very funny, but it was because I was well-behaved. I was also very diplomatic when it came to issues and conflicts.

I started learning English for the first time in Grade 10. I had no previous exposure to the language except when I saw my older brothers and sisters learning English, and I was very excited to reach Grade 10 and to start learning English myself.

Little by little, I was curious to look into their notebooks and see how they were cutting pictures and labelling them, and I got the feeling that English was a great language and I needed just to learn that language.

When I got to Grade 10, I just did the same thing that my older brothers and sisters did. I had to buy the most beautiful book for the English Language subject, and I had to look for bits of pictures just to label the pictures with every new word I was learning.

When I got to my Grade 12, which we call the Baccalaureate year, I had to be the best student in the English subject. I was doing every possible thing to be doing just fantastically.

When I got my Baccalaureate, I decided to specialise in the English Language. In that year, I was 2nd in place in my class, so it wasn't really difficult for me to choose the speciality I wanted at university.

I got the speciality I wanted at the closest university to my home town and the journey started.

The first year was a bit difficult for me. I came from a large family and money had to be distributed to almost everybody in the family.

I had to struggle with waiting for a grant from the government to buy the books that I was supposed to be reading and that was a challenge to me. It was difficult at first but then little by little things started to become easier.

When I graduated, it was very exciting for my family because they always looked at me as someone who was hardworking and well behaved, so it was like paying tribute to my father and my mother. I had always been a source of pride to them and now that little child who was always well behaved had come to a situation where he was going to get a job, and everybody was excited about it.

My Dream Job - On top of the world

I was sent to a school, in the far south of the country, 600 kilometres from my hometown in the capital city. It was the first time I had to leave my family; and all of a sudden, I had to travel 600 kilometres to a very far place, far from the hustle and bustle of the capital city.

Things were less exciting, and it wasn't easy at first. Little by little, I started thinking if I lose this chance, chances are I would never get it again.

At the time, there was a great shortage of English teachers, so teachers were placed in a school and they would be trained until they could be confirmed. There was a kind of pressure on people in my situation. You could be fired at any time if an inspector comes and thinks you not performing or if the level of English is not that good. This was the first time I experienced pressure outside the school environment and university.

It was like now it's serious. It's about your professional life. It's about you getting a job. It was very challenging because I had no previous training. I was so far away from my family. I was tempted to stop the whole thing and carry on my Master's degree.

Then, little by little, I realised that I'm not the only one in that situation. There were other teachers who were going through the same thing. So, that April I got my first formal observation and although he was a tough inspector, things were fine. He even praised my work to the principal. For me, this was like a confirmation that this job could be my dream job.

I had to wait for another formal observation for confirmation and I remember, I had to teach the song, Candle in the Wind, by Elton John. I had posters about Diana and her voluntary work, a videotape with her funeral and I had to grab a small TV and VCR, the old-fashioned tape recorder.

I was just going up and down, with the people in the school helping me to put the whole thing together. Then the inspector popped in and she said, "Wow! You are doing all you can in a very remote area. I would like to thank you for bringing all this stuff to your students just to make your lesson exciting!"

I thought, 'There you go! That's another challenge that I just passed over.'

Thereafter, I was able to move to a small little town closer to my hometown, and I was there for two years, before moving back to my hometown.

I never thought I would meet my wife in the same neighbourhood where I lived. I was also excited because I was confirmed teacher, I was working for the government and I had just met the girl of my dreams and that meant I could think of getting married.

That girl (who is my wife now) was studying Agricultural Engineering and she was doing way much better than me, and I must hasten to add, whatever her mindset, this was one of the milestones or stepping stones for me, just to make myself better and better, to improve myself, and to be as great as her.

We got married in 2008, and that first year, we were on top of the world. We were young, and we were doing well in our jobs, but for a married couple life sometimes gets challenging in terms of expenses and in terms of the challenges you have to meet on a day to day basis.

We then decided to work in the UAE and I got the job offer to work for Adec. I was placed at a Cycle 2 Boys' School. It was a case of either you hate it, or you will miss it if you go back home. So, I decided to stay and then little, by little, because I'm a very sociable person, I managed. I had Grade 12 A students. I taught them in Grade 9, 10, 11 and 12 so I had a whole journey with them and it's just wonderful to see things that you have taught that the students are now internalising and using. It was like now we were like okay I'm gonna teach you how to skim, I'm gonna teach you how to scan ... and why skimming, why scanning ... it just happens to be that when you explain the reason behind the strategy or behind something, people adopt it willingly.

I'm very, very ambitious and I am somebody who has a growth mindset. Even when I have challenges, I say to myself, if I don't learn in this place, I'm going to miss it. It is going to be like a chance I missed.

I always have to look at myself as somebody who is growing professionally, growing as a person, as a father, as a husband. So, I took this opportunity as a very good situation for me to learn.

From the Perspective of a Leader - A very huge World

At first, I was worried about the fact that I was not good at computers and Adec is very keen on using Information Technology. What if I don't meet the expectations?

It was always what if ... what if ... what if ... and then I started to have my observation classes from my Principal and my VP. Everyone that got to my class just thanked me for the lesson they observed.

Little by little, I started to have that comfort feeling that people like my work, that people appreciate what I do.

That started another spark in my life ... What if I become a leader in the school area?

I was lucky to have a principal like the principal I have now. He believed in me as a teacher. He decided that I would do the coordination job for the Department of English.

I didn't like the idea at first, but I said to myself, "Now that you wanted to make people know who you really are, then it's the moment you can prove yourself."

I had a very, very supportive advisor at the time, a wonderful soul who appreciated all my ideas even though I was not a native speaker of English. Back home, Arabic is our Mother tongue, French is a second language and English is a foreign language.

Being in an environment where you work with Native speakers of English, with all the expertise of Western pedagogy, you are kind of apprehensive at first. Then I just decided to use my skills.

I am a very, very patient person. I am somebody who is willing to learn until the last day of my life, so instead of just thinking of the native speakers of English as people whom I would compete with, I took them as people who would help me to succeed in this coordination job.

The fact remains I met great people in my school here, people from the States, people from the UK and people from Ireland, and they all liked the fact that I am so active, the fact that I am always willing to listen to them, and that I can pick up their ideas and move forward.

I was running the department and I had people around me. There were challenges, sometimes people wouldn't agree on things, but I was always thinking performance. How many goals can be achieved? I might not get the whole thing, but I might get 90% or an 80%.

I am a teacher that can make things move forward and then, little by little, my principal started to be more and more confident about what I am doing. When we had the Irtiqaa inspection, I was given the responsibility of being in charge of four standards, and the whole thing was six to seven standards.

Working within my Department

I was responsible for the teaching and assessment standards so basically my role was to monitor my team in terms of collecting pieces of evidence of a quality of teaching that would meet the satisfactory criteria.

When we had the Irtiqaa team in their last visit, they mentioned that the quality of teaching did not meet their expectations.

So, in the self-evaluation form, we mentioned that the target would be a satisfactory performance. Our role was to make sure that we track the SLT (School Leadership Team) lesson observations and just identify the areas where they have witnessed change in the instructional practices all across the school.

Again, we had to track teachers' lesson plans for evidence of differentiated lesson plans and also evidence for the implementation of the 21st Century skills. Apart from that, I had to collect pieces of evidence signalling different types of assessments ranging from baseline to quizzes to the projects that the students had to do. This was just to track students' performance in terms of the Continuous Assessment (CA).

We also had to track data coming from the end of year examination where we had to look at the data, analyse it and give our data and analysis to the SLT. Then, we had also to collect assessments and evidence from teachers. This was for students' tracking. We combined all this in folders.

Apart from that we had to meet with the SLT often just to check the progress of work.

In terms of my work with my department, I worked on the Reading fluency programme last year. We had to track students' fluency from Grade 6 to 12, in all three trimesters. This was in reaction to the Irtiqaa report that students in our school lack basic skills in reading and writing. So, as part of the Action Plan, Reading Fluency Improvement was one of the main goals.

We also had to work on the writing skills so we had to break down the skill into minor elements such as sentence building, paragraph building and essay writing.

So, in terms of the sentence building we had to figure out a way to help students write correct sentences, then we focussed on the' sandwich paragraph' where students had to write a topic sentence, details and a concluding paragraph. That was subject to the teachers' choice in terms of how they would like to deliver that, and on what days they would like to do it.

When the Irtiqaa team came, we had to meet with them as coordinators to explain our work in our department, the different beliefs we had about students' performance and how we are tackling the different challenges in our specific departments.

I was subject to lots of questions from the Irtiqaa team, ranging from curriculum, assessments, whether or not we are aware of our students' performance in terms of the external examinations like EMSA (External Measurement of Student Achievement). We were also asked about what our plans were to improve the students' performance.

Teaching ... More than planning a lesson

Whatever they asked for, I would just do it. I was doing it because I started to discover this whole world of teaching. Before this, I looked at it from the perspective of a teacher. Now I began looking at it from a broader perspective, from the perspective of a leader.

Teaching is not just about planning a lesson. It's broader than that. It's a very huge world. It's assessment. It's students. It's like a leadership and I was discovering new concepts.

Then I thought of a leadership position, not only as a coordinator, because as a coordinator, you go through a lot and a lot of challenges. A coordination job is not an official title. We not paid for it and sometimes teachers look at us more of colleagues and friends than people in charge of leading a department. It's a very, very huge issue.

If you don't use your personal skills and social skills, there are chances that you can't get the whole thing because you cannot force things to happen.

I started to focus on getting things done not because I have the authority to get them done but because I'm using my skills to do my best to make them feel comfortable, so I can get it the easiest way.

With the Irtiqaa inspection, it was I can have a greater role not only as a coordinator but somebody who is officially given a role. Then I decided, what if I applied for an Academic Quality Improvement Officer (AQIO) position or a Head of Faculty position ...

To get there, I needed to read more and more about leadership. When we had meetings with the AQIOs and the people from Adec, I started to figure out that those are meetings where I could have great opportunities to meet the finest minds of Al Ain Zone and I started to think these are the people I like to be with.

I engaged in those discussions and then little by little, I started having the feeling that people appreciated my interventions in meetings. These discussions as well as the recommendations we make as teachers were seen as valuable.

The fact of finding myself, a teacher whose English has never been his mother tongue, being able to discuss things with people, was something I was proud of.

Again, it was a reflection of the passion for the job and the language. It was seeing myself like that child that grows up into a young man and a teacher, who carries the same passion all his life.

If there's something that I'm proud of, it's the love I have in this building. Everybody likes me helping them and they have no issues at all just coming to me and asking for help. They would say to everybody, 'if you need something, just go, go to Ahmed, he would be of help to you.'

My Academic Vice Principal whom I take as a mentor now because he's been here for two years, pushes me to apply, apply, apply.

As a teacher, there is a tendency to be one dimensional. So, I started to read about how to lead in a place of constant change, how I can lead without having the official stature of a leader, which is not easy at all.

Being a coordinator is a very vulnerable position. You've got no authority at all just to make things happen but at the same time, you've got to succeed, you've got to prove yourself.

A Growth Mindset – Surrounded by Opportunities

Then, all of a sudden, I discovered the concept of a growth mindset. I had to see myself as making mistakes and learning from them, and always thinking that I have a dream; a goal to achieve. It's to prove myself even though the position is vulnerable. It's to prove myself even though I am not paid for it.

I would never like to think that because there's no money in it, I would just never do it. My work as a coordinator helped me to bring in new ideas to our department. It helped me to make my department more consistent.

It helped my department to be one of the best departments in my school. So, I just kept reading about the growth mindset and I figured out that the growth mindset is the best kind of mindset that would make me successful in this place.

I started to talk to my wife about it and it was a concept we continued to read about at home.

My wife is a very avid reader. She reads a lot and a lot, and she is a perfectionist. I needed to learn things from her. My wife … she's like WOW! She's a mother because now we have two kids. She does the housework. She meets her friends and she talks to them about the books she's reading.

She even worked with somebody on a guide for pesticides for the Ministry, travelling back and forth to Abu Dhabi, until she got the book done. If I am married to somebody like that, why on Earth would I think of not being a leader?

I am surrounded with opportunities. My principal and my AQIOs are very supportive. I've got the whole world on my side.

I began thinking of what would make me stay as coordinator and a good teacher in a very challenging environment. I started to think of all my skills. I can speak good English, but I can also lead. I can have good relationships and I can lead English native speakers with no issues at all.

I can be Arab, have that mentality but I can also be a western teacher, have that mentality. So, I can lead a department that has different nationalities.

Working with the whole world in one building, having the growth mindset helped me a lot. Learning from mistakes but also wanting to learn, to look at any situation as a learning opportunity; but not as a challenge that would prove me good or bad.

I wanted to read about self-enrichment, so this is how I stumbled upon Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence.* This was another great moment in my life.

Benefits of a Growth Mindset

Presently, I am not only coordinating the English Department. I am also part of the senior leadership team.

I'm designing the school improvement plan with my AVP. I am also responsible for the literacy programme for the English Department. I also help other coordinators to figure out how they can incorporate all their ideas within the school improvement plan or how they could translate the school improvement plan into actionable strategies back in their classrooms.

I think that I need to carry on in this job and I see myself as having all the chances that I could be a principal ten years from now.

I also made the decision that if I would teach my son to have a growth mindset, I would teach my son not to stop at the first mistake he made. I would tell him your brain needs time to learn.

So, I started to speak to a five-year-old boy about neurons and synapses. Then, little by little, my son would play with children and then get back to me and tell me that, this or other guy doesn't have a growth mindset, he just has a fixed mindset.

I am proud of being somebody who is investing time in the job he's doing for himself and for his family.

For the last three or four years, I had the best evaluation in my school, which allowed me to apply for the AQIO position. We applied but we did not get any answers. Many of my friends said they would never apply again.

Now that I have internalised the growth mindset, it was like okay this was an opportunity. I never got a reply, but I might have passed. I will apply again. Nothing would stop me from applying as long as it's a button to press. The more I apply, the more I learn about things not to do so I can just get it.

If I had not accepted the coordination post for no money at all, and learnt all these skills, read these books, had opportunities to meet people in the subject network meetings, meet the AVP

and the AQIOs; I would not have those good evaluations that allowed me to apply for these jobs. These are the benefits of the growth mindset. *(refer to Figure 3.6 Ahmed's Artefacts Books)*

Different Manifestations of Myself

If there's anything I owe to this place, it's the fact that I have to learn to work with a growth mindset, to approach all the challenges with confidence. In this way, I would see any opportunity or any meeting with people as an opportunity to learn; not as a mishap in my life, not an obstacle that would prevent me from getting a better position.

In terms of professional development with ADEC, each teacher has to identify goals for himself. I don't take it with that kind of formality. I don't wait up until we get that time to fill in the form. I have my own project for myself. I have my own professional development plan that is continuous, based on things that I myself need either in the classroom or in the leadership.

I had the opportunity to be part of the train the trainer programme. It was fantastic because this was an opportunity when I had to take the responsibility of delivering workshops to my colleagues. So, I have started another dimension as an employee with Adec, somebody who would bring support to people through professional development.

I know the more you acquaint great minds, the better person you are. In my reading, I stumbled upon a wonderful strategy which is thinking in metaphor. It's like how one idea can spring from another.

I see myself as a father who's got the potential to make his kids ready for a future he himself cannot predict. I see myself as an understanding husband. I see myself as a very supportive friend, somebody that people like to spend time with*. (refer to Figure 3.4 Ahmed's Collage in the shape of the word GROW)*

You can think of the personality as multi-dimensional but when you grow professionally, you just think of it as a manifestation of you in the right direction. You're the teacher, you're the good coordinator, you're the supportive colleague, you're the good husband and you're the good friend is just YOU being unfolded over and over and over again. I would never call them roles. I would just call them a different manifestation of yourself and that's it.

4.4 Zainab's Story: Leading through Challenge

Zainab's enactment of teacher leadership is underpinned by her ability to overcome challenges. Her story displays her ability to rise above the many challenges she encounters along her journey.

Becoming a Teacher – In the face of Challenge

I was born in a country where Arabic is the native language, but French is the dominant language of education and administrative processes. French is actually used by intellectuals, scientists and the business community so it is regarded as an important social marker. So, it was very important for students at the time to use it fluently, both in speaking and writing.

At that time, English was not really a powerful language in our society so my love for the English language arose in an environment where all the circumstances were against its birth.

Although my knowledge of French helped me to understand English, it was difficult for me to speak English accurately using the correct accent because my exposure to English was not enough. So, I thought about how I could help myself learn a language where I wasn't exposed to the language in my community. At the time, social media and internet did not exist in our community, or maybe we didn't hear about it as children. So, I thought about working in English restaurants and cafes, just to listen to the English speakers using the language.

I was astonished at the way they twist their tongue, uttering these English words in a completely different manner from French and Arabic being spoken. So, the language itself was like a strange language for me.

I lived in a tourist town. It's coastal so many tourists come to visit our country and my town, especially, so I looked for tourists everywhere … in buses, in trains and on the beach. I tried to communicate with them just to know the language in context.

When you use the language with native speakers, it's something different. So, I can say I relied totally on myself to learn English and it was in a real context of face to face communication.

Language is not something empty. You have language and culture, so you are learning about other cultures, at the same time. *(refer to Figure 3.7 Zainab's Artefacts)*

When I became a teacher in 2001, I faced a number of difficult experiences. I was a bit shy and for a teacher to be shy, it's a big problem. So, I needed to build a strong and daring personality at the time in order to manage my class and my students.

This should be done quickly, because if students feel that their teacher is weak at any point, his future can be destroyed, and both of them can happen in one single day. This is why teachers should build a strong personality and a good reputation at the beginning of their careers, as this facilitates everything in the coming years. Once you have a good image, students know that this teacher has a strong personality, so they will respect the teacher even before he starts teaching them.

I spent five years teaching in my country and because the salary was low, I decided to travel and work in the UAE. I heard that the Gulf countries are rich, so I thought the salary will be better. It was higher than the salary I got in my country and that was the beginning of a new phase in my life.

I had to deal with a completely different environment. On the one hand, the Arabic dialect is totally different from my own. On the other hand, the level of English was not high.

My first years in UAE were challenging because I had to prove myself in a totally new context. This was a painful experience in the beginning but Alhamdillilah, everything improved.

My principal was really satisfied with my performance and she appreciated everything I did, so she appointed me as subject coordinator for the first time in my life.

The role of a subject coordinator was not really clear at the time. I was appointed in one day and I didn't have any training. I did not have the exact role clear in my mind. I think she also appointed me because I was bilingual.

The principals in UAE mostly use the Arabic language or their dialect as the main medium of communication. They don't care if the English-speaking people know only English. It's not very important to them. As a result, they need a translator. At the time, the role of coordinator and translator overlapped in my mind. I thought a coordinator was only a translator.

To understand the Emirati accent, I needed first to understand the dialect which differed from standard Arabic. Then I needed to translate this to the English- speaking people at school.

It was a really hard job and all this process happens in your mind. No-one knows about it. The English native speakers don't know about that and the principal only cares about if the information is communicated or not.

So, the main role of the coordinator at the time was only cascading information between the principal and the native speakers. The information could be related to teaching and learning, or it could be related to administrative operations, so it was very important for a coordinator to be bilingual to perform all these tasks which was not easy at all.

From Understanding to Leadership – Life as an English Coordinator

The teachers themselves came from different backgrounds and multiple English dialects so leading this team was not easy at all. All of a sudden, I had to understand all these dialects. Nobody taught me about these different dialects. At school, we learnt the standard English, so I found myself in a completely new situation which I had to face at that moment. I didn't have time to think about it or learn about it.

Leadership is something else. You have to pass from understanding to leadership. You have to

understand all these dialects and all these people from different backgrounds and you have to lead at the same time.

You have to remember that I was the only English non – native speaker, leading a group of native speakers and that was really painful. That was so painful because deep inside myself, I felt that my position was weak. Still, I had to challenge myself. I had to prove the opposite to the people who were working with me. Sometimes, I felt they were talking about that.

I'm good at English but sometimes we mix some expressions, or some words are missing, or some difficult parts that people use in their daily life and I didn't learn about. Often times I felt my position was weak, but I didn't give up. I tried to challenge myself. I tried to collect information

about the coordinator job and I attended trainings. I totally relied on myself. I built myself. Nobody helped me.

Everything was happening in my mind, and in my heart too. I didn't tell anyone because you couldn't tell anyone. I couldn't speak to these native speakers and tell them I am weak in that point because they could reply, "If you're weak, why are you leading us?"

So, one of the most important characteristics of leaders is that they should be strong. Whatever happens, they should stay strong. The other characteristic is self-confidence otherwise you will fail. I started doing meetings with the team once a week. It was basically cascading information to them from the principal or from the advisor, or between parents and the teachers themselves. At that time, I didn't even have an idea about what an agenda is.

As a subject coordinator, we don't learn about leadership. Leadership is something we acquire throughout our life. We start building the characteristics, the characteristics in us. No one taught us the principles of leadership.

So, I was building myself bit by bit. I started doing meetings and later on I started sending agendas before meetings. Bit by bit, step by step, my understanding of the role of coordinator improved.

I am grateful to my English Advisor because she really helped me have more self-confidence, and she supported me with the material I needed. She never thought twice about helping me and always gave me emotional support. This is what matters because I think you can change the world if you have emotional support.

I have a teaching load of almost 15 hours. We do the regular schedule, but we also have to perform our role of coordinator. This is basically supervising teachers, doing observations, organising peer observations and then taking notes about the feedback.

Feedback is very important in sharing best practices. If you visit a teacher and you like her strategy of teaching, this would help you in improving your own teaching, so sharing best practices was the real target from peer observations.

I also have to sit with the principal to discuss reports based on these observations. Sometimes the principal does not have the time to observe all these teachers on a daily basis, so the coordinator should assume this responsibility.

The first piece of advice I would give newly appointed teachers is to win teachers hearts. I think this is the clue to a successful coordinator. If a team or group of people really love you, they would accept anything from you.

I'm always speaking about emotions because I think emotions play an important role in our lives. I don't agree with people who say work is work and emotions are for personal life. I think emotions go with you wherever you go. Even though you may say, I'm in a professional context, you can't detach yourself from your heart. Your heart is still there.

The clue to success in the job of a coordinator is ***Love your Team*** and let this team also love you. Give them the opportunity to love you, because if they love you, they won't look for trivial problems or small things that you miss in a presentation or workshop, or in conveying information between you and the principal, or between you and parents. They won't look at these small things. They will consider you as a person, as a person who gives.

My mother always says you can't succeed in your professional life if you can't stop being emotional. But I think the opposite. Emotions are very strong. They can push you. It's through emotions we succeed. It's through emotions we challenge ourselves. The mind is a dry place otherwise.

A subject coordinator has to perform all the tasks given to him without missing any of them. If you missed any of the tasks, people would start saying this coordinator needs to be changed. Just because he didn't do this or that, maybe he didn't do meetings on time or maybe the last workshop was not successful as expected. Maybe you were observed by your team once or twice and they didn't like your performance as a teacher. All these factors affect your image as a coordinator, so you have to be consistent in your performance.

People won't talk directly to you and say you missed it or please improve it next time. They would just take your job, especially if there are people in your team who think that they are better than

you. If these people think that they are more knowledgeable, more competent, or have better leadership skills than you do, this gives them the confidence to take your job.

I was on maternity leave once, and if a person goes on leave in our school, she should appoint someone to do the tasks of the coordinator. This teacher will perform that role while the coordinator is away on two months maternity leave.

I appointed one of my colleagues but by chance this colleague actually wanted the job as coordinator. So, in my absence she tried to perform her job on a high level.

She gave the team new strategies of teaching. She actually did things that I missed. I must admit in honesty that I am human, and I sometimes miss things. I was really impressed by the way she worked. I thanked her, and I was grateful to her for performing the job well, but when I returned from my leave, I found it so hard to start over again.

My team thought I'm not competent to take the job again and they thought my colleague should continue as coordinator, not me.

The first thing I did at the time was I cried for almost two hours. As mentioned before, I was the only non – native speaker in this team, so my position was weak as a teacher, let alone as a coordinator.

Then an amazing and wonderful thing happened. One of my team members said, "Listen, I will help you!"

She gave me templates and everything I needed. She not only gave me material support but emotional support as well. From that moment on, I began to perform my role as coordinator in a more consistent and powerful way.

I began to feel that I deserve to be a coordinator because I had faced all these challenges, with determination and perseverance. I succeeded with the help and support of a team member.

My role in developing others – Working progressively

Concerning my professional development and my role in developing others, I have a professional development plan in which I build my goals for the year. When we observe teachers, or when the

principal observes me, she gives us feedback based on our performance. We take that feedback into consideration and build our goals accordingly.

If the principal noticed that we didn't differentiate, then differentiation should be one of our goals. In our professional development plan, we can talk about enriching the classroom environment and other goals related to teaching and learning.

As members of the leadership team at school, we collect these PDPs and try to see what is a common theme, and what our teachers need to focus on. We then group our goals for next year in the school improvement plan which is called the SIP. The SIP contains our main goals for the year which is focussed on improving the quality of learning and teaching.

As a coordinator and member of the leadership team, I played an important role in carrying out the goals of our school improvement plan.

We have a part in the SIP called the SIP review so after we carry out all these goals, we check if these goals were performed the way we expected them to be done. What was missing? What did we lack? How can we improve ourselves at our school?

I think I played an important role in developing teachers in a way that I gave them more self-confidence in teaching. This happened with the help of my advisor who supported me in this role.

We had a teacher who needed a lot of support. She needed support in terms of teaching strategies and classroom interaction. I had to deal with all these issues at once. I agreed with my advisor to go and observe this teacher and give her continuous feedback.

This was difficult because this teacher herself had had difficult experiences in the past and this had damaged her self-confidence. We worked progressively. We gave the teacher the opportunity to change step by step. We observed the teacher and gave her feedback.

The teacher took that feedback into consideration and tried to improve, and in the end the principal and the leadership team realised that a big change happened in her personality. This is how together with my advisor, I contributed to a big change in the personality of a teacher in my school.

I think professional development goes along with personal development. If you are growing as a person, you are growing as a leader. If you are growing as a teacher, you're growing as a leader. If you are growing as a leader, you growing as a person, so this growth cycle goes together.

I started my job in 2001 so now it's been 17 years growth. I change every single minute without even noticing that.

We change because we face problems and after we face problems, we are another person. We are different even in nature because nothing makes stronger than a great pain.

My main support comes from my principal. When the principal chooses a coordinator, she has certain criteria in her mind. I don't know the criteria, but I trust her choice. If she has chosen me as a coordinator, I wouldn't break that trust. I would give her a good image of a good coordinator.

She can see things we can't see, from her place in the school, from her place in power. She can choose certain characteristics that go with her own nature or with her personality.

Our principal is easy going and she doesn't want her teachers to be stressed. She's the kind of principal who doesn't care about paperwork and I am proud about this because I think the job of a teacher shouldn't be paperwork. It should be her role in class, her impact on students, the information she carries to students.

Up to this point I have been successful as a coordinator and thanks to my parents, my advisor and everyone who supported me in this role. *(refer to Figure 3.3 Zainab's Collage in the shape of a butterfly)*

My Philosophy of Teaching – Inspiring my students

My philosophy of teaching is represented by a butterfly. Students are like flowers and the teacher is the butterfly that moves between these flowers. This butterfly with the flow of the wings, inspires the whole class. The teacher motivates the whole class, moving between students and checking on them, listening to their ideas, and giving positive feedback. At the end, students should have multiple learning experiences.

If students don't seem to be happy with their experience of learning, the teacher should revise her teaching, and should look for strategies, or methods on how to make these students engage in learning. The teaching environment should really encourage a student to learn, and students should be happy with their learning.

At the end, when a child tells a story, the whole world should listen because children are own capital of investment in this world.

4.5   Conclusion

The focus of this chapter was the storied narratives of three English subject coordinators; Mariam, Ahmed and Zainab. The main source of data came from narrative interviews and was supplemented by data collected from collage inquiry and artefacts inquiry. The next chapter will concentrate on the second level of analysis namely the analysis of the narratives.

CHAPTER FIVE

SANDS THROUGH THE HOURGLASS: ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVES

5.1 Introduction

The previous Chapter 4 focussed on my first level of analysis namely the narrative analysis. In the chapter I presented the stories of three teacher leaders; Mariam, Ahmed and Zainab. The stories were co-constructed by me and the participants.

The primary purpose of this Chapter is to present the analysis of the narratives (deconstruction of the narratives) of my participants in order to respond to the three critical questions generated in Chapter 1. To remind the reader, the three research questions of my study are:

- *How do the English subject coordinators enact leadership on a day-to-day basis?*

- *Why do the English subject coordinators enact leadership the way they do?*

- *What challenges do the English subject co-ordinators encounter in enacting leadership?*

I commence the chapter by responding to the first research question on how the English subject co-ordinators enact leadership on a day to day basis. Next, I look at why the English subject co-ordinators enact leadership the way they do. Finally, I present my analysis on the challenges that the English subject co-ordinators encounter in enacting leadership. I have called this chapter "Sands through the hourglass", a metaphorical expression, to convey the transitory nature of time. I draw on this metaphor to illustrate the enactment of leadership, on a day-to-day basis, by the English subject coordinators. The hour glass represents the repertoire of leadership practices of the English subject co-ordinators and each grain of sand the specific practice that they deploy on a day-to-day basis.

5.2 How do the English subject coordinators enact leadership on a day-to-day basis?

My analysis for this question is informed by the *Teachers as Leaders Framework* developed by Crowther et al (2009) (See chapter 2, page 22).

Crowther's framework is based on a perspective of schools as social systems with explicit roles and expectations, supported and managed by "individuals with personalities and needs dispositions" p.4. I read all three stories and selected evidence from each of the stories that spoke to each of the 6 aspects of Crowther's Framework.

5.2.1 Conveying convictions of a better world

I present my findings on this theme under two sub-themes derived from the framework namely, articulating a positive future for all students and contributing to an image of teaching as a profession that makes a difference.

5.2.1.1 Articulating a positive future for all students

Two of the three participants' stories reflect a sanguine view of their learner's potential and of their learner's future as citizens of the country and the world at large. Mariam recounted the following:

> *I make my students feel comfortable in the class, so no stress is put on them ... I look at every child in my class. Every child takes part. When every child takes part, this makes them comfortable, happy with the lesson.* (Chapter 4, page 51)

> *We need to have a smooth atmosphere in which we can perform and achieve the biggest goal which is student achievement.* (Chapter 4, page 56)

> *For me, I don't teach and leave and it's finished. I have succeeded in some way to create this family environment in my class; and this is what I want all of my team to do.* (Chapter 4, page 56)

> *I try to say something good about every child.* (Chapter 4, page 56)

> *Everyone in life can achieve success. Everyone in life can fulfil something, little or big.* (Chapter 4, page 60)

While Ahmed's story is silent on painting a positive future for all students, Zainab draws on the metaphor of a butterfly to express her views on creating a positive future for students.

Zainab explained:

> *My philosophy of teaching is represented by a butterfly. Students are like flowers*
> *and the teacher is the butterfly that moves between these flowers. This butterfly*
> *with the flow of the wings, inspires the whole class. (Chapter 4, page 80)*

Mariam and Zainab are motivators of their students. They create a classroom ethos wherein their students feel valued and respected. They are very invitational and receptive to their student's views.

The influence of teachers upon the lives of their students has been documented in research across the decades; and as Wrigley (2003) points out, inspirational teachers aspire to motivate their students into never losing hope. They are more likely to demonstrate a positive outlook, thereby articulating a hope of a better world, as in the case of Zainab and Mariam. This is aptly summarised in the words of Zainab when she says:

> *The teacher motivates the whole class, moving between students and checking*
> *on them, listening to their ideas, and giving positive feedback. At the end, students*
> *should have multiple learning experiences*. (Chapter 4, page 80)

Emerging from the evidence then is this idea that teachers have the power to shape the lives of their students, and within schools lies the dynamic potential for teachers to provide enormous support for students to embrace a vision of a more positive world (Crowther et al,2009).

5.2.1.2 Contributing to an image of teaching as a profession that makes a difference

All three participants are emphatic about the idea that teaching is a profession that makes a difference. Mariam alludes to the fact that her teaching has made a difference to her students and that they benefit from her teaching. Mariam is passionate about teaching and is articulate about the way in which she teaches. She has a definite idea about how students learn and how she can add to their learning experiences. This is what Mariam has to say about her teaching and its impact on her students.

The way I teach, the way my students benefit from me, this made the difference. (Chapter 4, page 52)

I feel that every time I leave a class, I achieve something, even if it is 20% of my goals. (Chapter 4, page 51)

Pedagogy means that when you are a teacher, you can sense every student. (Chapter 4, page 52)

When you come with a song, it adds to the learning experience. (Chapter 4, page 53)

Then I said to the student, look, the teacher wants you to benefit. (Chapter 4, page 57)

Ahmed calls teaching **his dream job** and describes himself as a teacher who can move things forward. He cites various examples where he is able to make a difference to both his students and his colleagues:

I was just going up and down, with the people in the school   helping me to put the whole thing together. Then the inspector popped in and she said, "Wow! You are doing all you can in a very remote area. I would like to thank you for bringing all this stuff to your students just to make your lesson exciting!" (Chapter 4, page 63)

Again, it was a reflection of the passion for the job and the language. It was seeing myself like that child that grows up into a young man and a teacher, who carries the same passion all his life. If there's something that I'm proud of, it's the love I have in this building. Everybody likes me helping them and they have no issues at all just coming to me and asking for help. They would say to everybody, 'if you need something, just go, go to Ahmed, he would be of help to you.' (Chapter 4, page 68)

Zainab also recalls a time when she supported a colleague and made a difference.

We had a teacher who needed a lot of support. She needed support in terms of teaching strategies and classroom interaction. I had to deal with all these issues at once. I agreed with my advisor to go and observe this teacher and give her continuous feedback. (Chapter 4, page 78)

*This was difficult because this teacher herself had had difficult experiences in the past and this had damaged her self-confidence. We worked progressively. We gave the teacher the opportunity to change step by step. We observed the teacher and gave her feedback. (*Chapter 4, page 79)

As per Crowther's theory, there is the idea that there is a moral purpose that underlies teacher leadership. The evidence of all three participants appears to be imbued with this moral purpose, the idea that teaching is a profession that can contribute to a better humanity; one in which teacher leaders help to make a difference to the lives of others.

Katyal and Evers' (2002) Hong Kong research surmised that teacher leaders have the ability to influence student engagement beyond the boundaries of the classroom. In order for this to happen, teachers need to possess the sensitivity and compassion to support their students through challenging times. Zainab, Ahmed and Mariam are convinced that their support can and will make a difference to their students' lives as well as the lives of their colleagues'.

Beyond all else, teaching is, as Wrigley (2003) points out, "a profession of hope" and teachers are compelled by their innermost convictions to help their students envision the best possible world (p.1).

5.2.2 Facilitate communities of learning

I present my findings on this theme under three sub-themes derived from the framework namely, encouraging a shared, schoolwide approach to core pedagogical processes, approaching professional learning as consciousness-raising about complex issues and synthesizing new ideas out of colleagues' professional discourse and reflective activities.

5.2.2.1 Encouraging a shared, schoolwide approach to core pedagogical processes

Mariam, Ahmed and Zainab are team orientated. Mariam is adamant that sharing is the secret of success.

> *The crucial part was working within the department itself ... so everyone worked as a team.* (Chapter 4, page 58)

> *We work whole circle, big circle and this is the secret of success ... sharing.* (Chapter 4, page 60)

Meanwhile Ahmed makes on an important point when he mentions that although people may not agree about things, the focus should be on performance.

> *I was running the department and I had people around me. There were challenges, sometimes people wouldn't agree on things, but I was always thinking performance. How many goals can be achieved? I might not get the whole thing, but I might get 90% or an 80%.* (Chapter 4, page 65)

Both Ahmed and Mariam mention the connection between working in a team and achieving goals/ success. Successful schools have often been linked to collective to collective purpose and shared goals (Newman, Secada & Wehlage,1995). A strong professional community appears to be built on this idea of collaboration. Mariam in particular attributes the success within her team to sharing. The teachers within her team collaborate and share ideas which has contributed to a well-defined learning community.

Zainab' experience is on a more personal level where a member of her team supports her and helps her to become a better team leader. She recalls the incident with great admiration for her colleague. She says:

> *Then an amazing and wonderful thing happened. One of my team members said, Listen, I will help you! She gave me templates and everything I needed. She not only gave me material support but emotional support as well. From that moment*

on, I began to perform my role as coordinator in a more consistent and powerful

way. (Chapter 4, Page 77)

All three participants subscribe to this idea of a shared understanding of fundamental pedagogical issues. The implications of such an approach in facilitating communities of learning within schools are significant. Moller and Pankake (2006) propose that most teachers who engage in leadership take on the role because they are motivated to help their colleagues. I am inclined to agree with this as in my experience with English subject coordinators over the past decade I have witnessed many incidents of teachers eager to assist their colleagues. Furthermore, schools are part of the knowledge industry and within such an industry, and I believe to encourage activities that stimulate a shared approach to understanding key pedagogical issues, would enhance both the creation and transmission of knowledge.

5.2.2.2 Approaching professional learning as consciousness-raising about complex issues

While Mariam appears silent about this issue, Ahmed and Zainab endorse this idea. Ahmed describes himself as an ambitious person with a growth mindset.

I'm very, very ambitious and I am somebody who has a growth mindset.

Even when I have challenges, I say to myself, if I don't learn in this place, I'm going to miss it. It is going to be like a chance I missed.

I always have to look at myself as somebody who is growing professionally, growing as a person, as a father, as a husband. So, I took this opportunity as a very good situation for me to learn. (Chapter 4, page 64)

As a teacher, there is a tendency to be one dimensional. So, I started to read about how to lead in a place of constant change, how I can lead without having the official stature of a leader, which is not easy at all. (Chapter 4, page 68)

Zainab talks about her professional development plan as a way of focussing on goals related to teaching and learning.

If the principal noticed that we didn't differentiate, then differentiation should be one of our goals. In our professional development plan, we can talk about enriching the classroom environment and other goals related to teaching and learning. (Chapter 4, page 78)

Ahmed and Zainab have a great desire to learn and with this comes a desire to understand complex issues regarding teaching and learning. Crowther et al's research (2009) confirm that many teacher leaders have the ability and the capacity to understand complex pedagogical issues. Case studies of teacher leaders conducted by Crowther et al (2009) suggest that professional learning is one of the ways to build school capacity as well as rejuvenate schools, as it allows teacher leaders to engage in discussions about complex issues as well as to express their individual convictions. If teacher leadership, and indeed school-based leadership, is to flourish then, teachers need to engage in professional learning "in order that the complex processes that enable school capacity building to transpire" become a theory in practice (p.57).

5.2.2.3 Synthesizing new ideas out of colleagues' professional discourse and reflective activities

Of all three participants, only Ahmed commented on this particular sub-theme. This is what he had to say.

So, in the self-evaluation form, we mentioned that the target would be a satisfactory performance. Our role was to make sure that we track the SLT (School Leadership Team) lesson observations and just identify the areas where they have witnessed change in the instructional practices all across the school. (Chapter 4, page 66)

Embedded in this theme is Crowther et al's (2009) idea that "schools can be communities of learning where significant knowledge is created to enhance students' lives" (p.13). Ahmed is committed to professional learning and professional growth. This is evident in his pursuit of a growth mindset and in his endeavour to create a professional learning community. Crowther et al (2009) research propose that in order for teacher leaders to synthesize meaning out of colleagues' ideas requires a sound pedagogical knowledge as well as the ability to listen and

provide feedback. The role of the English subject coordinator appears to be deeply woven into this fabric of listening to their colleagues and being able to provide feedback. In the case of Ahmed, he is trying to work together with the school team towards the development of the school improvement outcomes. In so doing, he plays an active role in helping his fellow team members succeed in their classroom efforts, in order that they can make an impact on student learning.

5.2.3 Strive for pedagogical excellence

I present my findings on this theme under three sub-themes derived from the framework namely, showing genuine interest in students' needs and well-being, continuously developing and refining personal teaching gifts and talents and seeking deep understanding of significant pedagogical practices.

5.2.3.1 Showing genuine interest in students' needs and well-being

In this first sub-theme, it appears to be Mariam who reveals her commitment and interest in the well-being of her students. Mariam comments on the importance of maintaining good communication with her students.

> *I try to keep the same good communication that I have with my team, with my students. Good communication means you don't stress your students.* (Chapter 4, page 55)

> *The psychology of students is very important.* (Chapter 4, page 56)

> *Don't embarrass students with activities they will not manage. You will demotivate them.* (Chapter 4, page 56)

> *When there are behavioural issues with other teachers, I go to their class and assist with such issues. I solve a lot of problems.* (Chapter 4, page 57)

> *We are teachers and we are responsible for those kids.* (Chapter 4, page 60)

Mariam is genuinely interested in the progress of her students. Research around this area tends to be contested; with early models of teacher leadership showing limited reference to the

process of teaching and learning. According to Odell (1997), research shows a link between pedagogical excellence and teacher leadership. The fact that Mariam realises that the psychology of her students, promotes learning, is paramount to good communication. Ultimately, good communication is an essential part of good teaching practice. Mariam is able to create a safe environment for her students, one in which they feel confident to speak about their ideas.

5.2.3.2 Continuously developing and refining personal teaching gifts and talents

Two out of three participants appear keen about developing their personal teaching talents. While Mariam highlights her experience in creating new projects, Ahmed talks about his ability to identify his own goals.

Mariam has this to say:

> *I read a lot about strategies. I listened to people. I am the kind of person who wants to learn new things and see how to apply that and see how things can match with my job as a teacher and a coordinator.* (Chapter 4, page 58)

> *So, the advisor said, "Look Mariam because you are motivated, I want you to create the book to teach Kindergarten students in June and we will see if we can implement it the coming school year."* (Chapter 4, page 53)

> *Then in my third year, my advisor said, "Mariam let's start a new project.*

> (Chapter 4, page 53)

Ahmed mentions the importance of learning from others.

> *I am a very, very patient person. I am somebody who is willing to learn until the last day of my life, so instead of just thinking of the native speakers of English as people whom I would compete with, I took them as people who would help me to succeed in this coordination job.* (Chapter 4, page 65)

> *In terms of professional development with Adec, each teacher has to identify goals for himself. I don't take it with that kind of formality. I don't wait up until we get that time to fill in the form. I have my own project for myself. I have my own*

professional development plan that is continuous, based on things that I myself

need either in the classroom or in the leadership. (Chapter 4, page 71)

Mariam and Ahmed are deeply committed to developing their inner potential and enhancing their personal teaching gifts and talents.

Both teacher leaders possess a strong sense of self-worth and are able to set their own goals in order to sustain pedagogical excellence. As compared to early models of teacher leadership, recent frameworks appear to support the view that in order for teacher leadership to flourish, teacher leaders need order to model pedagogical excellence (Crowther et al, 2009). In order for this to happen, it makes sense that teacher leaders need to constantly develop their personal teaching talents as in the case of Mariam and Ahmed. The refinement of personal pedagogy is an intricate part of teacher leadership as it helps to shape the work of teachers not only as leaders but as individual professionals (Crowther et al, 2009).

5.2.3.3 Seeking deep understanding of significant pedagogical practices

While Ahmed and Mariam discuss how they gained deeper understanding of teaching practice, Zainab is silent. Mariam reflects on how she conducted workshops and visited other schools in an attempt to improve pedagogical practice.

We enhanced the 21st century skills. We worked a lot on critical thinking. (Chapter 4, page 59)

We also visit other schools and exchange ideas. We made workshops in other schools. Our workshops were about innovative strategies and creative ideas within the English lessons, and mixing two subjects, English and Science, English and Mathematics, (cross curricular projects). (Chapter 4, page 59)

Ahmed talks about his pedagogical journey as a merging of that of a teacher and that of a leader, in which he discovers that teaching is about transforming all the great ideas into actions.

I wanted to read about self-enrichment, so this is how I stumbled upon Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence. (Chapter 4, page 69)

> *I also help other coordinators to figure out how they can incorporate all their ideas within the school improvement plan or how they could translate the school improvement plan into actionable strategies back in their classrooms.* (Chapter 4, page 70)

Research has established that excellent pedagogical practice impacts school success; and that teachers are a fundamental conduit in the success of the pedagogical process (Harris, 2005/ Mulford, 2007/ Crowther et al, 2009).

As Ahmed says:

> *Teaching is not just about planning a lesson. It's broader than that. It's a very huge world. It's assessment. Its students. It's like a leadership and I was discovering new concepts.* (Chapter 4, page 67)

The crucial factor is that teachers are perceiving themselves as leaders. Teaching becomes a form of leadership and within this leadership, comes a yearning to improve the progress of their students as well as the aspiration to enrich their own growth as teachers and teacher leaders. It is clear that Ahmed and Mariam demonstrate this same keen desire to become accomplished teachers and teacher leaders and to improve their understanding of pedagogical practice. For Mariam this means engaging with other teachers to gain a shared understanding of pedagogical practice. She says:

> *We also got lots of ideas from other teachers … we saw how we could use different strategies to improve the English level.* (Chapter 4, page 59)

Odell's (1997) research is affirmed by both Crowther et al (2009) research as well as my own study, when it suggests that in order to be an accomplished teacher leader one has to first be a proficient teacher. It is imperative therefore for teacher leaders to gain a deeper understanding of pedagogical practice.

5.2.4 Confront barriers in the school's culture and structures

I present my findings on this theme under three sub-themes derived from the framework namely, standing up for children, especially disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups, working with administrators to find solutions to issues of equity, fairness, and justice, and encouraging student "voice" in ways that are sensitive to students' developmental stages and circumstances.

5.2.4.1 Standing up for children, especially disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups

Mariam and Ahmed describe how they stood up for students who were disadvantaged, while Zainab is silent.

Mariam relates her experience with Grade 6 students and how working together with other members of the school team, she helped these students to overcome their learning difficulties.

> *Grade 6 at our school has some disadvantages concerning learning. Some students face learning difficulties and are unable to achieve the outcomes in different subjects, not only in English. So, I decided to make an intervention to improve the students' level and encourage them to be more motivated and believe in their abilities. First, I met with all grade 6 teachers, the SEN teacher, our English advisor, the psychology lady and the social worker. We had a long meeting during which we discussed all the issues related to Grade 6 students. The main problem was that the students need to work harder at home and practice every part of the lesson to learn the new key words. After that, I did my best to arrange a big meeting with their parents. We had the meeting and everyone discussed the reasons behind the failure of some students. Teachers had a great opportunity to talk to the mothers and suggested many ways in which the parents can support their kids.* (Chapter 4, page 57)

Ahmed describes his work on the reading programme which focussed on students who had reading problems.

In terms of my work with my department, I worked on the Reading fluency programme last year. We had to track students' fluency from Grade 6 to 12, in all three trimesters. This was in reaction to the Irtiqaa report that students in our school lack basic skills in reading and writing. So, as part of the Action Plan, Reading Fluency Improvement was one of the main goals. (Chapter 4, page 66)

Ahmed and Mariam show a keen interest in helping students, especially those with problems. Ahmed developed a programme to improve students' fluency in reading. In a similar vein, Mariam stood up for Grade 6 students who faced challenges in their learning.

In light of the above, Crowther et al (2009) point that teacher leaders "manifest conviction, courage and strategic skill that might not be expected of most teachers" but are a necessary component of teacher leadership, holds true (p.17). Both Ahmed and Mariam acknowledge the issues that form a barrier to learning and they confront these barriers in their desire to revitalise the learning process and to ensure that all students are engaged in the learning process.

5.2.4.2 Working with administrators to find solutions to issues of equity, fairness, and justice

None of the participants appear to have articulated a response to this sub theme.

5.2.4.3 Encouraging student "voice" in ways that are sensitive to students' developmental stages and circumstances

It is Ahmed who responds to this sub-theme, while Mariam and Zainab are silent. He talks about how he helped Grade 12 students to develop their voice in their reading.

I had Grade 12 A students. I taught them in Grade 9, 10, 11 and 12 so I had a whole journey with them and it's just wonderful to see things that you have taught that the students are now internalising and using. It was like now we were like okay I'm gonna teach you how to skim, I'm gonna teach you how to scan ... and why skimming, why scanning ... it just happens to be that when you explain the reason behind the strategy or behind something, people adopt it willingly. (Chapter 4, page 64)

Ahmed shows initiative in addressing gaps in student performance and this in turn, allows them to stand up for students who are at a disadvantage; as well as encourage student voice as they progress from Grade 6 to Grade 12, in a long-term process of student – teacher engagement. According to Hargreaves (2000), schools are emotional places and teaching is an "emotional" practice. (p.824). Embedded in this sub theme is the idea that teachers should understand the emotions of their students so as to encourage their ''voice'. This involves allowing students to take charge of their own learning, and in so doing, allowing them to embrace a wider spectrum of thoughts. In the current social and technological milieu, it is imperative for teacher leaders to allow students to harness their own 'voice' as knowledge appears to increase at the speed of light and becomes obsolete just as quickly. A deeper learning becomes essential in order that students can embrace a future in which they will probably hold multiple jobs (Berry 2016).

5.2.5 Translate ideas into sustainable systems of action

I present my findings on this theme under two sub-themes derived from the framework namely, working with the principal, administrators, and other teachers to manage projects that heighten alignment between the school's vision, values, pedagogical practices, and professional learning activities and building alliances and nurturing external networks of support. This theme focusses on the management abilities of teacher leaders.

5.2.5.1 Working with the principal, administrators, and other teachers to manage projects that heighten alignment between the school's vision, values, pedagogical practices, and professional learning activities

All three participants mention the importance of working with other members of staff in order to enhance the vision and mission of the school. Mariam talks about her experience, working with the school leadership team in trying to improve student behaviour. Ahmed mentions his idea of "working with whole world in one building" while Zainab describes how together with her advisor and her principal, she helped teachers on her team gain more self-confidence.

Mariam has this to say:

We worked on the Irtiqaa targets for two years and we harvested a great result ... Presently, we are working on a writing project. (Chapter 4, page 59)

So, I worked as an English coordinator within my team to improve the level of the students, to improve my teachers as well as with the School Leadership Team to improve behaviour within the school. (Chapter 4, page 58)

I worked with the School Leadership Team (SLT) and the social workers on behaviour issues because that was one of our targets. Together, we put marks for good behaviour, we put prizes for good behaviour, and we assigned trips for good behaviour so the girls were encouraged to behave well. We made lectures. (Chapter 4, page 58)

Ahmed reflects on the great people he met at school while Zainab talks about her experience in developing teachers on her team.

The fact remains I met great people in my school here, people from the States, people from the UK and people from Ireland, and they all liked the fact that I am so active, the fact that I am always willing to listen to them, and that I can pick up their ideas and move forward. (Chapter 4, page 65)

I had the opportunity to be part of the train the trainer programme. It was fantastic because this was an opportunity when I had to take the responsibility of delivering workshops to my colleagues. So, I have started another dimension as an employee with Adec, somebody who would bring support to people through professional development. (Chapter 4, page 71)

Zainab has this to say:

I think I played an important role in developing teachers in a way that I gave them more self-confidence in teaching. This happened with the help of my advisor who supported me in this role. (Chapter 4, page 78)

According to Durrant (2004) any form of school leadership cannot be separated from its organisational and management functions. Crowther et al (2009), also acknowledge that strategic planning is central to teacher leadership. There is sufficient evidence from Zainab, Ahmed and Mariam to show competence in managing projects that heighten alignment between schools' vison, values and pedagogical practice and professional learning activities. All three English subject coordinators demonstrate a sincere commitment to creating and sustaining relationships within their schools, and in working together with their respective principals and colleagues, they contribute towards a unified vision and mission.

5.2.5.2 Building alliances and nurturing external networks of support

None of the participants appear to have commented on this sub theme. Teacher leaders' jobs appear to be concentrated within the classroom and within their schools.

5.2.6 Nurture a culture of success

I present my findings on this theme under three sub-themes derived from the framework namely, acting on opportunities to emphasize accomplishments and high expectations, encouraging collective responsibility in addressing schoolwide challenges and encouraging self-respect and confidence in students' communities.

Embedded with this theme is the idea that teachers must build on achievements and act on opportunities to foster a culture of success (Crowther et al, 2009).

5.2.6.1 Acting on opportunities to emphasize accomplishments and high expectations

Ahmed is the only participant who is vocal about acting on opportunities. He talks about the fact that although the subject coordinator job is an informal position, he has managed to go beyond the challenges.

> *When we had meetings with the AQIOs and the people from Adec, I started to figure out that those are meetings where I could have great opportunities to meet the finest minds of Al Ain Zone and I started to think these are the people I like to be with.* (Chapter 4, page 68)

> *I am surrounded with opportunities. My principal and my AQIOs are very supportive. I've got the whole world on my side.* (Chapter 4, page 68)

I could sense the optimism within Ahmed as he spoke about how he has seized the opportunities to network with other people in order to foster his leadership skills. As per research (Seligman, 2006, Smith & Hoy, 2007), optimism is as important in leadership as motivation or skill.

Crowther et al, 2009 propose that optimism is a powerful aspect of leadership because it can be learned, and it can be extended. Perhaps the greatest thing about optimism is that it helps us to see the opportunity in every experience whether good or bad and as Ahmed says:

> *I would see any opportunity or any meeting with people as an opportunity to learn; not as a mishap in my life, not an obstacle that would prevent me from getting a better position* (Chapter 4, page 69).

Ahmed's comment is noteworthy for he sees every meeting as an opportunity, a stepping stone to success.

5.2.6.2 Encouraging collective responsibility in addressing schoolwide challenges

Mariam and Zainab discuss ways in which they solve problems at school and both mention the importance of teamwork. Ahmed is silent. Mariam says that as a coordinator she doesn't put the blame on anyone when there is a problem. She declares:

> *We all share the failure of a student* (Chapter 4, page 59).

Zainab reveals that the first piece of advice she would give newly appointed teachers is to win teachers hearts. She thinks this is the clue to a successful coordinator. Her comment is:

> *If a team or group of people really love you, they would accept anything from you.*
> (Chapter 4, page 76).

Inherent in both pieces of evidence is the idea of collective responsibility. Research confirms that collective responsibility lies at the core of any form of successful school leadership, and that collective responsibility involves being able to manage relationships as wells as sharing a genuine interest in the welfare of team members and students (Crowther et al, 2009).

5.2.6.3 Encouraging self-respect and confidence in students' communities

None of the participants appear to have commented on this sub theme.

5.3 Why do the English subject coordinators enact leadership the way they do?

I now look at why the English subject co-ordinators enact leadership the way they do. I present my findings for this question with a focus on my participants' personal and professional lives. Teachers day-to-day practice is linked to their lived personal and professional lives.

I analyse my findings from the premise that the personal and professional lives of teachers are inextricably linked and each one influences the other.

5.3.1 Personal lives

In terms of their personal lives, I present my findings under the following sub-themes: demonstrating an innate love for learning and a deep respect for knowledge, embracing a problem solving/ growth mindset and overcoming challenges, and striving for excellence and being the best at what they do.

5.3.1.1 Demonstrating an innate love for learning and a deep respect for knowledge

An innate love of learning is intrinsically motivated. As in the case of Zainab, Ahmed and Mariam, they display a genuine love for learning, which is beyond the surface. It penetrates the core of their being. They find meaning and purpose in learning (Briggs, 2017). As Briggs (2017), points out, "If the purpose of life is to learn (whether to become the best person you can be, become better at your job, or share your knowledge with others), then in fact every learning experience, good or bad, becomes a step in the right direction" (p.1).

Mariam believes that her father inspired her to develop a love of knowledge and education. She describes it as follows:

> *One specific and special thing I loved about my father is he liked education. He liked educated people. He gave me that feeling, and I am still living with that*

feeling of the love of learning and the love of knowledge and education. (Chapter 4, page 48)

Zainab describes her experience, learning English in an environment where there was not enough exposure to the language:

At that time, English was not really a powerful language in our society so my love for the English language arose in an environment where all the circumstances were against its birth. Although my knowledge of French helped me to understand English, it was difficult for me to speak English accurately using the correct accent because my exposure to English was not enough. So, I thought about how I could help myself learn a language where I wasn't exposed to the language in my community. (Chapter 4, page 73)

Ahmed recalls his excitement about learning a language to which he had no previous exposure:

I started learning English for the first time in Grade 10. I had no previous exposure to the language except when I saw my older brothers and sisters learning English, and I was very excited to reach Grade 10 and to start learning English myself. Little by little, I was curious to look into their notebooks and see how they were cutting pictures and labelling them, and I got the feeling that English was a great language and I needed just to learn that language. (Chapter 4, page 61)

When I got to Grade 10, I just did the same thing that my older brothers and sisters did. I had to buy the most beautiful book for the English Language subject, and I had to look for bits of pictures just to label the pictures with every new word I was learning. (Chapter 4, page 61)

Another characteristic as per Briggs (2017) is that individuals who display an authentic love of learning, view every challenge as an opportunity. We can see this in Zainab's struggle to learn English. Although she is in a situation where access to English is difficult, her love of learning allows her to find ways to learn English and to perfect it as best she can. We also witness this in Ahmed's attempt who does everything in his power to learn English, regardless of the challenges.

Research also shows that for teachers to instil a love of learning in their students, they must first cultivate a love of learning in themselves (Briggs, 2017). All three participants display a love of learning and this in turn impacts the lives of the students whom they teach. As Zainab says so succinctly:

> *The teaching environment should really encourage a student to learn, and students should be happy with their learning.* (Chapter 4, page 81)

5.3.1.2 Embracing a problem solving/ growth mindset and overcoming challenges

Carol Dweck's work, *Growth Mindset*, is where talents and abilities, can be developed via persistence and effort (Morehead, 2012). Ahmed is particularly inspired by Carol Dweck's book on the Growth Mindset. He goes as far as to select it as one of his artefacts, and this demonstrates the impact it has on his life. Insights from the book allow Ahmed to not only practice a growth mindset at work, but also at home. He uses this strategy not only in his teaching and his interaction with his team at school, but also with his son. For him, it is about having a mindset that is flexible. In this way, he can adapt to any circumstance and he can overcome all his challenges.

Ahmed talks about some of his challenges viz being a second language speaker of English and engaging with first language speakers, not being IT savvy at the beginning and running a department where sometimes people would not agree on things. He goes on to say:

> *Then, all of a sudden, I discovered the concept of a growth mindset. I had to see myself as making mistakes and learning from them, and always thinking that I have a dream; a goal to achieve.* (Chapter 4, page 69)

Ahmed is not the only one who displays the characteristics that underlie this theme. Mariam recalls her experience when she first came to the Emirates. She says:

> *Travelling to another country was a big test in my life because when you are on your own, you have two choices – either you save yourself or you fall into a big hole and you cannot get outside it.* (Chapter 4, page 51)

Zainab talks about some of the challenges in her life and how she overcame them. She says,

> "*We change because we face problems and after we face problems, we are another person*" (Chapter 4, page 80). *I began to feel that I deserve to be a coordinator because I had faced all these challenges, with determination and perseverance*" (Chapter 4, page 78)

As I explore the stories of all three participants, I am convinced that individuals who embrace a growth mindset are able to confront failure (Gerstein, 2014). As Zainab says so eloquently:

> "*Nothing makes us stronger than a great pain*" (Chapter 4, page 80).

Mariam also shows a sense of tenacity and fortitude as she describes how she copes with the challenges she encounters on her journey from her home country to a new life in the UAE. She says:

> *Those, four months I spent in UAE, by myself added to my life, added to my personality, helped me face problems by myself.* (Chapter 4, page 51)

All three subject coordinators are able to embrace a problem solving / growth mindset and overcome challenges and this informs their leadership practice in a very specific way as one can infer from the above evidence that all three participants are able to take risks and are determined to improve their performance.

5.3.1.3 Striving for excellence and being the best at what they do

There appears to be a pursuit of excellence, which pervades the stories of Mariam and Ahmed. According to Mintrom & Cheng (2014), excellence is a habit, which can have positive impact on an individual's practice as well improve their task performance. This is evident in the lives of my participants in the following ways:

Being the best at what she does is also evident in Mariam's life as a child. She describes it as follows*:*

> *I liked school and I was always first in my class, so that's why my father was proud. He was proud of all of us but especially of me, because of the constant praise from teachers.* (Chapter 4, page 48)

> *They said, 'She's a good student, a good girl. We expect a shining future from her.'"* (Chapter 4, page 49)

Ahmed too displays this pursuit of excellence in his endeavours which begins in his youth and persists throughout his life. He describes it like this:

> *I was born into a family of eleven members, and there was a kind of behavioural theme running across, that I am the most well-behaved member of the family, which had its repercussions on my personality as a young man and as a father too.* (Chapter 4, page 61)

> *When I got to my Grade 12, which we call the Baccalaureate year, I had to be the best student in the English subject. I was doing every possible thing to be doing just fantastically.* (Chapter 4, page 61)

Mintrom & Cheng (2014) describe the pursuit of excellence as "crucial to creativity, knowledge generation, innovation and the development of new products and services" (p.3). Based on this research, the pursuit of excellence may well be seen as having a deep and profound impact on schools as can be evidenced by the lives of these two teacher leaders. It is within their pursuit of excellence, that these two subject coordinators are able to play a significant role in their overall school improvement and contribute towards the maintenance of best teaching practice.

5.3.2 Professional lives

In terms of their professional lives , I present my findings under the following sub-headings: mentoring, motivating and supporting staff and students towards successful school development, demonstrating impeccable work ethic and showing accountability for their actions, and facilitating communication with or between the various stakeholders at school.

5.3.2.1 Mentoring, motivating and supporting staff and students towards successful school development

According to Hudson (2013), leadership whether distributed, transformational or transactional, is able to inspire teams to attain organisational goals and visions. Hudson's (2013) qualitative study shows how attentive listening, motivational and visionary practices, as well as acknowledgement of individual achievement can guide school leaders to inspire others towards attaining the goals and visions of an organisation. This is particularly evident in my own research as well, as I discovered that the English subject coordinators provide a strong support system for colleagues as well as for their students. Mariam describes how her team misses her when she is absent. She says:

> *I was absent once and my team really missed me. They called me and sent messages. It was just for a day but when I got back to school, they said, never be absent again! We missed you! Why did they do that? Nothing would push them to do all these emotional things. One reason is I am honest with them … I try to solve the problems with them.* (Chapter 4, page 54).

Mariam's admission of how her team missed her when she was absent lends itself to confirmation that she is a much-needed support system at her school. Mariam also mentions that:

> *Teachers must be motivated.* (Chapter 4, page 59)

Zainab talks about giving students positive feedback and this is an affirmation of students' potential which according to Hudson (2013), is essential to building student success.

She says:

> *The teacher motivates the whole class, moving between students and checking on them, listening to their ideas, and giving positive feedback.* (Chapter 4, page 80).

Zainab also talks about her part in supporting her team when she says:

> *I think I played an important role in developing teachers in a way that I gave them more self-confidence in teaching.* (Chapter 4, page 78)

Ahmed shows evidence of Crowther et al's (2009) admission about the ability of teacher leaders to see the bigger picture as he assists other coordinators to project ideas into the school improvement plan. He recalls the following:

> *I also help other coordinators to figure out how they can incorporate all their ideas within the school improvement plan or how they could translate the school improvement plan into actionable strategies back in their classrooms.* (Chapter 4, page 70)

There is without doubt a strong element of mentorship, motivation and support in the professional lives of the English subject coordinators.

My evidence affirms Crowther et al's 2009 research in that teacher leadership embraces "a capacity for visioning, and for big picture explanation and projectioning" as this essential in engaging their colleagues in successful school development (p.27). All three coordinators are supportive towards their colleagues and help to develop the potential of their team via their ability to mentor and motivate the members within their teams. In this way, members of their teams feel supported and able to perform better in their roles as teachers.

5.3.2.2 Demonstrating impeccable work ethic and showing accountability for their actions

Little (2003), who describes Teacher Leadership as evolving in three waves, characterises the third wave as an increase in responsibility and accountability. This research confirms that teacher leadership can serve to improve the school system as well as foster the engagement of its teachers. My evidence affirms this when Zainab says:

> *As a coordinator and member of the leadership team, I played an important role in carrying out the goals of our school improvement plan. We have a part in the SIP called the SIP review so after we carry out all these goals, we check if these goals were performed the way we expected them to be done. What was missing?*

What did we lack? How can we improve ourselves at our school?" (Chapter 4, page 78)

As members of the leadership team at school, we collect these PDPs and try to see what is a common theme, and what our teachers need to focus on. We then group our goals for next year in the school improvement plan which is called the SIP. The SIP contains our main goals for the year which is focussed on improving the quality of learning and teaching.(Chapter 4, page 78)

Further to this, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) research confirms that as teachers develop into leaders, they embrace a broader vision of the process of school improvement as a result of collaborative decision making. This is evidenced by Mariam's comment:

The crucial part was working within the department itself because you know they came for English, looking for the level of reading and student participation. Irtiqaa's recommendations were Enhancing Reading for English, Innovation for Science teachers, Student Behaviour and organisation for the Administration, so everyone worked as a team (Chapter 4, page 58)

We enhanced the 21st century skills. We worked a lot on critical thinking. At the beginning of the lesson, we wrote a question on the board, and this was a deep question which we used to enhance thinking. We used also used Blooms taxonomy and lots of strategies. We worked on the Irtiqaa targets for two years and we harvested a great result. (Chapter 4, page 58) *We all share the failure of a student.* (Chapter 4, page 59)

Ahmed also emphasizes his commitment to impeccable work ethic and accountability for his actions when he says:

I was running the department and I had people around me. There were challenges, sometimes people wouldn't agree on things, but I was always thinking performance. How many goals can be achieved? I might not get the whole thing, but I might get 90% or an 80%. (Chapter 4, page 65)

The subject coordinators spend considerable time in trying to uplift their departments and on the improvement of their students' performance. This emerges from their ability to demonstrate a strong work ethic and being accountable for their actions.

5.3.2.3 Facilitating communication with or between the various stakeholders at school

Communication is at the heart of leadership and it may well be considered one of its central dimensions. Researchers have noted that the ability to facilitate and sustain communication within an organisation is indicative of successful school leadership (Danielson, 2006). As per the OECD (2008), communication and collaboration, can allow schools to function in a more productive manner than isolated practices and programmes. In line with the above research, Mariam says:

> *I try to keep the same good communication that I have with my team, with my students.*

> (Chapter 4, page 55)

> *I facilitate communication between the English Medium Teachers and the administration because sometimes teachers are lost and there is a misunderstanding especially as English is their language and messages and memos are in Arabic.* (Chapter 4, page 57)

Zainab's evidence corroborates Mariam's evidence, as her role as coordinator initially was also about cascading information between the principal and the English native speakers. She describes it as:

> *The information could be related to teaching and learning, or it could be related to administrative operations .*(Chapter 4, page 74)

Ahmed talks about helping to design the school improvement plan and collaborating with other coordinators.

He says*:*

I also help other coordinators to figure out how they can incorporate all their ideas within the school improvement plan or how they could translate the school improvement plan into actionable strategies back in their classrooms. (Chapter 4, page 70)

Danielson (2006) corroborates this in her own research, as she proposes that the most successful schools are those schools where teachers, supported by the administration, contribute largely towards school improvement, including school policies, instructional improvement as well as communication. This entails a solid communication network that leads to the sharing of ideas, resources and skills.

As a result, this ability to facilitate communication ensures that all three subject coordinators are able to sustain a smooth flow of information within their departments as well as within their schools. They play a crucial role in ensuring that every member within their team is on track in terms of information relating to teaching learning and administrative requirements.

5.4 What challenges do the English subject co-ordinators encounter in enacting leadership?

I will now discuss the challenges that English subject coordinators encounter in their day to day leadership.

5.4.1. Negotiating the issue of language

Within the UAE context, and pertaining specifically to the English subject coordinators in my study, the issue of language arises as one of the challenges encountered. In their study, which investigated teachers' perceptions of teacher leadership within UAE schools, Al-Taneiji & Ibrahim (2017) note that within ADEC schools, teachers fall into three categories: Nationals, Arab expatriates and English native speakers. They noted that language barriers were a deterring factor in the assumption of leadership roles. All three of my participants speak Arabic, French and English. Within the English department, there are English native speakers. One of the roles of the English subject coordinators is to translate from Arabic (spoken predominantly by school principals) into English, so that their English-speaking colleagues can understand.

Zainab narrates her experience learning English for the very first time, in a country where Arabic was the native language, and French was the dominant language of education and administrative processes. She, very poignantly, describes her love for English:

> *as a love that arose in an environment where all circumstances were against its birth.* (Chapter 4, page 72)

She says*:*

> *I was astonished at the way they twist their tongue, uttering these English words in a completely different manner from French and Arabic being spoken. So, the language itself was like a strange language for me.* (Chapter 4, page 74)

Zainab goes on to speak about the challenges she experienced when she becomes an English subject coordinator in the UAE. She recalls the following:

> *It was a really hard job and all this process happens in your mind. No-one knows about it. The English native speakers don't know about that and the principal only cares about if the information is communicated or not. The information could be related to teaching and learning, or it could be related to administrative operations, so it was very important for a coordinator to be bilingual to perform all these tasks which was not easy at all. I'm good at English but sometimes we mix some expressions, or some words are missing, or some difficult parts that people use in their daily life and I didn't learn about. Often times I felt my position was weak, but I didn't give up. I tried to challenge myself. The teachers themselves came from different backgrounds and multiple English dialects so leading this team was not easy at all. All of a sudden, I had to understand all these dialects. Nobody taught me about these different dialects. At school, we learnt the standard English, so I found myself in a completely new situation which I had to face at that moment.* (Chapter 4, page 74)

Ahmed began learning English for the first time in Grade 10, with no previous exposure to the language apart from the fact that his brothers and sisters studied English and this created a

burning desire in the young Ahmed to learn the language himself. He describes the pressures of becoming an English teacher:

> *At the time, there was a great shortage of English teachers, so teachers were placed in a school and they would be trained until they could be confirmed. There was a kind of pressure on people in my situation. You could be fired at any time if an inspector comes and thinks you not performing or if the level of English is not that good. This was the first time I experienced pressure outside the school environment and university.* (Chapter 4, page 62)

He then goes on to describe his role as an English subject coordinator and the support he receives from his subject advisor:

> *I had a very, very supportive advisor at the time, a wonderful soul who appreciated all my ideas even though I was not a native speaker of English. Back home, Arabic is our Mother tongue, French is a second language and English is a foreign language.* (Chapter 4, page 65)

Mariam simply says that her favourite subject was English, which led to it being her first choice of subject at university. She discusses her role as an English subject coordinator in facilitating communication between the English Medium Teachers and the administration.

She says:

> *Sometimes teachers are lost and there is misunderstanding especially as English is their language and messages and memos are in Arabic. I translate.* (Chapter 4, page 57)

The evidence reveals that all three participants are passionate about the English language. There is little doubt then that all three English Subject coordinators have a flair for the English language. The challenge arises however, when the participants become subject coordinators of the English departments of their respective schools, and thereby assume a leadership role. It becomes very clear in Zainab's experience as well as Ahmed's how the dynamic changes when they have to lead a team of English native speakers.

Zainab says:

> *You have to remember that I was the only English non-native speaker, leading a*
> *group of native speakers and that was really painful.*(Chapter 4, page 74)

She goes onto explain that it was painful because she felt her position was weak. This idea is corroborated by Ahmed's evidence when he describes it as:

> *Being in an environment where you work with native speakers with all the*
> *expertise of Western pedagogy, you are kind of apprehensive at first*. (Chapter 4,
> page 65)

On the whole, the above evidence confirms that negotiating language is definitely one of the challenges experienced by the three English subject coordinators. As discussed by Al-Taneiji & Ibrahim (2017), this conspicuous language barrier that exists within Adec schools, lends itself to difficulties in teachers understanding each other, within their schools. Their study confirms that language barriers are indeed a deterring factor in the assumption of leadership roles as it affects oral and written communication. Within such a context, it is difficult for teachers to commit themselves to leadership roles.

5.4.2. Ambiguity & Vulnerability within the Role of English subject coordinators

The role of the English subject coordinator appears to be both ambiguous and vulnerable. It lends itself to multiple descriptions which may be due to the fact that it is an informal position. At the time of my research there was no formal job description for the English subject coordinator. In 2014, a weekly online poll of ASCD members, reflected the nature of the ambiguity surrounding the role of teacher leaders when they asked what members thought was the primary characteristic of a teacher leader (ASCD, 2014). Less than 2% saw teacher leadership as bearing a formal leadership role beyond the classroom. Around 8% felt that teacher leaders facilitate "meaningful conversations between teachers and administrators" while more than 24% viewed teacher leaders as improving colleagues' classroom practice (p.8). These results are thought provoking and bear significance to my study.

Mariam describes her perspective of her role as an English subject coordinator. She regards herself, first and foremost as teacher.

She says*:*

> *I teach and do coordination in parallel because I cannot be something else – only a teacher. So, coordination and being a coordinator is an extra job.*(Chapter 4, page 54)

She elaborates on the challenges of being a coordinator*:*

> *We do our best as teachers, but sometimes you face challenges as a coordinator. For example, if a class fails an exam, the administration will automatically put the blame on the teacher and they will ask the coordinator to solve the problem.*(Chapter 4, page 59)

Ahmed talks about the implications of an unofficial leadership position. He says:

> *Then I thought of a leadership position, not only as a coordinator, because as a coordinator, you go through a lot and a lot of challenges. A coordination job is not an official title. We not paid for it and sometimes teachers look at us more of colleagues and friends than people in charge of leading a department. It's a very, very huge issue.* (Chapter 4, page 67)

He emphasizes the vulnerability of the position.

For Zainab, the role of a subject coordinator was not really clear. According to her, she was appointed in one day and didn't have any training. As a result, she had no clarity of the exact role clear of English subject coordinator. She describes it as follows:

> *At the time, the role of coordinator and translator overlapped in my mind. I thought a coordinator was only a translator. So, the main role of the coordinator at the time was only cascading information between the principal and the native speakers … At that time, I didn't even have an idea about what an agenda is. As a*

subject coordinator, we don't learn about leadership. Leadership is something we

acquire throughout our life.

We start building the characteristics, the characteristics in us. No one taught us

the principles of leadership. (Chapter 4, page 74)

Zainab recalls an incident which serves to highlight the vulnerability of the role. She describes what happens when she goes on maternity leave and one of her colleagues does an impressive job in her absence. This incident brings out Zainab's own vulnerabilities concerning the coordinator job. She says*:*

I appointed one of my colleagues but by chance this colleague actually wanted the job as coordinator. So, in my absence she tried to perform her job on a high level. She gave the team new strategies of teaching. She actually did things that I missed. I must admit in honesty that I am human, and I sometimes miss things. I was really impressed by the way she worked. I thanked her, and I was grateful to her for performing the job well, but when I returned from my leave, I found it so hard to start over again. My team thought I'm not competent to take the job again and they thought my colleague should continue as coordinator, not me. The first thing I did at the time was I cried for almost two hours. As mentioned before, I was the only non – native speaker in this team, so my position was weak as a teacher, let alone as a coordinator.(Chapter 4, page 77)

Evidence as per the three participants shows that within the role of coordinator lies a grey area, in which the role is not clear. It appears to vacillate from teacher to coordinator to translator, depending on the situation. Ahmed brings in an added dimension when he mentions that teachers sometimes look at the coordinator as colleagues and friends rather than as leaders; while Zainab reminds us that her role of coordinator overlapped with that of a translator.

Added to the ambiguous nature of the role of coordinator is the notion that within the role lies a vulnerability. As Ahmed describes quite succinctly:

Being a coordinator is a very vulnerable position. You've got no authority at all just

to make things happen but at the same time, you've got to succeed, you've got to

prove yourself. (Chapter 4, page 68)

Mayrowetz (2008) studies revealed that role ambiguity arises as a result of abstruse definitions of distributed leadership and teacher leadership. Murillo (2013) affirms that role ambiguity occurs when specifications about the teacher leader's job are not clear.

5.4.3 Context Induction and socialisation

Another challenge faced by the three English subject coordinators is the issue of context induction and socialisation. All three coordinators are Arab expatriates and when they arrived in the United Arab Emirates, they were new to the social context. They had to adapt to their environment, each to his or her own specific context. According to doctoral research done by Thorne (2015), this idea of becoming interculturally competent is a developmental process, which is experienced by some individuals when working across international borders.

Mariam describes her desolation when she first she arrives in Abu Dhabi, as travelling to another country was a big test in her life. She says:

When we arrived at the airport in Abu Dhabi, they divided us. After three days in

a hotel, we were taken to Khorfakkan which is part of Sharjah. They said I would

work in a place called Kalba which is 5 km from Fujairah. Many of us wanted to

return home during that first week. I was unbearably homesick, but my father said,

Wait and see, finish your two years and come back.(Chapter 4, page 50)

Mariam also demonstrates her fortitude when she explains how she works through this big test in her life. She says:

Because when you are on your own, you have two choices – either you save

yourself or you fall into a big hole and you cannot get outside it. (Chapter 4, page
51)

Zainab articulates her feelings about how she has to deal with a completely different environment. She elaborates on how she deals with a completely different environment.

> *On the one hand, the Arabic dialect is totally different from my own. On the other hand, the level of English was not high. My first years in UAE were challenging because I had to prove myself in a totally new context.* (Chapter 4, page 73)

The above evidence reveals come of the angst suffered by the coordinators as they adapt to their new roles as both teachers and coordinators, in a new land. This is reflected in the statements of Zainab as she says:

> *Everything was happening in my mind, and in my heart too. I didn't tell anyone because you couldn't tell anyone. I couldn't speak to these native speakers and tell them I am weak in that point because they could reply, "If you're weak, why are you leading us?" (Chapter 4, page 75)*

Thorne, Sauro, & Smith (2015) endorses Kim's (2007) research as the latter describes how an individual's identity evolves as he or she becomes more secure within their own personality and thus develops the ability to view others as unique beings rather than as a cultural mass. This is applicable to all three coordinators as they move along their own personal and professional trajectories and they develop coping mechanisms to face the challenge of context induction and socialisation.

This is evident in comments by Zainab as she says:

> *This was a painful experience in the beginning but Alhamdillilah, everything improved."* (Chapter 4, page 73) ,

And by Ahmed when he says:

> *Being in an environment where you work with Native speakers of English, with all the expertise of Western pedagogy, you are kind of apprehensive at first. Then I just decided to use my skills.*
>
> (Chapter 4, page 65)

And by Mariam when she says:

> *So, those four months I spent in UAE, by myself added to my life, added to my*
> *personality, helped me face my problems by myself.* (Chapter 4, page 51)

Thorne (2015) suggests that within a multicultural country like the UAE, which is in the midst of such rapid and unprecedented change, there is a need for interculturally competent educational leaders who have the ability to foster positive organisational attitudes and cultures that can move in tandem with such rapid change. Snoek (2014) advises that in the same way that novice teachers need support when they begin teaching, teachers also need support when they become teacher leaders. This support may be provided by fellow teacher leaders, supervisors and school management.

5.4.4 Constraints of workload and time

The fourth and final challenge centres around the constraints of workload and time. This was brought up by one specific participant, Zainab, as she talks about her workload and the duties she has to perform, both as a teacher and as a coordinator. She says:

> *I have a teaching load of almost 15 hours. We do the regular schedule, but we also*
> *have to perform our role of coordinator. This is basically supervising teachers,*
> *doing observations, organising peer observations and then taking notes about the*
> *feedback.* (Chapter 4, page 75)

Snoek (2014) refers to teacher leaders as "boundary crossers" who "need to act as brokers", providing pedagogical support to their colleagues and on the other hand, supporting school management on strategic levels (p187). It is within this educational milieu we meet Zainab, who has to negotiate her life as an English subject coordinator, working against the constraints of workload and time. According to the Teacher Workload Survey (2016), an online survey that was disseminated across 900 schools in in England, teachers, middle & senior leaders were asked to state the extent to which teacher workload was considered a serious problem in their school. The findings are worth noting for the majority of teachers, a whopping 93% stated that it was a problem, and of this 52% stated that it was very serious.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter focussed on the analysis and interpretation of my narratives in response to the three research questions of my study. The chapter commenced with my response to the first research question on how the English subject co-ordinators enact leadership on a day to day basis. For this question, I read all three stories and selected evidence from each of the stories that spoke to each of the 6 aspects of Crowther's Framework (Crowther et al, 2009). I then looked at why the English subject co-ordinators enact leadership the way they do. For this question, my analysis focussed on my participants' personal and professional lives. My final question concentrated on the challenges that the English subject co-ordinators encounter in enacting leadership. Chapter Six provides a summary of all chapters. It will also provide my conclusions, reflections and recommendations.

CHAPTER SIX

STANDING ON THE SUMMIT OF A SAND DUNE: SUMMARY OF THE STUDY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focussed on the analysis of the storied narratives of my three participants in response to the three critical questions of my study. This chapter presents the summary of my study, its conclusions, my reflections and finally, my recommendations to those involved in the enactment of leadership, particularly, in the subject area English, within schools in Abu Dhabi. I use the phrase "Standing on the summit of a sand dune" to symbolise the end of my journey, in this the final chapter of my research study. Being on the summit of the sand dune allows me to encompass a wide perspective. I can see how far I have travelled and I am now able to make a judicious summary, draw the main conclusions of my study as well as offer the salient recommendations.

6.2 Summary of the Study

Chapter One - I presented the purpose of my study by illuminating its key focus and the underlying rationale. I instantiated the concept, Teacher Leadership, by discussing the vital role played by the English subject coordinators in Abu Dhabi Public Schools. I made particular reference to the informal nature of leadership underpinning the role of the English subject coordinator. I discussed the three key questions underpinning my study and illuminated the main concepts, Leadership, Distributed Leadership and Teacher Leadership.

Chapter Two – I discovered a vast array of literature, stemming from South Africa as well as across our international borders, in my attempt to gain further insight into my study. There is no shortage of research on Teacher Leadership as a phenomenon. However, research surrounding teacher leaders, with particular reference to English subject coordinators in Abu Dhabi, was limited. This provided an opportunity for me address a gap in research and at the same time, allowed me to explore the conditions of Teacher Leadership pertaining to the English subjective

coordinators in Abu Dhabi public schools. English subject coordinators of Abu Dhabi public schools hover between two roles – teacher and teacher leader. On the one hand they are responsible for teaching English and on the other hand, they are responsible for coordinating the English team. Without a formal portfolio, the English subject coordinator performs an array of tasks which include observation of lessons, holding regular meetings with their teams, translation of documents and memos from English to Arabic and vice versa as well as other administrative duties. The key debates that I presented surrounded the contested nature teacher leadership, its enactment, teacher leadership as empowerment, organisational conditions for teacher leadership, the benefits of teacher leadership and obstacles to teacher leadership. It was interesting to discover in terms of organisational conditions; teacher leaders are a very important link in facilitating school improvement as they are a conduit between principals and sustainable school programmes. Another thought-provoking debate surrounded the enactment of teacher leadership, with teachers having very few opportunities to lead beyond the classroom.

My theoretical framework encompassed two theories, Distributed Leadership and Teacher Leadership and these provided the theoretical lenses to my study. Specifically, Crowther's framework supported my attempt to understand and explore the role of English subject coordinators as teacher leaders in Abu Dhabi public schools.

Chapter Three – This chapter presented my research design and methodology. I undertook a qualitative study within the interpretive paradigm drawing on narrative inquiry. For someone like myself, with a passion for writing, I was excited to discover the many features of narrative inquiry and keen to employ this as my methodology. Narrative inquiry allowed me to undertake a very rich and detailed journey into the lived experiences of three English subject coordinators. I selected my participants using purposively and ensured strict adherence to ethical rules and considerations. My main goal was to give voice to the unheard stories of my participants. Narrative interviews and collage and artefact inquiry were my main forms of data collection. I analysed my data at two levels. Firstly, I engaged in narrative analysis which entailed the construction of stories from the data. Secondly, I engaged in analysis of narrative which comprised me deconstructing the stories in order to answer my research questions.

Chapter Four – My study was shaped by the narratives of my participants. These narratives were crafted from my narrative interviews, collage inquiry and artefact inquiry. The role of the English subject coordinator is not limited to school, it penetrates the core of their being and subsumes their personal and professional lives. The stories of my participants touched me deeply and forever changed my life.

Chapter Five – This chapter focussed on the analysis of the storied narratives of my participants. I presented my analysis in response to three critical questions.

- For research question 1, *How do the English subject coordinators enact leadership on a day-to-day basis?*, my key finding was that they enact leadership within specific roles and responsibilities.

- For research question 2, *Why do the English subject coordinators enact leadership the way they do?*, my key finding was that they have distinct personal and professional identities which influences the way they enact leadership.

- For research question 3, *What challenges do the English subject coordinators encounter in enacting leadership?,* my key finding was that regardless of the challenges my participants may face, underpinning the enactment of their leadership, is a very clear commitment to teaching and learning and my participants show an unwavering support towards their colleagues and their students.

6.3 Conclusions

My study was based on the lived experiences of English subject coordinators in Abu Dhabi public schools. This particular focus is relatively new as there are no studies I have come across within this particular domain. My study was based on three key questions, and my conclusions are drawn around each question.

6.3.1 How do the English subject coordinators enact leadership on a day - to- day basis?

In terms of my analysis of this question, using Crowther's framework, the following conclusions can be made:

6.3.1.1 Conveying Convictions of a Better World

I have discovered that my participants are convinced that their teaching impacts their students. They believe that teaching is a profession that can make a difference and they know that their support is valued.

6.3.1.2 Facilitate Communities of Learning

All three English subject coordinators believe in team spirit and are committed to shared goals and working within a team. There are some opportunities for participants to engage in professional discussions and for them to contemplate complex educational issues.

6.3.1.3 Strive for Pedagogical Excellence

Ahmed, Mariam and Zainab display a strong desire to improve pedagogical practice. They have a strong work ethic and make every attempt to improve their understanding of how students learn.

6.3.1.4 Confronting Barriers in the School's Culture and Structure's

My participants are committed to helping their students. They are able to deal most effectively with issues within the classroom and find creative solutions to resolving problems in their students' learning process.

6.3.1.5 Translate Ideas into Sustainable Systems of Action

The English subject coordinators are people orientated and demonstrate excellent organisational skills. They are involved in the school improvement plan and are committed to implementing systems to improve performance in teaching and learning.

6.3.1.6 Nurture a Culture of Success

The English subject coordinators are genuinely concerned about the welfare of the colleagues and students. However, their scope is limited when it comes to influencing student communities and developing student voice.

6.3.2 Why do the English subject coordinators enact leadership the way they do?

My conclusions are drawn from the idea that the personal and professional lives of my participants overlap and there is a constant interplay between them.

6.3.2.1 Personal Lives

I have concluded that my participants are inspired to learn, and that this emanates from family influence as well as from a deep intrinsic motivation. They also display a tenacity and a capacity to endure challenges. Mariam, Zainab and Ahmed leave their home countries and manage to carve their own niche in a foreign country. Furthermore, they are driven to be the best at what they do and strive for excellence. Within their interactions with their families, they strive to set an example to their spouses and their children, and they emulate excellence in the governance of their personal lives.

6.3.2.2 Professional Lives

The following conclusions have been reached from my study. The English subject coordinators are able to inspire both their colleagues and students. They possess an impeccable work ethic and are both responsible and accountable to the administration, the English department as well as their students. They are an integral link in the chain of communication within their respective schools and act as a conduit between the administration and their individual departments.

6.3.3 What challenges do the English subject coordinators encounter in enacting leadership?

I have concluded that there are four challenges. All three participants are bilingual and face the challenge of leading the English department which has both English 2nd language speakers as well as English native speakers. The English subject coordinator does not hold a formal portfolio and as a result, the role fluctuates from teacher to teacher leader. They also face the challenge of adjusting to their role of subject coordinator within a specific cultural context and have not had any preparation or induction for this role. They perform the role of English coordinator based on their assumptions of what an English coordinator should do and adapt to whatever context they find themselves. Further to this, my participants have to manage their time effectively as they

have to harness two profiles – that of a teacher as well as the role of subject coordinator – and within the status quo, they must maintain a full teaching load.

6.4 My Reflections of the study

It has been an intense journey fraught with emotion … ranging from excitement to anxiety to anguish to hope to perseverance and now as I approach the summit of my own sand dune, I feel a sense of immense gratitude. At the heart of my research, giving it life, are my three participants; Ahmed, Mariam and Zainab, without whose stories there would be no study. Somewhere in the middle of my study, I lost my beloved Mother. Yet tragic though my circumstances, I was inspired by the lived experiences of my three participants. Their pain became my pain. Their courage became my courage. Their hopes became my hope. Their triumphs became my triumph – for isn't this what all great life stories do – inspire us to go on.

My methods of inquiry; narrative interviews, collage inquiry and artefacts inquiry, inspired me as much as it did my participants. It was new to all of us and we embraced the idea enthusiastically. All three methods resulted in evoking deep emotions within my participants and myself. It was a cathartic process, allowing us to resurrect important aspects of our inner selves. Both researcher and participant were involved in an intense dialectical experience that forever changed their lives.

Above all else, I realised that the process of any research study is much like the process of giving birth. It occurs in stages, encompassing a range of emotions and activities, and it becomes a part of who you are, embedded within your psyche. At the initial stage, there was a sense of newness, excitement and expectation. Middle way, I became fully immersed in the rhythm of my research as my study began to take shape. The final stage was filled with a multitude of emotions – a mixture of anxiety, fear and excitement. What would this final product look like? I was also filled with a desire for my work to be perfect as ultimately, it would become a gift which I would share with the rest of the world.

6.5 Recommendations

- **Recommendation One**

  School principals need to be aware of the many advantages of Teacher Leadership and its positive effects on the future of students. It is recommended therefore that principals of Abu Dhabi public schools create the necessary professional milieu to allow teacher leadership to flourish in order that distributed leadership is further activated and its impact on teaching and learning, enhanced.

- **Recommendation Two**

  My study reveals that English subject coordinators are eager to be involved in pedagogical discussions. It is recommended that school principals and subject advisors further encourage activities within their schools that will stimulate a shared approach to understanding key pedagogical issues. There exists a huge potential for meaningful dialogue around salient issues surrounding teacher leadership, and this needs to be galvanised within Abu Dhabi public schools.

- **Recommendation Three**

  A significant portion of the English subject coordinators' lives is spent in motivating, mentoring and supporting staff towards successful school development. It is recommended that subject advisors incorporate the concepts 'mentoring and motivation' into professional development programmes that are developed specifically for English subject coordinators. This will help to further support coordinators in one of the key components of their role as a teacher leader.

- **Recommendation Four**

  My fourth recommendation comes from the premise that the role of English subject coordinators needs to be coagulated. It is recommended that the Ministry of Education develops an induction programme for subject coordinators that gives clarity to their roles and will allow them to be properly introduced into the process of their respective leadership profiles.

- **Recommendation Five**

  It is recommended that the school principals negotiate the issue concerning the workload of subjective coordinators and that time allocation be adjusted to accommodate duties linked to subject coordination. This will allow English subject coordinators to focus more clearly on issues surrounding teacher leadership and in the long term, this will have a positive impact on overall school improvement.

- **Recommendation Six**

  As per my research, the role performed by English subject coordinators encompasses an integral part of teacher leadership. Teacher leaders form a vital component within the school structure in Abu Dhabi. It is strongly recommended, therefore that the Ministry of Education performs further research within this realm in order that teaching, learning and leadership are further enhanced within Abu Dhabi public schools.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION FROM ADEC

UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL
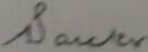
INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

31 October 2016

To Whom It May Concern

Dear Sir/Madam

Access to teaching and learning sites for data generation: Ms DS Pandaram – Registration Number: 912 425 901

Ms DS Pandaram is currently registered for a Master's Degree in Education with specialization in Education Leadership and Management at our university. Her research explores *Stories of teacher leadership: Lived experiences of English subject co-ordinators in public schools in Abu Dhabi.*

She has made tremendous progress with her research and is now ready to gather empirical evidence for her dissertation. However, in order to do this she needs access to two all-girls schools and one all-boys school in Al Ain. Hoping you would grant her access to these sites.

If you need any further information feel free to contact me on +2731 260 3461 or Naickeri1@ukzn.ac.za

Yours faithfully

Dr Inba Naicker

Educational Leadership and Management

School of Education

University of KwaZulu-Natal

APPENDIX B: ADEC LETTER GRANTING PERMISSION

مجلس أبوظبي للتعليم
Abu Dhabi Education Council
Education First التعليم أولاً

Date: 26TH November 2016	التاريخ: 27 نوفمبر 2016
Ref:	الرقم:

To: Public Schools Principals,	السادة/ مديري المدارس الحكومية
Subject: Letter of Permission	الموضوع: تسهيل مهمة باحثين
Dear Principals,	تحية طيبة وبعد،،،

The Abu Dhabi Education Council would like to express its gratitude for your generous efforts & sincere cooperation in serving our dear students.

يطيبُ لمجلس أبوظبي للتعليم أن يتوجه لكم بخالص الشكر والتقدير لجهودكم الكريمة والتعاون الصادق لخدمة أبنائنا الطلبة.

You are kindly requested to allow the researcher/ Desire Sangeetha Pandaram , to complete her research on:

ونود إعلامكم بموافقة مجلس أبو ظبي للتعليم على موضوع الدراسة التي ستجريها الباحثة/**ديسيري سانجيثا باندارام** ، بعنوان:

Stories of Teacher Leadership: Lived Experiences of English Subject Coordinators in public schools in Abu Dhabi

Stories of Teacher Leadership: Lived Experiences of English Subject Coordinators in public schools in Abu Dhabi

Please indicate your approval of this permission by facilitating her meetings with the sample groups at your respected schools.

لذا، يرجى التكرم بتسهيل مهمة الباحثة ومساعدتها على إجراء الدراسة المشار إليها.

For further information: please contact **Mr Helmy Seada** on 02/6150140

للاستفسار: يرجى الاتصال بالسيد/ **حلمي سعدة** على الهاتف 02/6150140

Thank you for your cooperation.

شاكرين لكم حسن تعاونكم

Sincerely yours,

وتفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام والتقدير،،،

محمد سالم محمد الطاهري
المدير التنفيذي لقطاع العمليات المدرسية

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Dear Participant

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

My name is Sangeetha Pandaram. I am a Masters of Education candidate studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

I am interested in learning about English Subject coordinators as teacher leaders. I am studying cases of English Subject Coordinators as teacher leaders in Abu Dhabi Public Schools. Your role as an English Subject Coordinator is one of my case studies. This research is valuable because it will provide information about the role of English Subject coordinators as teacher leaders. To gather the information, I am interested in asking you some questions, by interviewing you. The interview should be 60 minutes long and we can hold it at a place that you choose.

Please note that:

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your inputs will not be attributed to you in person, but reported only as a population member opinion.
- The interview may last for about 1 hour and may be split into two parts depending on your preference.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- Data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after 5 years.
- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- The research aims at creating greater awareness of the leadership role of English Subject coordinators.
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.
- If you are willing to be interviewed, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
Audio equipment		
Photographic equipment		
Video equipment		

I can be contacted at:
Email: san1965@eim.ae
Cell: +971508976558

My supervisor is Dr Inbanathan Naicker who is located at the School of Education, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. He can be contacted at:

Email: Naicker1@ukzn.co.za
Phone: +27312603461

You may also contact the Research Office through:
P. Mohun
HSSREC Research Office,
Tel: 031 260 4557 E-mail: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

_____

Ms DS Pandaram

DECLARATION

I………………………………………………………………… (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire. I give/ do not give (delete that which is not applicable) permission for the interview to be digitally recorded.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT   DATE

……………………………………   …………………………………

APPENDIX D: Turnitin Report

turnitin **Turnitin Originality Report**

<u>Ms</u> by Sangeetha Pandaram

From Dissertation (Master of Education)

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Lauren Stephenson, Robin Dada, Barbara Harold. "Challenging the traditional idea of leadership in UAE schools", On the Horizon, 2012

11 < 1% match (Internet from 23-May-2014)
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