

**“School-Community Partnerships: Bhutanese Principals’ Impact on  
Community Involvement in Schools”**

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## Abstract

Bhutan became the world's youngest democracy in 2008, transitioning from an absolute monarchy to a democratic constitutional monarchy system (NA, n.d.). A new democratic governance model accordingly emerged which included a changed school governance model in which school leaders were expected to practise 'shared leadership' to create a sound management system and to act as a bridge between the school, the community, the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the national government. In the shared leadership approach the community is also expected to take responsibility for educating their children through involvement in the development and execution of school plans and programmes (EMD, 2017). With the introduction in 2009 by the MoE in Bhutan of the initiative 'Educating for Gross National Happiness (EGNH)', deeper collaboration and connectivity among schools and communities is required in order to achieve the national goal of producing GNH graduates (MoE, 2013), and thereby producing responsible Bhutanese citizens. The concept of school community partnership has been discussed in policy documents such as the *Bhutan Education Blue-Print 2014-2024*, however, insufficient attention appears to have been given to how school principals and community members understand and implement this concept. No prior study has been carried out on School Community Partnerships (SCPs) in Bhutan, consequently very little in relation to how the concept is understood, or how perceptions may impact on establishing and supporting the relationship.

The current study has addressed this research gap by investigating how Bhutanese school principals' leadership and governance practices affect school-community partnerships in working towards the realisation of 'Educating for Gross National Happiness (GNH)' through a shared school governance system which is viewed through the lens of Ecological Systems Theory (EST). Adopting a qualitative research design, data were collected via semi-structured interviews from two school principals and six community representatives (SMB members) from two higher secondary schools in Bhutan. The data were then analysed using a thematic approach. The findings of the study suggest that school community partnership is in fact reasonably well understood by the participating principals and community representatives as cooperation and collaboration between a school and community to

support their children's learning. The findings also reveal that school-community partnership in the Bhutanese context is manifested in the form of good governance, community vitality, wholesome education, collaboration and respect.

The current study has made an important contribution to the existing body of educational research not only in relation to how Bhutanese principals and community representatives understand democratic school governance, but also in identifying the need to improve current school community partnerships through policy intervention by the Ministry of Education. This study also identifies meaningful implications for school community partnership policies and programmes in terms of how future school principals and community members can be better prepared to implement partnership enhancement policies and programmes through shared leadership. Finally, the recommendations made by the study for future research are intended to make further contributions in the field of school community partnership in Bhutan.

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# List of Abbreviations

BEB	Bhutan Education Blue-Print
DCRD	Department of Curriculum and Research Development
DEO	District Education Officer
DSE	Department of School Education
EGHN	Educating for Gross National Happiness
EMD	Education Monitoring Division
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNH	Gross National Happiness
GNHC	Gross National Happiness Commission
HDR	Higher Degree Research
MoE	Ministry of Education
NNC	New Normal Curriculum
NEP	National Education Policy
NSB	National Statistical Bureau
OECD	Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development
PPP	Public Private Partnership
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
PTM	Parent-Teacher Meeting
RCSC	Royal Civil Service Commission
REC	Royal Education Council
SCP	School Community Partnership
SMB	School Management Board

# Glossary

Driglam Namzha

Druk Gyalpo

Drukpa Kagyud

Dzongkha

Dzongkhag

Gewog

Gup

Ley Judrey

Shedras

Tha Dam Tshig

Tshogpa

Etiquette

Dragon King

One of the Buddhist sects

Bhutanese Language

District

Block

Block Headman

Cause and effect/karma

Monastic Institutes for Higher Studies

Sacred Commitment

Chiwog Representatives

# Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: [QUT Verified Signature](#)

Date: 09/07/2022

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## **CHAPTER 1: CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides an overview of the research inquiry. Section 1.1 presents the context and background of the study in relation to the Bhutanese context and introduces the problem statement in Section 1.2. Section 1.3 outlines the purpose and significance of the study, and Section 1.4 details the research questions. Section 1.5 introduces the theoretical framework for this study, and Section 1.6 outlines the methodology adopted in the study. Definitions of key terms used in the study are also provided. The chapter concludes with an overview of the thesis structure in Section 1.7.

### **1.1 CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND**

Bhutan became the world's youngest democracy in 2008, transitioning from an absolute monarchy to a democratic constitutional monarchy system (National Assembly of Bhutan, n.d.). A new democratic governance model accordingly emerged, which included a changed school governance model, according to which school leaders are expected to practise 'shared leadership' to create a sound management system and to act as a bridge between the school, the community, the Ministry of Education (MoE), and the national government. This new model of school leadership was included both in the national vision and the changed role of the education sector in Bhutan in line with the process of becoming a democratic country. The Ministry of Education (MoE), the Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC), and the Department of School Education (DSE) were setting a clear statement of expectation: that the education system was to produce responsible citizens, or Gross National Happiness (GNH) graduates (MoE, 2013), as detailed in Chapter 2. This commitment formed the research focus of this study.

It was not possible, however, for schools to shoulder such a responsibility alone; and a collective effort was therefore sought from the community, in the belief that with a sense of 'unity of purpose' - achieved by the community proactively engaging in school affairs - the education system might produce responsible citizens. Such collective efforts necessitated school-community partnerships (SCP) in Bhutan, and a recognition of the collective responsibility shared by school and community in realising the nation's expectation of producing responsible citizens or GNH graduates;

and this required deeper understanding of SCPs in the context of Bhutan. There had been no prior research carried out in relation to this topic; the aim of this study, therefore, has been to explore both the nature and the challenges for SCPs in relation to the objective of producing responsible citizens or GNH graduates.

### **1.1.1 Defining terms: Partnerships and Community**

A wide variety of terms have been used in the literature to describe arrangements similar to the SCPs; these include: *joint ventures; public-private partnerships; school-enterprise cooperation; networks; coalitions; collaborations; social partnerships; business-school relationships; school-business partnerships; community-school partnerships; industry-school engagement; industry-school partnerships, and school-community partnerships* (Pillay, Watters & Hoff, 2013; Zhao, 2011). Robertson, Mundy, Verger and Menashy (2012) have broadly described these partnerships as “cooperative institutional arrangements between public and private sector actors” (p. 1). The various terms reflect the various arrangements, from formal contractual agreements through to informal cooperation and supportive activities to achieve mutual goals. For the purpose of this study, ‘school-community partnerships’ (SCPs) has been adopted as the preferred term as it focusses on how schools partner with their respective communities to achieve the national education goals. In this study the abbreviation SCP is used when referring to school-community partnerships.

The term *community* in school-community partnerships generally refers to all individuals in a community served by a school. This includes parents of past, present, and future students, plus others like School Management Board (SMB) members - who might not have children attending the school but are significant members of the community (BEB, 2014-2024). However, for the purpose of this study the *community* consisted of SMB members, referred to throughout this study as ‘community representatives’. The SCP was slightly different from other Public-Private Partnerships (PPP), as PPPs always have a commercial perspective, while the SCP was driven by a collaborative perspective with a view to achieving the nation’s aspiration of Gross National Happiness (GNH). In the SCP context, ‘school’ was the ‘public entity’ while ‘community’ was the ‘private entity’.

In Bhutan, the education stakeholders who are actively involved in driving the

SCP agenda include the Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC), the Ministry of Education (MoE), and the Department of School Education (DSE). While the SCPs were not clearly defined in the local literature, a distinguishing “feature of these partnerships is their focus on producing a Gross National Happiness (GNH) Graduate” (MoE, 2013).

### **1.1.2 What is Gross National Happiness (GNH) within Bhutanese society?**

His Majesty the 5th King of Bhutan commented that ‘Gross National Happiness has come to mean so many things to many people, but to me it signifies simply ‘development with values’ (GNH Centre Bhutan, 2016, p. 1). The concept is based on the premise that the true development of human society takes place when material and spiritual development occur side by side. The two elements complement and reinforce each other (Tourism Council of Bhutan, n.d). The concept of GNH underlies a holistic and sustainable approach to development that seeks to balance material and non-material values, with the conviction that humans want both material and spiritual fulfilment. The objective of GNH is to achieve a balanced development of all facets of life, which contribute to both personal happiness and social progress (GNH Centre Bhutan, 2016).

The concept of Gross National Happiness is made up of four pillars:

- Sustainable and equitable socio-economic development
- Preservation and promotion of cultural and spiritual heritage
- Conservation of the environment
- Good governance (MoE, 2013, p. 9).

These four pillars are further elaborated in nine domains, of which three were of significance to this study. These were:

- *Community vitality*, which possesses strong relationships amongst the community members (including within families), the possession of socially constructive values, prosocial behaviours such as volunteering and donating time and/or money, and a safe environment from violence and crime (Ura et al., 2012).

- *Good governance*, which is a linchpin for the other GNH domains and is absolutely essential for their implementation. If a state were poorly governed, then the chances of the other domains of GNH such as health and education being well developed would be low. The other two of the four major aspects of good governance as conceived by GNH are service delivery ‘with respect to healthcare, electricity,



water, and government performance regarding the state's advancement of employment, education, culture, and the like' (Ura et al., 2012, pp.26-28).

- *Education*, which can change the way that people view issues. It can affect their ability to secure employment, to take care of themselves during sickness, or to think rather than fight their way out of a challenging situation. For this reason, education can be seen as the glue that connects all the GNH domains.

GNH is a national philosophy rather than merely a performative measure; and it is intended to instil a sense of social responsibility. It emphasises the importance for citizens of fundamental rights and duties in their day-to-day lives, empowering people in ways that are underpinned by the State's good governance structures. Schools and their respective communities are expected to work together to support the national aspiration of producing responsible and productive citizens. For the government, the GNH development paradigm has facilitated and informed the drive towards economic self-sufficiency and self-reliance, a reduction in the gap between rich and poor, and good governance and empowerment of the people (Bhutan-Bhutan travel: Sustainable tourism, 2015). Implementation of good governance principles enhances features of transparency and accountability, which in turn promotes the concepts of social trust. Through such underlying mechanisms citizens are empowered to hold governments and their agencies accountable in terms of justifying their actions. It is important, therefore, that citizens are equipped with appropriate skills and knowledge if they are to fully participate in supporting the GNH aspirations. According to the GNH policy it is assumed that through platforms like SCPs the education sector will support and enhance the requisite skills and knowledge.

The importance of GNH values and principles, however, predates the introduction of democratic governance, as can be seen in successive national development plans seeking to support the economic prosperity of the people as well as the preservation of age-old Bhutanese culture to protect the country's rich natural environment. Hence, GNH is important as it ensures the balance between economic development and spiritual aspirations.

The change in the system of governance from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy conferred crucial responsibilities upon the government bureaucracy and on the people of Bhutan. A new democracy required every individual to be able to take part in the governance of the country. Today, Bhutan is primarily a welfare-based society, where people do not have to worry about the education of their children as the State is mandated to provide free education through the Ministry of Education to all school-age children up to Year 10 (Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2008).

Peoples' representation in democratic governance is supported by the policy of decentralisation and the devolution of power to people at the grassroots level of society. This requires ministerial departments and institutions to participate in the socio-economic development of the country. Responsibility has thereby been transferred to the people in relation to their active participation in understanding their roles and those of government, and how they can actively involve themselves in deciding issues related to national education planning, resources allocation, and the delivery of high quality services (Royal Government of Bhutan, 2011).

How people participate actively at the school level depends on how the education services are delivered. More importantly, it depends on the effective participation of the respective communities in the process of democratic governance. It is expected that community members are equipped with the following:

- understanding of the basic principles of democratic governance
- the knowledge and skills required to participate
- knowledge and skills which are based on sound principles of morality, integrity, and efficiency (NDP Steering Committee and Secretariat, 2013).

Communities equipped with these three elements are likely to foster the establishment of SCPs in Bhutan with less resistance than those without such knowledge and skills. The assumption underlying the formulation of these expectations is that a general lack of such knowledge and skills among communities could constitute a barrier to the establishment of SCPs.

### **1.1.3 The Role of School Principals**

Against the above contextual background, the new constitution for Bhutan mandated that the State ensure that all citizens - including school principals - be provided with a good education that includes the requisite level of knowledge and skills needed to implement democratic leadership by engaging school communities. Creating conducive learning environments and implementing educational innovations that depend heavily on the talents, self-efficacy and enacted values of teachers and principals has characterised education around the world for several decades (Bandura, 1977; Fullan, 1992; Yero, 2010). This trend is also reflected in the Bhutanese context: the development of relevant knowledge and skills is seen as the foundation of an education system that will produce citizens informed by appropriate Bhutanese values in accordance with the GNH (MoE, 2013). To support the aspiration to facilitate greater involvement of the community in education, a democratic governance model was needed to ensure that all school principals possess the requisite knowledge and skills to actively support the development and maintenance of partnerships between schools and communities (The Wallace Foundation, 2012). At the same time as the transition to a democratic governance model, school leadership in Bhutan was also undergoing a transformation to adjust its scope and style to respond to and serve modern needs relating to the professionalism and competence of school leaders, who had to widen and deepen their understanding of what leadership really entails in relation to the quality of education and the effectiveness of schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Royal Education Council - School Enabling Conditions, 2012). Bhutan required a school system which promotes broad and comprehensive democratic values and which aligns with the GNH indicators. Importantly, these values have to be reflected, incorporated and manifested in the behaviours of school principals in ways which both support educational consultation objectives in schools and the enhancement of SCPs in the community (EMD, n.d.). In Bhutan, education leaders such as school principals are key in terms of knowledge, the provision of learning opportunities, and inspiring both students and community members. While most democratic leadership knowledge has typically been provided by textbooks, the behavioural enactment of the knowledge by principals demonstrates how this theoretical textbook knowledge, skills and values can be translated into practice. Since principals play such an important role in Bhutanese education, there is an expectation that they will enact their responsibilities in an informed and intelligent way in collaboration with the

community. One avenue open to principals for garnering support from community stakeholders in relation to school governance is through SCPs, which also act in conformity to democratic school governance principles (Dewey, 1938).

#### **1.1.4 A New Model of Democracy in Bhutanese Schools**

Democracy is a relatively new concept for Bhutanese people, and for the education sector. The governance system in schools should therefore convey a realistic view of democracy through modelling democratic leadership and promulgating responsible practices for living in a democratic society. For instance, in schools it should be taught that democracy is not only about freedom and individual choice, but that it also involves responsibilities and actions; and it should demonstrate the teaching and enacting of Bhutanese ethos and values, which have the potential to educate ‘about how human beings organize their life and build institutions to guide and govern themselves’ (DCRD, 2008a, p. v).

Stakeholders including students, teachers, parents, and members of the broader community should learn from the school governance system that Bhutan is a highly cultured society which is endowed with a set of shared community values which guide how people live their lives. Examples of these values include *Tha-Dam-Tshig* (sacred commitment, a commitment between individuals to act with commitment and to take responsibility for their actions); *Ley Judrey (cause and effect)*, which stresses the general belief that present actions and their impact determine trust and future outcomes both for individuals and the community; *Ley Judrey*, which emphasises the belief that an individual will only act positively if they have expectations in terms of issues such as high levels of integrity for good outcomes in the future; and *Driglam Namzha* (etiquette), which refers to ordered and cultured behaviour. These values are all embedded in the GNH framework (MoE, 2013) to ensure a positive effect for those participating in democratic decision-making processes.

School principals, as respected leaders, have a responsibility to propagate these values through their actions, both in their schools and in their communities. They should act in ways that ensure that all stakeholders exercise vigilance for their actions - what in modern governance discourse is called *transparency* and *integrity* (Wangchuck, 2009). Individuals can monitor their own actions to see if they are supporting or adversely affecting the harmony of relationships between the school and its community. School stakeholders, for example, can observe how committed the

school principal is to the people in the community. Finally, principals – like all stakeholders – need to be mindful of their actions, being aware of whether an action is performed with discipline and respect or in a mannerless way. Society appreciates and respects a well-mannered leader (Wangchuck, 2009).

There is also a need for principals to be reflective, bearing in mind the national aspiration of Bhutan, and the key role they play in providing children with an education that meets the nation’s current needs: “... it is better to see what our weaknesses are, where we have not done very well, and where we need to do better” (Wangchuck, 2009, Paragraph 2). It is impossible, however, for school principals alone to provide effective education; they need collaboration and support from the community; and having a strong SCP is one way to ensure the realisation of this objective.

Democratic school governance with an emphasis on SCP is a relatively new model; and, as is the case of most new practices, regular formal reflection is needed to ensure best solutions and highest quality of practice. School governance includes principals and community representatives whose combined perspectives help to create a rich understanding of the current situation in relation to school governance and SCP (Bhutan Education Blueprint (BEB), 2014-2024). The ultimate aim of any formal reflection is to identify potential improvements, so that quality enhancement is an ongoing process. To further quote His Majesty the 5<sup>th</sup> King: “Our education system built and nurtured with your [teachers’] hard work and dedication has served us well. But we must understand that the times have changed here in Bhutan and all around us in the world. We cannot face new challenges with the same tool” (Wangchuck, 2009, paragraph 5). The SCP, therefore, suits the changing model of school governance in Bhutan, given that it is derived from the overarching model of GNH.

## **1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

As noted above, the school governance model changed after Bhutan became the world’s youngest democracy in 2008 (NA, n.d.), and the government emphasized the importance of democratic leadership and community vitality in school governance. School principals were expected to practice ‘shared leadership’, to create a sound management system and to act as a bridge between the school, the community, the Ministry of Education and the national government. The community

is seen as an equal partner in education; and it is expected to take some responsibility in educating their children through involvement in the development and execution of school plans and programmes (EMD, 2017).

There was an assumption that these national aspirations might meet with resistance due to a general lack of community understanding of democratic principles; the transition from 100 years of absolute monarchy to democratic governance constituting a huge shift. Most Bhutanese people generally lacked understanding of the core principles and practices of active participation, which included informed decision-making skills, accountability, and responsibility. As in other jurisdictions (Brown, 1998; Comer et al., 1996; Epstein, 1990; Wolfendale, 1992) Bhutanese school principals also held varied perspectives on engaging communities as part of the school governance process. To support the transition to democratic leadership it was therefore important to determine whether principals supported the policy of community engagement in school governance, given their limited understandings. The above two conditions created tensions between the expectations of *vertical structural mandates* (compliance and performance monitoring) of the Ministry of Education and *horizontal relationship enhancement* by engaging parents' aspirations for their children and supporting the GNH through SCPs. There was an apparent disconnect between education policy, which sought to improve SCPs, and school principals' compliance-driven approach in the implementation policy to achieve such goals.

Since SCPs represented a new approach to Bhutanese school governance, there was very little experience of it – in the case of both school principals and communities. This situation was noted by reports in the Bhutan Education Blueprint (2014-2024) about the School Management Board (SMB), which served as the main indicator for SCPs in the case of Bhutan:

Although the policy requires every school to constitute School Management Boards (SMB) to encourage participatory management and to garner support from stakeholders, many schools do not have functional SMBs. Schools are expected to follow standard management procedure including goal setting, strategic planning, implementing plans, monitoring of plans, reviews and assessment and recording and reporting. The effectiveness of uniform governance and management structure followed by all schools is not clear. There is a need to reflect on current standard governance and management

system (p. 52).

It is a good practice to review the effectiveness of any new policy after a period of implementation; such reviews inform the Ministry of Education on the implementation of policies and programs in schools, helping them to make informed decisions in relation to ongoing quality improvement. To this end, the perceptions of various stakeholders relating to the nature and implementation of policies on democratic school governance with an emphasis on SCPs needed to be explored by investigating:

- Principals' opinions on their school governance system as well as their views on the SCPs and the mandates provided by the Department of School Education as envisaged in the Bhutan Education Blueprint (BEP) 2014-2024.
- Community representatives' perceptions on the new school governance system and SCPs.

The proposed study therefore sought to first establish whether participants (school principals and community representatives) have knowledge of and experience with partnerships; and secondly to explore the nature of such knowledge and experience, in order to identify the potential for enhancing or hindering the effectiveness of SCPs, specifically in relation to the issue of school governance.

### **1.3 PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

As noted, the introduction of democratic principles in Bhutan has required schools to work with communities, aligning with the GNH framework. The aim of this study was to understand how SCPs can be strengthened; and understanding this question has involved looking at both the horizontal and vertical relationships associated with SCP relationships, as principals have to balance the issues of compliance with policy and community engagement.

The purpose of this study was, therefore, to investigate the nature and scope of SCPs in Bhutan, and the challenges faced by both schools and communities in relation to the implementation of the policies and programmes on democratic governance through the SCPs. The study examines the perceptions of principals and community representatives in relation to implementation of the policy on democratic school governance with an emphasis on SCPs. The intention was to:

- Investigate stakeholders' expectations about SCPs
- Explore perceptions of the ways in which universal democratic values, GNH values and the Bhutanese ethos are modelled through the school governance system and SCPs
- Explore challenges faced by both schools and communities through the implementation of policies and programmes on democratic governance systems and SCPs
- Consider other pertinent and emerging issues relating to SCPs.

The study is expected to provide comprehensive information relating to SCPs in Bhutan to inform the Ministry of Education. It is further anticipated that the research will provide input for ongoing quality improvement and appropriate future decision-making by the government. The study is significant because it is the first such research conducted on SCPs in Bhutan. Its findings will inform policy makers, educationists, and the public at large about the current state of democratic school governance and SCPs in Bhutan. Such knowledge will support ongoing quality improvement in the country's education system.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following questions were investigated via online semi-structured interviews:

##### **Overarching question:**

How do Bhutanese school principals' leadership and governance practices affect school-community partnerships for the realisation of 'Educating for GNH' through a shared school governance system?

##### **Sub-questions:**

1. How is *Educating for Gross National Happiness* interpreted and enacted by the key educational stakeholders, principals and community representatives?
2. How are *School-Community Partnerships* interpreted and enacted by the key educational stakeholders, principals and community representatives?



## 1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 1.5.1 Relevance of Ecological Systems Theory to SCPs

Considering the need to manage expectations and relationships at multiple levels and across various stakeholders, SCPs are seen to behave in ways that are similar to an ecological system, in that lack of performance at any level or by any stakeholder can kill or weaken the whole SCP. This study which focuses on SCPs therefore sets out to identify and evaluate the interconnections and influences between stakeholders within each level of the system. Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological model is used to identify levels of interactions (*micro, meso, exo, macro*) and the influences of the SCP relationships. The study examines relationships between the school and community based on three themes from GNH, *good governance, community vitality and education*, and two themes from the principals' guidelines (*collaboration and respect*). These themes have formed the analytical frame to this study. Bronfenbrenner (1989) described his theory as a set of nested systems at successive levels; in the SCP case three levels of both direct and indirect influence on relationships are identified, these being the GNH policy (*macro-level*), national and district education bodies (*exo-level*), and school and community members (*micro-level*). The fourth level of Bronfenbrenner's model (the *meso-level*) describes the interactions of stakeholders within the micro-level. It is this level that is the focus of this research study.

Hands (2005) identified ecological theory as being relevant to understanding how networks of interconnected relationships, such as those found in SCP, function. Given the similarity of inter-dependent relationships in both SCP and in ecological systems, Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological model (albeit applied to a new context) was relevant. Firstly, it provides a clear system structure similar to those that were found in SCPs in Bhutan; and secondly, it offers a useful way of conceptualising and explaining the interdependency that operates between the various stakeholders within an overall SCP system. While the Bronfenbrenner model was adapted and applied to this study, it is acknowledged that other ecological models and system theories have also contributed to understanding complex real work situations such as Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA) and School-Community Organisations (Sanders, 2015).

## **1.6 METHODOLOGY**

### **1.6.1 A Qualitative Approach**

This research has adopted a qualitative, case study approach. The case in the study is the Bhutanese schools which are implementing democratic leadership through SCP. The research objective has been to understand the constructs, contexts and relationships involved in the case through investigating the perceptions of participants (principals and community representatives) within selected schools. Qualitative approaches are appropriate when a study intends to explore contexts and to describe practices (Stake, 1995; Thomas, 2011), as is the case with school leadership studies (e.g., Grootenboer & Hardy, 2017; Heffernan, 2018b). The approach generates rich and thick descriptions of the case within the specific research context (Thomas, 2011). In this study it allows insight into how school principals navigate their way through the complex roles expected of them (Miller & Acs, 2017; Webber & Scott, 2008). The use of a qualitative approach enabled the researcher to explore the context surrounding specific complex practices, such as participatory leadership within a school context.

### **1.6.2 Study Participants**

According to Creswell (2013), participants for qualitative studies are selected on the basis that they meet a certain set of criteria. This study involved convenience sampling, with the school principals and school community members as the focus participants. The researcher wrote to the principals and School Management Board (SMB) members to determine whether they were willing to participate in the study, as they were most likely to provide in-depth understanding of the issue identified as the focus of the research. Given that this was an exploratory, qualitative study the selected context was two government higher secondary schools in Bhutan. This sample size was small enough to be managed effectively to elicit detailed, in-depth information. Participants from each school consisted of the school principals and three community representatives from each of the selected schools. For example, School A's participants consisted of the school principal and three community representatives from the SMB - the highest decision-making body at school level in Bhutan (BEB 2014-2024), forming the school's SCP system.

## **1.7 AN OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS STRUCTURE**

Chapter 1 has presented the overall context and purpose of the proposed study, including detail of the national vision and the changed role of the education sector in Bhutan during the process of becoming a democratic country. The education sector, Gross National Happiness Commission, and the Department of School Education are described as setting clear statements of expectations for the education system to produce responsible citizens, the context which provides the focus of the study. The chapter has identified the specific purpose of the study, the research questions, study participants, and the significance of the study.

Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive review of the literature associated with school leadership and SCPs, and a detailed conceptualisation of SCPs which focuses on a definition, the concepts of SCPs in the West and the East, the Bhutanese conceptualising of SCPs, the concept of Gross National Happiness in relation to SCPs, the importance of SCPs, the values promoted through democratic school governance and SCPs, and challenges which typically characterise SCPs. The chapter also describes ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1989) as the conceptual framework that underpins the research.

Chapter 3 presents a detailed discussion of the research methodology, including appropriate research methodology, research purpose, research design, qualitative data collection, analysis of data, ethical issues, credibility of data, and limitations associated with the data collection process.

Chapter 4 describes the data analysis process utilized in this study. Each step of the analysis process is discussed, and examples are provided. The chapter also presents a detailed account of the major findings of the study, which are organized around a-priori themes derived from GNH and leadership guidelines. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the findings.

Chapter 5 reiterates the research questions and presents detailed discussion of the findings in relation to the existing literature. Chapter 6, the last chapter of this thesis, presents discussion of the identified implications of this study, which is followed by an acknowledgement of associated limitations. Finally, recommendations are made for further research.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter critically reviews the literature that informs this study. It begins by describing the background to Bhutan's education system (Section 2.1) and reviews how democratic leadership was introduced to the school education system, followed by detailed discussion of School Leadership (Section 2.2) and Community and School-Community Partnerships (Section 2.3). Section 2.4 highlights implications identified in relevant literature and develops the conceptual framework which guides the study. Finally, Bronfenbrenner's (1989) Ecological Systems Theory is discussed as the key theory informing this research. Explanation of this theory and a justification for using it in this study in the context of Bhutan, is provided when discussing the research methodology in Chapter 3.

### **2.1 BACKGROUND OF BHUTAN'S EDUCATION SYSTEM**

Education in Bhutan is believed to date back to the visit of Guru Padmasambhava in 746 AD. In the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, the founder of the Drukpa Kagyud School of Buddhism sent some of his principal disciples to Bhutan to preach the Dharma. The disciples built temples and continued spiritual education and study of lineage. Drukpa Kagyud has remained the principal school of Buddhism in Bhutan.

Monastic education in Bhutan had its roots as early as the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD and was practiced through informal relationships between the master and the disciples (Tobgay, 2014). It focused on the art of liturgy and ritual, and gradually grew and expanded throughout the country. Today, monastic institutes for higher studies, called *Shedras*, for monks of higher stature, offer study at tertiary level education in literature, philosophy, Arts and language, combined with long periods of spiritual meditation. The monastic system of education has maintained the spiritual aspects of Bhutanese society for many centuries and informs the development of the Gross National Happiness philosophy and the associated governance and monitoring index. As noted above, the system predates modern or Western education in Bhutan (Tobgay, 2014). Monasteries were traditionally not only the focus of religious practices, they were also educational centres, providing schools for learning language, Arts, literature, and philosophy.

King Ugyen Wangchuck introduced a modern education system in 1914 by sending 46 boys to India to receive a Western education (Tobgay, 2014). Initially, the purpose of getting a modern education was to support public administrative duties and to gain access to global knowledge and practices. In 1914 the first Western school was established in the Haa district of Bhutan, offering subjects such as arithmetic, Hindi, English and Dzongkha (Dorji, 2005). In the 1950s King Jigme Wangchuck established secular schools, borrowing both curriculum and the medium of instruction from India. This was the beginning of the present Bhutanese education system.

Major developments in the education system took place in 1962, led by King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, when English became the medium of instruction in Bhutanese schools, as it was considered the most useful world language. In addition, the third King realized that Bhutan could no longer prosper if she maintained her old traditions (Dorji, 2005), and he focused his enthusiasm and determination on the development of a national modern education system. Since there were not enough teachers at that time to implement the system Bhutan had to recruit teachers from neighbouring India.

In addition to secular school education in Bhutan, some students were sent to missionary schools in Darjeeling, India; and similar missionary schools were later established in Bhutan to modernize the education system (Ministry of Education, 2014). It was around this time that the Ministry of Education developed a national education policy to guide the future of education for Bhutan. Salient details of this policy as it relates to the proposed research are as follows:

The National Education Policy (NEP) of Bhutan (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 5) provides a chronology of significant events to help contextualise the education system in Bhutan:

- **His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo's address at Paro College of Education, 17 Feb. 2009** - 'Our nation's Vision can only be fulfilled if the scope of our dreams and aspirations is matched by the reality of our commitment to nurturing our future citizens.'

- **Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan: Article 9.15** – 'The State shall endeavour to provide education for the purpose of improving and increasing

knowledge, values and skills of the entire population with education being directed towards the full development of the human personality.’

- **Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan: Article 9.16** – ‘The State shall provide free education to all children of school going age up to tenth standard and ensure that technical and professional education shall be made generally available and that higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.’

- **Educating for Gross National Happiness (GNH):** Bhutan’s vision of development is based on the principles of Gross National Happiness. As education is the cornerstone of all progress in a society, this vision has been incorporated into the education system through Educating for GNH, an initiative that promotes holistic, contemplative, eco-sensitive, and culturally responsive educational approaches that are both taught and put into practice.

- **Democratic Foundations:** The advent of democratic constitutional monarchy in 2008 has provided an impetus to the education system to build strong foundations for democracy in Bhutan by educating citizens to meaningfully participate in the political process.

- **Knowledge Society:** One of Bhutan’s development goals is to create a knowledge society. Towards this, the NEP shall direct and define new avenues for students, both Bhutanese and international, to pursue quality education in Bhutan.

- **Quality Education:** As indicated in the policy excerpts above, the quality of education for Bhutan is of critical importance and must be enhanced. The policy provisions strive to ensure the development of a Bhutanese learning system based on GNH principles: creating a performance-based culture in schools; ensuring targeted professional development of educators; and utilising innovative ICT-based teacher support mechanisms.

In Bhutan, Educating for Gross National Happiness (GNH) is fundamental policy, intended to reinforce Good Governance, Education, and Community Vitality in order to effect the changes and initiatives proposed by the government. While the aim of the programme ‘Educating for GNH’ (introduced in 2009) was for all learning in schools to become GNH-infused, at the same time it was emphasised that none of the intended educational reforms in Bhutan would compromise academic rigour. The education reform policy also emphasised that reasoning and critical thinking should

be elevated to the status of top priorities in a genuine GNH curriculum (Hayward et al., 2009). The importance of community in GNH provides a strong ground for establishing ‘SCPs’, as such reasoning and critical thinking help people to realise the importance of shared responsibility for education and of a collective effort for peaceful and harmonious relationships between school and community. The SCPs were established with the intention of creating long-standing relationships between schools or school districts and organisations in the local community (BEB, 2014-2024).

It is argued that ‘Educating for GNH’ aspires to produce citizens with the desired level of democratic principles and participatory understanding. The SCP presented an opportunity to demonstrate how best to implement such school leadership and to help nurture young people and citizens in line with GNH values and to imbue their consciousness with GNH principles (MoE, 2013). If Bhutan’s educational system was to cultivate GNH values and principles in its students, there would be a need for school leadership capable of creating GNH-inspired schools with GNH-infused learning environments. The school system required both school principals and the community to make conscious efforts to provide avenues and opportunities to enact GNH values so that the students grow up as GNH-graduates.

Schools in Bhutan therefore implement the concept of ‘Nurturing Green Schools for a Green Bhutan’, which is manifested through eight ‘Greeneries’: Academic, Aesthetic, Cultural, Environmental, Intellectual, Moral, Social, and Spiritual Greeneries. These eight Greeneries are also embedded in the three domains of GNH (as mentioned in Chapter 1): Good Governance, Community Vitality, and Wholesome Education.

The Ministry of Education’s aspiration statement, ‘Educating for GNH’, therefore demanded space and attention in respect to school governance, which increased the need for a review of the traditional school governance system which is the focus of this study: *School-Community Partnerships: How do Bhutanese school principals’ leadership and governance practices affect school-community partnerships for the realisation of ‘Educating for GNH’ through a shared school governance system?* (the research questions have been detailed in Chapter 1). Furthermore, to cope with the increasing need for quality educational achievement,

the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Bhutan has taken various measures to improve the educational landscape, to increase the quality and equity in schooling, and to ensure equal opportunities to achieve productive and fulfilling lives for future generations (United Nations Report, 2015). Transition from a system steeped in culture and tradition is not easy; hence the need for research that can identify and analyse mechanisms to support and strengthen the transition.

### **2.1.1 Transitions Challenged in Bhutanese Education Today**

Against the background detailed above, education in Bhutan by 2019 involved 4991 students studying in monastic schools across the country, and 165,081 students studying in 646 modern schools around the country (National Statistics Bureau, 2019). At this time of national educational transformation from the age-old monastic education system to a modern system infused with GNH values, the government and leaders acknowledged the importance of education in a range of areas, such as civic duties and social development, character building of citizens, and cultural and values transmission. Tobgay (2014) defines this type of wholesome education as providing

a holistic approach through critical education thinking and innovative approaches to develop the mind and body. It includes all aspects of human existence and not only academics. In the world of disparities, education should also be inclusive of different abilities, skills, backgrounds and cultures. Bhutan provided chances and opportunities to her citizens to get educated together (p.5).

Tobgay (2014) also argues that if ‘wholesome education’ is construed as a framework of holistic education, then ‘values education’ can be understood as the details and specificities which flesh out this framework. Values education can be thought of as the moral aspects of education that contribute towards making the individual a good citizen, one who is conscious of their innate strength. This model is different from western models where the focus on development is of the individual, with little consideration of social or community responsibilities. The Bhutanese education model involves core, structural and institutional values, including cultural, moral, ethical, cardinal, and spiritual values which collectively shape the normative values seen to be



crucial for harmonious coexistence and the development of partnerships between schools and communities. These values have to be skilfully imparted to the students by the school and community, with the SCPs serving as the model for instilling the values of *good governance*, *community vitality*, and *wholesome education*.

However, as is found in many western systems, most schools in Bhutan still operate in isolation from their local community, which creates a host of other issues and barriers to school and student success (Warren & Mapp, 2011). One result of this 'disconnect' between schools and their local community is the fact that many individuals, including young people and their families, are less concerned about the value of education, leading to widespread disengagement, a lack of student interest, poor leadership, and low academic achievement (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). The bureaucratic nature of education has systematically inhibited the ability of public schools to nurture relationships with the local community (Vollmer, 2010). This disconnect consequently has continued to be a major barrier in respect to establishing and nurturing fruitful partnerships capable of generating capital and leveraging resources that benefit the entire community (Hands, 2005). There has been therefore an abundance of missed opportunities to build adequate conditions and environments for the raising, educating, and developing of GNH graduates. The burden of creating effective school learning environments and experiences that meet the needs of student education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century continues to fall on the shoulders of school principals, staff, and personnel (Vollmer, 2010). The disconnect between schools and communities severely limits possibilities for creating viable partnerships that generate the social and cultural resources needed to improve outcomes for young people and families (Warren & Mapp, 2011; Yosso, 2005). A key factor in creating viable SCPs is the effectiveness of the role of school principals who both shape and drive the partnership. The above discussion has been based on a system that had adopted highly transactional governance and partnership models; the challenge for modernising the Bhutanese school system, therefore, is that of converging the above model with the socio-cultural approach that is embedded in GNH aspirations, including the importance of a

strong school-community partnership. The next section explores various concepts and elements associated with school leadership.

## **2.2 SCHOOL LEADERSHIP**

### **2.2.1 Defining School Leaders**

Many terms have been used to describe the individual(s) charged with the responsibility of managing a school's operations. They have historically and commonly been referred to as Principals, although other terms such as educational leaders, school leaders, and educational administrators routinely appear in the literature. Although these terms have multiple definitions, there is general consensus among scholars and research data (Day et al., 2001; Sergiovanni, 2001) that they are referred to as *school principals*. For the purposes of this study, the term *principal* is used throughout to refer to school leaders.

### **2.2.2 School leadership that fosters school-community partnership**

Research on leadership within SCPs is situated within the broader literature of interagency collaboration; and it has generally observed that school principals have a major role in providing an enabling environment for community involvement (Day et al., 2016). A principal's personal beliefs regarding governance and leadership shape how community involvement is defined by school stakeholders and what forms of SCPs are developed at their school. The principal's personal beliefs and attitudes also shape how educators interact with their students and their community (Francis et al., 2015). Tension between principals' personal beliefs, the compliance and reporting regime imposed by the modern governance of the Ministry of Education (MoE), and community expectations need to be balanced to ensure sustainable engagement and to prevent the partnership from collapsing.

At the school level, the degree of community engagement and the ability to bring the community on board is seen to depend on the kind of school leadership adopted by the school principal, as certain school leadership practices (e.g., participatory leadership practices) can leverage and mobilize community resources such as parents and older siblings to work with a child's school. The current school reform challenges and encourages principals and communities to respond to the new emerging shared leadership or democratic approach of school governance; yet there is

currently little understanding of how this may be implemented, particularly in the case of evolving democracy among developing countries such as Bhutan. Lack of appreciation of 'democratic leadership', especially in educational institutions, has often led to unilateral decision making in schools, with the principal's leadership being regarded as an essential element in determining the school climate (Brown et al., 2012; Cohen et al., 2015; Day & Sammons, 2013). Regarding effective changes to school culture and climate, research findings particularly emphasize that a principal's leadership needs to effectively function as a change agent or change facilitator (e.g. Hall & Hord, 2011). In other words, to successfully implement school change, by creating the school climate necessary for the change to occur, the principal must serve as facilitator and have the capacity to engage school staff and community in the change process.

Research also shows that the leadership style of the principal, specifically an 'inclusive leadership' style involving all stakeholders with appropriate guidance towards change, correlates positively with a healthy school climate (Moolenaar et al., 2010). The general notion therefore has been established that it is the school principals who either make or break the school, and - more importantly - that much depends on how they engage all stakeholders by encouraging them to share responsibility for the school's performance.

However, studies such as that of Blank, Jacobson, and Melville (2012) have suggested that school principals have not generally been receptive towards parental participation; and that school practices largely determine how far parents are willing to invest their resources in actively engaging in their child's education. Studies involving Southeast Asian parents, for example, have shown that they were only prepared to support their children's learning at home, for example by supplementing their schoolwork, but not involving themselves directly in school operational matters (Ho, 2000; Shen et al., 1994). Both schools and community members were observed to be initially resistant to SCPs, to the detriment of the objective of improving the school's performance and the students' learning outcomes. These findings are similar to observations in Bhutan; and these situations may result from a lack of awareness about the unity of purpose and from being ill-informed about the direct and indirect roles of each stakeholder.

Linking the objective of school partnership to the State's aspiration of GNH therefore has provided a more holistic approach to strengthening the SCP; and developing understanding of a holistic approach represents a new way of building institutional trust between schools and communities. Unlike more developed economies, Bhutan is largely agrarian, and the regions are separated by rugged terrains with fast flowing rivers which result in limited mobility. Rural farming parents - who are rarely literate - often encounter substantial barriers to appreciating what happens in school; and their reluctance to engage in the SCP may be due to a lack of self-confidence, or feelings of being inadequate or ignorant (Ho, 2000; Shen et al., 1994). If the principal of the school is not welcoming and inclusive it makes things even worse for the community, since the success of a SCP depends on how well the school is able to maintain an equilibrium of relationship through interacting, valuing, and engaging with parents and community members, and vice-versa (Bhutan Education Blueprint, 2014-2024). To respond to the increasing need for higher quality educational achievement, the Ministry of Education (MoE) of Bhutan has taken various measures to improve the educational landscape, to increase quality and equity of experience in schooling, and to ensure equal opportunities that will increase the likelihood of productive and fulfilling lives for future generations (United Nations Report, 2015). These various measures impact on school leadership as well as on communities. A review of some of these reforms linked to school leadership is provided below.

### **2.2.3 School reform and its impact on school leadership**

The prevalent top-down approach to school leadership mandates that public schools meet national policy requirements, assess student achievement through standardized testing, and meet the inherent demands of the social needs of students, staff, and community (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Green, 2015; Owens & Valesky, 2011). However, the ability to adapt to a rapidly changing society, as is the case in Bhutan, has compelled educational institutions to adopt various models of school leadership to keep pace with the changing political, social, and economic landscapes (Fullan, 2001; Sergiovanni, 2000). To lead effectively in contemporary society school leaders in the Bhutanese education system must function as more than just transactional managers

and operators of schools (Wallace Foundation, 2013). They are required to make important decisions that influence an institutional culture infused with GNH values, which has the capacity to deeply affect the lives of students, teachers, and other community members (Berson & Oreg, 2016; Fullan, 2003; Lopez, & Stevens, 2015). The Wallace Foundation (2013) identified five key responsibilities of such school leaders:

- Shaping a vision of academic success for all students, one based on high standards
- Creating a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail
- Cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their parts in realizing the school vision
- Improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn their utmost
- Managing data, people, and processes to foster school improvement.

These responsibilities align well with the Bhutan Education Blueprint (BEB) 2014–2024, launched in 2014, which has given schools the new responsibility of elevating and restructuring the country’s education system based on *Eight Shifts*. These shifts represent the plans and programmes designed to improve critical focus areas, and they sit alongside specific strategies which aim to succeed within a targeted time frame. One of the listed shifts in school reform focusses on ensuring high-performance of schools and school leaders, and a key element of such performance is that of the involvement of communities in schools, with an emphasis on students’ academic success and on student support systems (BEB, 2014-2024). The increasing pressure associated with democratic leadership and the establishment of productive and meaningful SCPs has placed a huge responsibility on the shoulders of school leaders in Bhutan. Given the lack of prior experience or research attention in this area, it was useful to review research findings from studies conducted elsewhere that had similarities to the Bhutan context in terms of school reforms.

Gosnell-Lamb, O’Reilly, and Matt (2013), for example, conducted a quantitative study of school leaders’ perceptions of the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) policy in the US with regards to Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Their findings demonstrated that school leaders’ priorities had shifted, with most of their time and energy being dedicated to meeting the state required mandates instead of liaising and

building partnerships with local communities to strengthen the educational outcomes of the children. Another finding from the study indicated that school leaders had to deal with faculty and staff stress-related issues associated with teaching in a high-stakes testing environment (Gosnell-Lamb et al., 2013). The compliance-driven over-reporting identified in this study is similarly mirrored in conditions and expectations associated with principals' reactions to education reforms in Bhutan. The findings from the Gosnell-Lamb, O'Reilly, and Matt study (2013) may derive from western contexts, but they help to situate and contextualize current challenges, stresses, and conditions that are impacting the growth and development of school leaders in Bhutan. The changed governance and leadership approach has bearing on SCP programmes, the success of which largely depends on the effectiveness and efficiency of school leaders. The findings support the call to engage in research related to the systems, strategies and practices that provide support for emerging and practising school leaders, who are now required to lead effectively in challenging and changing contexts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). Hence the key focus of this current research project: democratic school leadership and emerging SCPs in Bhutan.

Leadership in schools is intrinsically involved in changing learning environments and improving students' learning outcomes from *undesirable* to *desirable* (Graczewski, et al., 2009). The expectations are high: school principals are tasked with ensuring that the education provided in schools is of good quality (Naicker et al., 2013). In a context of challenging school environments, principals now have the additional responsibility of being agents of social transformation (Bhengu, 2005). The school leadership literature in general emphasizes the importance of managing the instructional environment effectively (Leithwood et al., 2008), of creating trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), of building capacity (Sergiovanni, 1998), of cultivating a shared vision and commitments (Leithwood et al., 2008), of promoting shared decision-making (Marks & Louis, 1999; Spillane et al., 2004), and of being the driver of organizational change (Bryk et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008). National and district standards for school leaders in Bhutan similarly call for establishing a shared vision, developing an effective learning environment, ensuring effective management, and collaborating with both faculty and community members (Bhutan Education Blue Print, 2014-2024; Weiss & Siddall, 2012).

These seemingly simple identified characteristics of school leadership can be

deceptively difficult to enact. As described by organizational theorists, school leaders must learn to navigate ‘enduring’ dilemmas, rather than simply solving problems (Ogawa et al., 1999). Among the more challenging dilemmas have been those involving school-community relations, for which school leaders have frequently employed bridging and buffering strategies. On the one hand, principals must protect or buffer the core purpose of schools - teaching and learning - against equally competing co-curricular agendas like religious programmes, health and physical education, games and sports activities, and cultural programmes. On the other hand, they are asked to open or bridge school boundaries to parents, the neighbourhood community, and other agencies that increase their resources and support the teaching-learning environment (Crowson, 2003; Ogawa et al., 1999). Traditional notions of boundaries are disrupted in school-community partnerships, therefore school leaders must build consensus and trust around new understandings; and they must be able to skilfully handle tensions that can arise. Failure to do this can quickly undermine partnership efforts (Crowson, 2003). The role of principals’ leadership practices and community involvement becomes critical, and there is a need to understand the skill sets required to successfully navigate these changing times, practices and resulting tensions, to support Bhutanese school leaders and to strengthen the SCP. The next section explores in detail the promotion of SCPs through school leadership.

#### **2.2.4 School leadership that can promote SCPs**

International studies (e.g. Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; Jeynes, 2018; Lazaridou & Kassida, 2015; Povey et al., 2016; Robinson et al., 2008) have argued that the central role of a principal, as a school leader facilitating community involvement, is determined through their leadership style, their communication capabilities, attitudes and expectations. Several proposed models of leadership have highlighted the relationship between leadership practices and community involvement. For example, the *High Performing School* model developed by Shannon and Bylsma (2007) posited that effective leadership practices are positively related to family and community involvement while Robinson and Fevre (2011) argued that principals are the prime movers in respect to facilitating partnerships between multiple stakeholders at school level. Lloyd-Smith (2008, p. 3) asserted that “principals must not only recognise the

inherent barriers associated with community involvement in high schools, but also develop meaningful opportunities for community involvement”. In the context of Bhutan, principals have these same community service responsibilities (see the indicators of GNH) to establish cordial and healthy relationships with the community and to encourage parents to take some responsibility in educating their children; while the principal maintains contact with the community in relation to issues such as student progress and school development plans (Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC), n.d.). Their leadership practices must be able to mobilise community support to collaborate with the school.

Puccio et al. (2011) noted that effective leaders in this increasingly complex world are committed to new ways of leadership, ways that are built around creative processes. Schools currently encounter specific challenges that need to be addressed by using innovative solutions, especially in relation to involving communities in school-based activities. This position is supported by the *Chicago Appleseed Fund for Justice’s Report* (2007), which concluded that:

[...] creative, multifaceted communication and engagement strategies can promote better community involvement in schools. Apart from that, school leaders do not uniformly value community involvement as a key accountability strategy (p. 5).

It has in fact been noted that effective school leadership is only second to classroom instruction in regards to school related factors that influence student academic learning (Davis & Darling- Hammond, 2012; Leithwood, 2004; Wallace Foundation, 2013). This is a critical component in the overall process of educational reform, and an important topic of discussion and debate among researchers, scholars, and policy makers. Increased attention to effective school leadership practices has led to a proliferation of principal preparation programs, models of good practice, and strategies to adequately prepare principals capable of handling the complexities of school leadership. Various leadership frameworks have been developed in a relatively short space of time, such as *transformative, servant, instructional, democratic* and *social justice* approaches - a few of the most popular frameworks for leading schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Brown, 2004; Burns, 1978; Greenleaf, 1970; Khalifa, 2012). While advances are being made in terms of theorizing and evaluating the success of



school leadership models and programs related to student achievement, there remain considerable challenges in respect to developing and sustaining strong SCPs.

Empirical studies have investigated and identified how principals' leadership significantly and consistently determines the nature and degree of community involvement (Arar et al., 2016; Lazaridou & Kassida, 2015). Arar et al. (2016), for example, carried out a study to identify the issues of principals' leadership styles and parental involvement from the perspectives of teachers. Data were collected from 200 mostly female (61 per cent) elementary teachers, which demonstrated a significant relationship between principals' leadership and parental involvement. Overall, a positive relationship was identified between the two. From another research perspective, Griffith (2001) had previously reported that laissez-faire leadership did not contribute to parental involvement; and had argued that overall empirical examination of the relationship between the behaviour of principals and parental involvement was lacking.

In a later study that used a sample of 385 principals across 618 schools in Queensland, Australia, Povey et al. (2016) investigated the role of principals in promoting school-home partnerships, and their findings indicated that overall principals' approaches were positively significant, with only one-fifth of the participants not engaging in promoting parental involvement. A recommendation from this study was that parents should be invited to participate in school-based activities and that principals must create a positive environment to support the building of effective teacher-parent relationships. Schechter and Shaked (2017) provided evidence that a principal sets the tone for the school by establishing a positive atmosphere for stakeholders, and by helping teachers and parents to develop the skills required to work collectively towards realising the overall outcome of students' success. Oldham and Cummings, (1996) and Wang et al., (2010) showed that support received from the leader for innovative ideas was positively related to staff creativity; while Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) recommended that when the principal is more visible, dynamic, and effective in supporting parent-teacher relationships, the school is more likely to build solid programmes in which parents can participate.

According to Kelchtermans et al. (2011), a principal is viewed as a person who stands at the school doorstep, representing a point of connection between the internal

and external school communities. This bridging of connection between the internal and external represents a significant challenge to principals, as it involves a range of different demands, opinions, expectations, and goals (Botha, 2013; Kelchtermans et al., 2011; Schechter & Shaked, 2017); and a principal's performance is generally judged by their ability to create and preserve harmony among school stakeholders and the school community (Kowalski, 2010). Effective school leadership is seen to have a direct positive effect on community involvement in schools; the tendency for communities to be involved in schools increases when principals initiate activities that encourage and facilitate their involvement (Jeynes, 2011; 2018; Kandasamy et al., 2016; Vaden-Kiernan, 2005).

Previous studies have reported that school leadership is perceived as being positively related to parental involvement (Boatwright, 2014; Mleczko & Kington, 2013; Povey et al., 2016). Jeynes (2018) has argued that the degree of involvement of parents at school and at home depends on the role of the principal in organising and executing plans; that it is their responsibility to encourage strong partnerships among families, teachers and students; and that they must collaborate with community stakeholders. Findings from this study indicated that community involvement in schools can be achieved when principals employ creative ways to initiate and monitor partnership programmes and activities for community participation, with the aim of improving both students' achievement and school governance. These various findings align with one of the key aspirations of the Bhutanese Government: to restructure the education system based on the highest standards of good quality educational leadership (BEB, 2014-2024).

### **2.2.5 The complexity of school leadership that calls for SCPs**

Similar to other social institutions, public schools have significant challenges and issues with which to contend. The contentious environment surrounding the state of education, however, provides opportunities for teachers and school leaders to create environments and conditions that provide enriching learning experiences for children, and that foster imagination, creativity, and a sense of civic duty (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). There are, however, significant complexities involved in this process.

When conceptualizing the complexity of the kinds of leadership required by schools, Sergiovanni (2000) referred to,

...managerial requirements that ensure basic levels of organizational purpose, competence, reliability, structure, and stability. But schools must respond as well to the unique political realities they face. After all schools belong to parents and children, interact with the needs of local businesses, churches, and other community groups, and have a unique relationship with state governments [in many developing countries schools were established by communities - see Tagore's Shantiniketan school<sup>1</sup>; the monastery education in Europe]. These 'stakeholders' don't always agree, and it takes a high level of political skill for school leaders to bring about the necessary consensus and comment to make schools work well for everyone (p. 165-66).

Sergiovanni (2000) acknowledges the 'technical' elements of leadership, such as structure and management, but also emphasizes the importance of the political and relational domains of school leadership. It is the school leader who is ultimately responsible for working with others in developing methods to establish effective SCPs and to create spaces where meaningful conversations can take place; conversations which are fundamental to creating a climate and culture that nurtures both student and adult development (Block, 2008; Comer, 2004; Fullan, 2016; Senge, 2012; Sergiovanni, 1999; Sergiovanni, 2000).

As the context and landscape of school leadership continues to evolve and grow in complexity, the government of Bhutan has adopted standards that explicitly require school leaders to work with community members such as parents and other stakeholders to achieve effective school and student outcomes (BEB, 2014-2024). Despite the incorporation of community-oriented standards, however, there is concern about school leaders' capacity to engage and work effectively with the broader community (Green, 2017; Horsford & Brown, 2011). For most school leaders, expectations of working with the community and harnessing its assets as a potential for leveraging school and community relationships are often peripheral (Green, 2015).

As indicated previously, the education and professional preparation of emerging

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<sup>1</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5495/>

school leaders must prepare them to lead in a complex, fast-changing world context (Darling-Hammond, 2009). They are operating in increasingly dynamic and socially-oriented environments and need to experience rich learning opportunities that support their own growth and development in ways that help them to perform their complex duties effectively (Turnbull et al., 2013). This argument was supported by Darling-Hammond (2009), who described this level of capacity development for both school leaders and community representatives as being critical in most countries; however, the capacity constraints which characterise developing countries with low rates of community literacy, like Bhutan, represent an even more significant challenge. The Bhutanese Ministry of Education has recognised the need to engage and support aspiring school leaders, providing them with rich, intellectually and socially robust learning experiences that will cultivate and nurture the type of creative leadership required in the nation's schools (National Association of Secondary School Principals & National Association of Elementary Schools Principals, 2013; Wallace Foundation 2012). However, to educate and cultivate this type of school leadership Bhutanese schools require a major shift in the conceptualization and enactment of SCPs.

Bhutanese principals are needing to sharpen and refine skills such as self-awareness, awareness of place, and how to develop meaningful partnerships with community members (Budge, 2006; Posner, 2009) if they are to shape a vision of successful, collective and collaborative work with others to create an environment that supports the academic and social development of children (Mendels, 2012; Wallace Foundation; 2016), as well as incorporating the communal values and principles of GNH. Effective school district and community partnerships have the potential to foster rich and engaging educational experiences for aspiring leaders, and to help to cultivate and sustain school leadership that responds to local school and community conditions (Cosner et al., 2015; Guajardo et al., 2016; Shelton, 2012).

The complex, challenging and noble profession of school leadership has motivated researchers to investigate the nature of leadership that promotes strong SCPs. There has been a significant body of research on and around school leadership, but there is an ongoing need for examining and (re)assessing existing academic preparation programs, leadership models, pedagogies, and practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Guajardo et al., 2013; Young, 2015). The creation and

implementation of innovative, cutting-edge educational programs that promote dynamic, adaptive approaches to school leadership in this 21<sup>st</sup> century is critical to the educational outcomes of young people and their schools (Khalifa et al., 2016; Wallace Foundation, 2016). Democratic structures and systems that promote greater community engagement, shared leadership, and partnerships at different levels are critical to the national project of supporting and sustaining high levels of student achievement (Wallace Foundation, 2010). Scholars, educators, and policy makers are operating in a time which requires constant vigilance in relation to promoting, designing, and implementing standards and practices that promote a shared vision of school leadership responding to both school and community needs and contexts (Green, 2016; Guajardo et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2012).

School leadership in the current context of public education in Bhutan requires leaders who are equipped with the requisite knowledge, skill sets, and support systems that create conditions which are conducive to effective teaching and learning. Effective school leadership connects directly to the outcomes of student achievement, teacher effectiveness, and overall school improvement. Darling-Hammond (2009) and Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) make the important point that school leaders cannot achieve these outcomes alone; they need the support of the local community (Wallace Foundation, 2016). The following section considers the various elements that the community can bring to the SCP.

### **2.3 COMMUNITY**

No school is an island. Every school is established within a community (Abraham, 2003) - the community that constitutes the catchment area of the school. The community is a socio-ecological system, with a defined geographical area, and it forms a key part of that area; the community may in effect be synonymous with the neighbourhood. Every school relies on its community for most of the things it requires to be successful, such as teaching and non-teaching personnel, students, equipment, facilities, funds, and other resources. A symbiotic or mutual relationship needs to exist between the school and its community - as neither can do without the other (Abraham, 2003; Okorie et al., 2009). This is the case in Bhutan as elsewhere: community support of the schools plays a significant role, particularly in rural areas where schools depend on community support for almost everything.

### **2.3.1 Reciprocity of school and community**

The literature and research discussed above indicates how school improvement and change are highly contingent on the quality of school leadership. One thing that most researchers agree upon is that schools and school leaders cannot achieve their goals alone (Epstein, 2005). When viewed from a community perspective, the symbiotic relationship between educational institutions and local communities is clear. The outcomes of schools are contingent on the health of the communities they are nested within. Conversely, community well-being is dependent on the quality and success of its educational institutions (Ura et al., 2012). As such, school improvement reform efforts must factor in community context and conditions and implement democratic processes that engage input from various community partners (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2012). This approach to school change requires a significant shift in thinking about relationships, about conversations needed, and about who needs to be included (McKnight & Block, 2010; Sergiovanni, 2000). While the literature referenced above reflects the experience of western education systems, it provides generalisable evidence that change is possible as well as necessary. This is a crucial message for Bhutanese children, schools, and communities, who need to feel a sense of hope that they can survive, thrive, and excel in difficult conditions. These examples have been selected from western education systems because of a lack of literature on this topic in Bhutan.

This study explores SCP programmes that reframe school leadership by integrating different ideas, theories and values into educational leadership standards and practice. The investigation is framed by the premise that SCP relationships result in rich educational experiences that respond to district and community contexts. This perspective situates SCPs in the context of educational leadership from the community perspective, in order to understand their reciprocal nature. It highlights potential direct and indirect relationships between the school and community.

### **2.3.2 Creating enabling conditions for SCPs**

The importance of conversations, trust, and relationships to strengthen partnerships to promote and continue to strengthen SCPs, thereby effecting community change, has been well established (Epstein, 2009). The perceived benefits of direct and indirect relationships within a local ecology, its people and its history have created a deep desire for commitment and accountability in order to create a healthy, vibrant community that provides equitable educational and economic opportunities to all its members (Epstein, 2009). It has been further argued that the ‘care’ element (Noddings, 2013) within the context of community fuels and sustains principals’ passion for school and community change, an element that Bhutanese school leaders should embrace as a civic and moral responsibility, as envisaged in the country’s developmental philosophy of GNH when supporting the SCP.

In relation to education, the local community provides opportunities to organize and facilitate numerous professional development opportunities involving young people, the school, the district education office, staff and personnel. Experiences in local educational settings serve to cultivate, nurture, and reinforce concepts of community in the addressing of social, political, and educational concerns; and local communities can provide insight into content, pedagogies, and conditions required to train, develop, and sustain community-oriented educational leaders (Guajardo et al., 2016). These processes re-emphasise the need to shift the mainstream context by reframing the engagement process to one that nurtures a shared vision of possibility, accountability, and collective leadership (Block, 2008; Guajardo et al, 2016; McKnight & Block, 2010). This shared vision has been missing in current SCPs programmes in Bhutan.

Nnabuo and Emenalo (2002) argue that the term SCP presupposes genuine co-operation in planning and working for the benefit of the school, with the community giving as much as receiving in terms of ideas and resources. It involves a two-way process, an interchange of ideas between the school and the community to ensure mutual, cordial understanding that leads to effective teamwork for the realization of the educational and institutional goals of both the community and the school. School community relations involve a series of activities and communications, with the community seeking to learn more (when necessary) about the objectives, programmes, problems, and needs of the school (Arthur & James, 1957). School management committees, made up of community members, are often considered the

key mechanism to facilitate SCPs; however, there seems to be only minimal evidence of such activities and communications in the case of Bhutan’s SCP programmes.

A community that prescribes conditions for the control of school activities – seldom seen in Bhutan, where school committees are not as active as anticipated in the literature – typically demands to know what is happening in the school (Abraham, 2003; Emenalo, 2008). In Emenalo’s (2008) study, for example, students were ‘processed’ by schools, through teaching, assignments, exercises, research, discussions, excursions, guidance, counselling, and were then returned to the community as ‘refined products’, made up of disciplined, functional and employable individuals, properly equipped to be useful to themselves and to others, to serve the community in different capacities. In the Bhutanese context, however, this reciprocal relationship model is further complicated by infusing the ‘GNH’ policy, the additional expectation. As shown in Figure 2.1, the SCP is viewed as a means of supporting national aspirations. A strong SCP is expected to lead to the successful graduation of students equipped with balanced academic and socio-cultural knowledge.

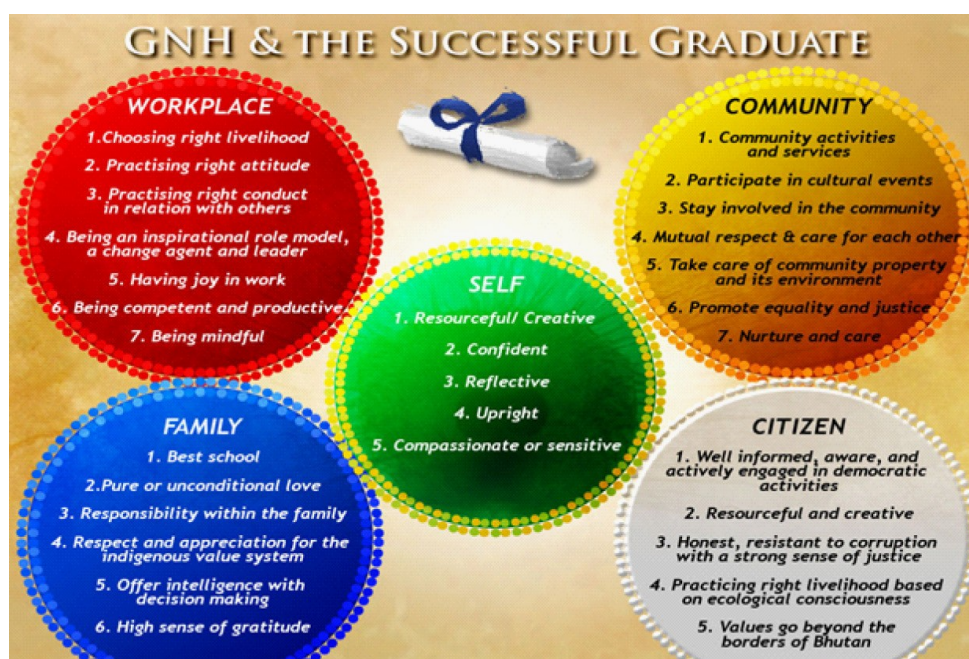


Figure 2.1: Traits expected from a GNH graduate. Source: Ministry of Education (MoE, 2013, p. 12)

The GNH (GNHC, 2012) provides policy direction that reinforces school level policies to strengthen the partnership between the school and the community: the two



social entities which are interdependent, interrelated, and have a mutual relationship. The school exists primarily for educating both the children and the community (Abraham, 2003; Abraham & Leigha, 2007); and the school principal is marked as more or less effective by what they do, and by how they galvanize the efforts and activities of the various stakeholders to ensure that effective teaching and learning takes place in the school; and how the students achieve the targeted objectives. In Bhutan, the community would not ordinarily assist the school in one form or another if the school principal did not establish and maintain friendly and respectful relationships with them.

The Bhutan government's policy of decentralization of education leadership and management to schools and the expectation of the delivery of GNH-infused high quality education further increases the scope of requirements of effective SCPs. The stance in Bhutan is that since the Government has lean budgetary allocations and limited ability to regularly access and support remote communities, the community must become involved in providing all the requirements of schools in terms of classrooms, personnel, furniture, and accommodation for staff and students. The sense of the mutual responsibility of schools and communities to educate children with culturally appropriate values is a core indicator of GNH, one that is of equal value to that of student academic achievement. It is believed that the solution to these problems lies in the school's relationship with the local community and with 'friends' of the school; that this relationship will ensure that the needs of schools in terms of classrooms, personnel, finance, facilities and other resources are met; that whatever is provided will be utilized in the best interest of the children's learning; and that the SCPs have been established with the intention of creating long-standing relationships among schools or school districts and organisations in the local community (Fullan, 2016; Wallace Foundation, 2012). This study provides an opportunity to investigate and better understand the effectiveness and the nature of SCPs in Bhutan, with a focus on school leadership.

## **2.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework in a social research project is important because it provides researchers with a conceptual frame to identify why and how variables relate to each other (Thompson et al., 2011). It also allows for changes in variables to be taken into account as necessary during the life of the project. The overall aim of this study has been to examine current perspectives of Bhutanese school principals and community representatives in relation to SCPs, and to assess the challenges currently faced by school principals in Bhutan with regard to the recently introduced democratic governance and SCPs. As noted above, an SCP is complex and multilayered, involving a range of relationships between as well as within the layers.

Considering the complexity of interactions between schools and communities, Ecological Systems Theory (EST) was identified as a theoretical lens which suits this study (Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Leonard, 2011). The strength of ecological systems theory is that it acknowledges the vertical and horizontal roles of stakeholders and their associated relationships. Although the original model proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1976) was based on child development, the theory has evolved and has been used in many other contexts (Bank & Owen, 2003; Crouter & Head, 2002; Leonard, 2011). It has been described as a system which involves a set of nested systems at successive vertical levels (see Figure 2.2). The original Bronfenbrenner model has four layers (*micro*, *meso*, *exo*, *macro*) of nested systems which constitute the theoretical framework. For the purpose of this study, the influence of three layers is considered - the *micro* system (schools & communities), the *exo* system (district/regional and national MoE), and the *macro* system (GNH). The micro level has two variables, the members of the school and members of the community, which provide the context in which SCP is most important. The four systems are summarised as follows:

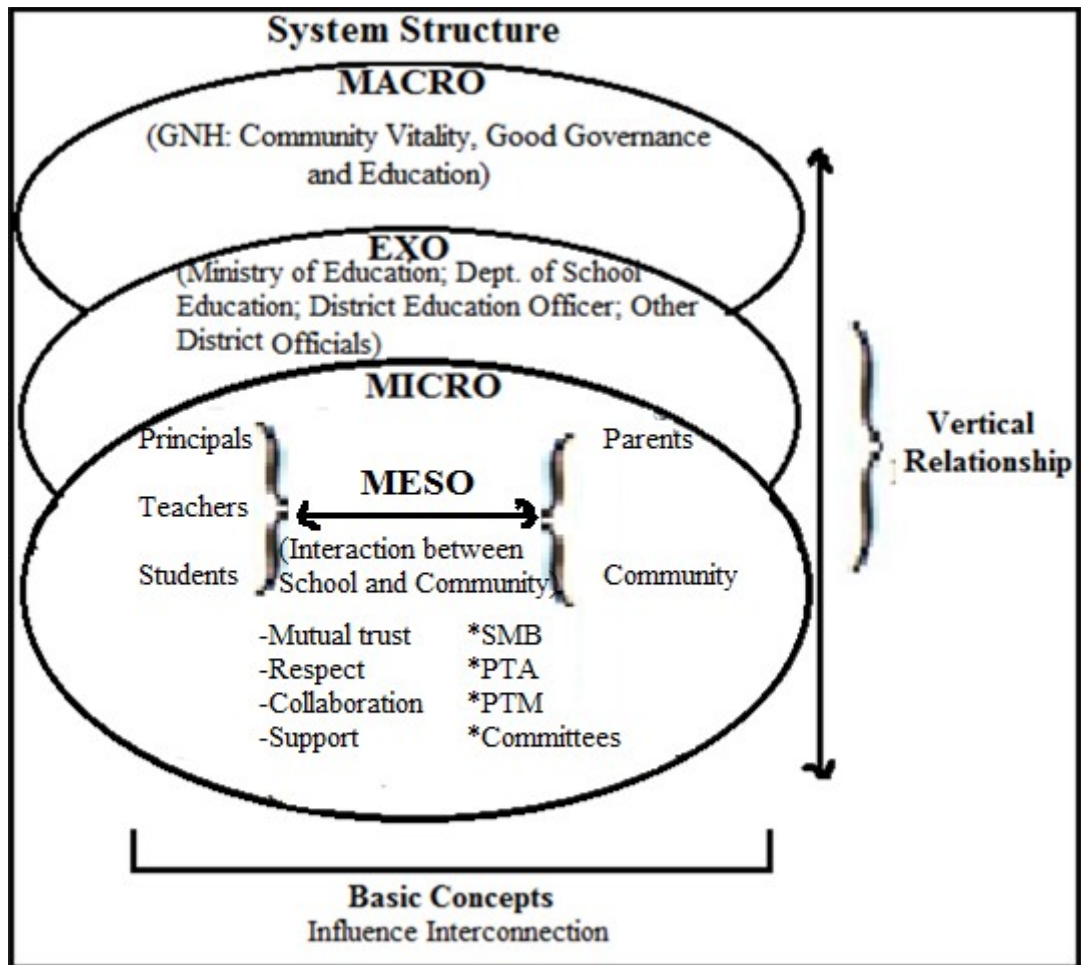


Figure 2.2: System structure of SCP. Adapted from Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1976, 1989)

### 2.4.1 Micro-system

Firstly, the micro-system in ecological models is identified as the engine of the system where most of the activity occurs (Leonard, 2011). The SCP micro-system is the immediate setting in which the SCP plans and coordinates its localised activities. This level includes the school, the teachers, the principal, and respective community members. At this level there are various direct and indirect relationships established between the stakeholders. For example, one direct relationship is that of the coordination of a parent-teacher association programme, where parents interact directly with teachers. An example of an indirect relationship is that of parents supporting children’s work; the parents are not directly responsible for the classroom work but they support their children in completing this work as homework.

Interactions that occur between players in the micro-system do so through the meso-system, which is described next.

#### **2.4.2 Meso-system**

The meso-system involves interactions between two micro-systems (e.g. the Principal and the SCP community members), with these interactions having a direct effect on the nature and strength of the SCLP. As they occur at the micro-system level, they represent a horizontal relationship between participants. Interactions are mainly influenced by the approach taken by the stakeholders in each micro-system. A principal's approach to leadership, therefore (a key focus for this research), will have implications for how the SCP relationships grow to strengthen the rationale for SCPs.

#### **2.4.3 Exo-system**

The exo-system operates externally to the activities under examination; for example, in the case of this study the District Education Officer (DEO) and the National Ministry of Education are situated in the exo-system, which can have a powerful influence in terms of supporting the SCP at the lower levels. In this study, it was anticipated that these stakeholders would have both an indirect and direct influence on the daily activities of SCPs at the micro-system level, but they would not actually be involved in performing daily activities. For example, a DEO might or might not choose to be involved at the micro level but promotes an interconnection between partners and monitors stakeholders and activities. The DEO could use status to influence micro-system activity.

#### **2.4.4 Macro-system**

The macro-system represents the school as a socialising agent through school policy that interprets a nation's culture, ethnicity, and values. In the current research project, the policy of GNH represents the macro-system. The MoE is required to support the infusion of GNH (a macro-system artifact) into its practices as part of their mandate from the parliament. GNH had defined pillars and fundamentals, which are were divided into further variables and factors. These variables and factors are seen at all three levels of the ecological systems (Micro, Exo and Macro) (Bronfenbrenner, 1989) but in varying degrees.

The EST views each system as arising from a setting, which Bronfenbrenner (1989) defined as ‘a place where people can readily engage in face-to-face interaction’ (p. 22). At the lowest level of his nested hierarchy, micro-systems are understood as settings where the focal individual plays a direct role, has direct experiences, and has direct social interactions with others. Using the example of an SCP, the school and the community are *microsystems* within which the school principal, as well as community members, play a direct role, has direct experiences, and directs social interactions with others, representing horizontal relationships within the micro-system.

*Mesosystems* include social interactions between two of the focal individual’s settings. In the example of this study, a mesosystem could include a meeting between a parent and Principal about a school development plan. This meeting represents a social interaction between members of the community’s micro-system and the school’s micro-system. *Exo-systems* include settings that influence the focal individual but in which s/he does not directly participate. While an individual Principal or community representative generally does not play a role in or have direct experience in the education policy-making community, educational policies nonetheless influence the SCPs (representing a vertical relationship). The macro-system also has a vertical influence through the mandates of GNH.

This study has focused only on the micro-level, as the micro system in most ecological models has been identified as the ‘engine’ of the system, the site where most activity occurs (Leonard, 2011); and also because the intention of the study has been to explore the nature and associated challenges of democratic school governance and SCPs. The SCP micro-system is the immediate setting in which an SCP plans and coordinates its localised activities. Moreover, the case of Bhutan, with the country embarked on the journey into the world of democracy, offers an opportune moment for developing and supporting bottom-up initiatives towards realizing the nation’s aspiration of GNH (see Figure 2.2). At the micro-level, GNH is manifested in the form of mutual trust, respect, collaboration, and support rendered to individuals through interactions between schools and communities in the common cause of producing responsible citizens. Also, calling for change at the higher levels of ecological systems requires deeper understanding of the ground realities at the micro-level; hence the focus of this study being on the micro-level.

## 2.4 SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter has reviewed international and Bhutanese literature pertaining to SCPs and has discussed the growth of SCPs internationally and in the Bhutanese context. Ignorance of the concept of SCPs among principals working in Bhutanese schools has been identified and analysed. The review has noted the different types of SCPs around the world, characterised by varied aims and relationships. In Bhutan, the main aim of SCPs currently is to enhance the academic performance of students, to contribute to character building, and to improve school governance (BEB, 2014-2024). Following discussion of the educational context, the concepts of school leadership, community and SCPs have been examined in relation to the key stakeholders, actors, and relationships of most significance in relation to SCPs. This section has provided clarifications and resolved ambiguity in the literature associated with concepts such as school leadership, community and SCPs, and has identified the fact that in a developing country like Bhutan, where there are low public literacy levels, the school principal is of most importance in SCPs.

The effectiveness, beliefs, and attitudes of principals towards SCPs were also reviewed and discussed. This was considered crucial because the success of SCPs largely depends on how the school principal views the role. The acceptance and attitudes of other relevant stakeholders have also been discussed, taking into account the importance of their roles in supporting implementation of the policy of democratic leadership and of SCPs as a key means of realizing GNH. While numerous studies have explored SCPs globally, there has been no study undertaken on SCPs in Bhutan. This study therefore provides useful insights to how principals in Bhutan make sense/meaning of their experiences of SCPs and of democratic governance more broadly.

Using Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological systems theory as a theoretical framework enables this study to explore both vertical and horizontal influences on the development and adoption of SCPs in Bhutan. This critical exploration of the effectiveness of principals in Bhutan in implementing the policy of democratic/shared leadership and establishing SCPs, given the context in which it was conducted (at the micro-level), had the scope to explore from both vertical and horizontal perspectives stakeholders' relationships and their impact, through the strength of ecological systems theory which acknowledges both vertical and horizontal stakeholders and

associated relationships. The following chapter addresses both the theoretical and practical aspects of the methodology used in this study.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **3.0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter describes the research methodology adopted for this study. The objective of the study as noted in Chapter 1 is to investigate *how Bhutanese school principals' leadership and governance practices affected SCPs for the realisation of 'Educating for GNH' through a shared/decentralised school governance system.*

To support the above objective, the following questions were posed:

1. How is *Educating for Gross National Happiness* interpreted and enacted by key educational stakeholders: the principals and community representatives?
2. How are School-Community Partnerships interpreted and enacted by key educational stakeholders: the principals and community representatives?

The rationale for the chosen qualitative approach is explained in Section 3.1. This section also includes discussion of the research design and the descriptive qualitative study and explains how and why the chosen approach addresses the research questions. Section 3.2 presents details of the location of the study site and of the research participants. Section 3.3 discusses the various data collection methods used in the study and also explains the necessary steps taken in implementing the methodology. The use of documents as a source of evidence is also covered in Section 3.3; and Section 3.4 presents the method of data analysis. Discussion of ethics is presented in Section 3.5; and a summary of the chapter is presented in Section 3.6.

### **3.1 RATIONALE FOR QUALITATIVE APPROACH AND DESIGN**

Considering the exploratory nature of the current study, a qualitative approach was considered appropriate to the investigation of the phenomenon of school community partnership as a function of school leadership (Creswell, 2014). The study collected qualitative data to understand participants' perspectives on a selected phenomenon, in this case "school-community partnership". A qualitative approach allows for in-depth investigation of key constructs and relationships between the stakeholders (principals and school communities) and systems (Government) involved in SCP. It is an approach which is typically supported by more socially oriented ontological paradigms (Creswell, 2014), whereby socially constructed 'realities' are seen as complex, value-laden, and contextually specific (Pernecky, 2016). As the



objectives underpinning this study relate to describing and understanding the perspectives of participants (school principals and selected community representatives) within complex relationships and environments (the Bhutanese Education system), a qualitative research paradigm is appropriate. The selection of a qualitative methodology aligns with the nature and intention of ‘how’ and ‘why’ research questions (as per the research questions noted above) which typically frame qualitative studies (Yin, 2003, p. 7).

Qualitative methodology was also considered appropriate as it enables rich and thick description of the case within the research context (Thomas, 2011), in this study that of Bhutanese schools strengthening SCP to support the transition to democratic leadership. The intention of the research is to understand the constructs, contexts and relationships associated with SCP through collecting and analysing the perceptions of participants (the principals and community representatives) within selected schools. Various qualitative studies have been conducted to explore contexts and to describe practices in school leadership in other jurisdictions (e.g., Grootenboer & Hardy, 2017; Heffernan, 2018b), and to identify leadership models that enable school principals to effectively navigate their way through the complex roles expected of them (e.g., Miller & Acs, 2017; Webber & Scott, 2008). In each of these studies, the use of a qualitative design enabled the researchers to explore the context surrounding specific complex practices involved in supporting participatory leadership within a school context.

### **3.2 RESEARCH SITE AND PARTICIPANTS**

This study involves two schools and their respective communities in Bhutan’s capital city of Thimphu (School 2) and in Southern Bhutan (School 1). School 1 is located at a distance of 238 kilometres away from the capital city of Thimphu with a class range of 9 to 12. It is in a semi-urban town with a population of 62,590 people (Population & Housing & Census Report, 2017) where majority of the people carry out farming related works. School 2 is at the heart of the capital city of Thimphu with a class range of 9 to 12. The city has a population of 1,38,736 (Population & Housing & Census Report, 2017) where majority of the people are civil servants and businessmen.

The size of the participant population to a large extent determined the methods employed for data collection. At each school, one principal and three community representative members of the SMB were recruited through convenience sampling, which was adopted to ensure that the participants had the necessary ICT competency to participate in online semi-structured interviews. ICT competency became a criterion when the planned face-to-face interview format was changed to online interviews due to the Covid restrictions in both Australia and Bhutan. Participants who did not have internet access at their homes were helped to attend the school, which had access to a internet connection; this allowed the online interviews to be conducted without interruption. This changed arrangement was made with the consent of the participants and was adopted only when it was convenient and comfortable for them. The participants were invited mainly to (i) explore and share their perception of the relevance of the SCPs; (ii) share their understanding of SCPs and explain what expectations they had from them; and (iii) understand their experience of SCPs and democratic school governance.

The two principals are identified as Principal 1 (P1) and Principal 2 (P2). P1 hails from a farming background and P1 is in late 40s of age. P1 has an experience of more than 10 years working as a school principal with exposure to both rural and urban school settings in Bhutan. P2 also comes from a farming background but has studied mostly in the towns of Bhutan. P2 is in early 50s of age and has more than 15 years of experience working as a principal in higher secondary schools in Bhutan. P2 is one of the best principals in the country.

The six community participants are village head (SMB1) (elected by the local community to head the local government – a subdivision of central government); parent representative (SMB2) (nominated by the parents); a retired teacher (SMB3) (whose interest is in the school system because of knowledge and expertise in the school system); alumni president (SMB4) (retired civil servant); corporate representative (SMB5) (nominated by the corporate bodies), and, business representative (SMB6) (nominated by the business community because of trust and enterprising personalities). All above community representatives have served as the members of SMB for the past two years.

### **3.3 DATA COLLECTION**

Data were collected through online semi-structured interviews with principals and community representatives. The data collection process involved asking participants questions in relation to their involvement in the SCP. The questions were centred around key issues related to the main research questions, and there were both key questions and follow-up questions. Key questions included:

- What kind of school leadership would you prefer and why?
- Why is it necessary to have a SCP? What do you expect from the SCPs?
- What is the potential of, or the challenges associated with, the current model of SCPs?
- In your opinion, how should SCPs function to ensure quality education to produce GNH graduates?

#### **3.3.1 Online semi-structured interviews with principals and community representatives**

Interviews are flexible instruments for collecting data which enable the use of multi-sensory channels: verbal, non-verbal, spoken, and aural. An interview has a specific purpose and is therefore based on predetermined questions such as those noted above. These questions were well-planned, so the interview differed from daily conversation (Cohen et al., 2011). They were informed by and derived from the literature, but directly linked to GNH aspirations and the shared/democratic school leaders' initiative.

King and Horrocks (2010) noted that qualitative interviewing has become a popular research method in the field of the social sciences. It allows the interviewer to be flexible in terms of the order in which the topics are considered, allowing the interviewee to develop ideas and speak more widely on issues raised, while 'the interviewer still has a clear list of issues to be addressed and questions to be answered' (Denscombe, 2010, pp. 174-176). Semi-structured interviews additionally allow the interviewer to include supplementary questions, to probe deeper and to investigate people or topics in greater depth (Minichiello et al., 1995).

Due to the limitation of COVID restrictions and the nature and structure of the research, and also to the profile of the researcher, interviewing was the preferred data

collection technique. The researcher is fluent in both English and Dzongkha (the national language of Bhutan), therefore it was expected that this method of communication would most resemble the kind of conversation with the participants that they may have as a daily occurrence. However, as Denscombe (2010) cautioned, it was important to remember that interviews are not the same as conversations:

Interviewing is no easy option. It is fraught with hidden dangers and can fail miserably unless there is good planning, proper preparation and a sensitivity to the complex nature of interaction during the interview itself.  
(p. 173)

This study therefore employed the method of semi-structured interviews with utmost care, understanding that it provides flexibility with regard to the order in which topics are considered and opportunities for interviewees to develop ideas and cover a wider range of issues (Denscombe, 2010). The less structured method was preferred over the more structured interview method as the study was investigating respondents' attitudes, beliefs and perceptions; this would have been difficult to do in a highly structured format, using structured questions with one predetermined answer, which can lead to making respondents feel that their real opinions have not been represented correctly (Wilson & Sapsford, 2006). The one-on-one interview format allowed the researcher to locate specific information and ideas from specific informants since each interview was conducted independently. This method had the additional advantage of being able to explore a single person's ideas, which were easier to transcribe verbatim as only one person was talking at a time (Denscombe, 2010).

### **3.3.1.1 Procedure**

Upon receiving QUT ethics clearance, the approved ethics letter and the study information were sent to the Ministry of Education, Bhutan. The Director General of the Ministry of Education provided permission and ethical clearance to conduct the study (see Appendix B) at any two public schools in the education districts of the capital city and southern Bhutan. Following confirmation of the granting of permission from the Bhutanese Ministry of Education, the researcher emailed five public schools with good internet connectivity which had been selected through convenience sampling from the list of public schools received from the Ministry of

Education, Bhutan. The two public schools that responded first were selected to be involved in the study.

The two principals were briefed on the research study through an email invitation which included Participant Information and a Consent Form (PICF) for the two principals and for six community representatives (SMB members). The invitation email sought assistance in conducting the study at their school and with their respective community representatives. The researcher then requested the principals who agreed to participate to send the email addresses of all the SMB members of their school and requested questions by email to clarify any doubts or seek more detailed information regarding the research project. The participants were requested to scan and return their email consent form to the researcher.

### **Interview Scheduling and Planning:**

An email with an attached invitation to participate in the research, an information sheet outlining the aims and objectives of the research, and a consent form were therefore sent to principals and all community representatives (SMB members) of the selected schools. Once the participants (2 principals & six community representatives) had sent their signed consent forms, interview schedules were organised, taking into consideration the issue of mutual convenience, particularly in relation to the time difference of four hours between Brisbane and Bhutan. Due to the busy schedules of the participants in Thimpu and Samtse, Bhutan, the interviews were scheduled in the evenings. If the participant consented to schedule the interview at 8:00 pm in Bhutan, it was scheduled for 12:00 midnight in Brisbane, since the timing of the interviews was dictated by the availability and convenience of the participants. The principals and community representatives were contacted individually in advance to discuss schedules, locations, and permission for audio and video recordings. In addition, as detailed in the ethics section, individual written consent to participate in being both audio and video recorded was sought from each participant prior to conducting the interview sessions.

To make the interview effective in terms of ensuring that all desired data and information were collected, the following protocols were followed:

- An online congenial atmosphere was created by the introduction of the researcher
- Introductions and informal conversation were exchanged to build virtual rapport with the informant or interviewee
- An information sheet was provided to the participants via email in advance
- A consent form was handed to the participants to sign via email prior to the meeting for the interview
- To ensure anonymity, information relating to participants and any individuals or locations referred to in the interviews was coded in the transcription (P1, P2 / SMB1, SMB2 etc.)
- Consent for voice as well as video recording was sought from participants in writing via email prior to the commencement of the study and re-confirmed verbally online prior to the commencement of any recording, as per QUT ethical requirements and the ethical requirements of the MoE, Bhutan
- As the interview progressed, additional time was provided when new themes or information emerged to allow participants to further share experiences or when the interviewee had more to contribute
- The interviewer thanked the informant or interviewee for their time and support and ended the interview respectfully (Minichiello et al., 1995).

Each interview was expected to last approximately sixty minutes to allow for the generation of rich and thick data and to avoid imposing time constraints on participants (Morris, 2015). An additional time of fifteen minutes was required ahead of the actual interview time - with consent from the participants - for setting up and doing a test run of the online system to ensure the interview went smoothly. Interviews were conducted online using ZOOM (the online audio-visual communicative tool) to capture the broadest possible range of data in the form of both verbal and non-verbal cues (Curtis & Curtis, 2011; Morris, 2015). Audio recordings of all the interviews were captured using the Voice Memos app on an iPhone. This duplication in audio recording was vital to ensure that data were not lost through device failure and to provide effective data security backup (Morris, 2015).

Beyond the question of the medium of communication, several elements of the interview process remained consistent, and would have done regardless of whether the interview was conducted in-person or via any other medium. Video and audio recordings were taken throughout to record non-verbal cues and reflections to contribute to analytical considerations.

Verbal communication is an integral part of self-reporting methods of data collection. Two languages, English and Dzongkha (the national language of Bhutan) were used in the interviews as per the participants' requests, to optimise fluent conversation, authentic contributions, and genuine participation by the respondents. For clarity of meaning some Dzongkha words were used during the interviews, especially with community representatives (Marshall & While, 1994). The researcher is fluent in both Dzongkha and English. Interestingly, all participants preferred interviewing in English language. Hence, all interviews were done in English.

All interviews were recorded in audio form as well as on video to obviate Denscombe's (2010) perception that human memories are unreliable research instruments. As pointed out by many psychologists, human memory is often prone to partial recall, bias, and error. Audio and video recordings offer permanent recording without disturbing the interview. Barriball and While (1994) explained the common use of audio taping in research in terms of how it offers detailed insight into the performance of both the respondent and the interviewer. Also, it provides access to nuances of interactions between respondents and interviewers, such as intonations.

Utmost care was taken to ensure that the interviews did not extend beyond 60 minutes, bearing in mind Krueger and Casey's (2009) finding that an interview that lasts longer than an hour will likely result in participants being active for the first hour but bored after that. The issue of duration of the interview is important, as participants are being asked to reconstruct their experiences, to consider, relate and reflect on their meaning, and anything less than 60 minutes for an interview would be too short. In light of the above cautions, the interviews were managed depending on the interaction of the interviewee, ensuring there was sufficient time flexibility.

### 3.3.2 Policy document analysis

In addition to the online interviews, the individual school policy documents were analysed specifically to gain information relating to the composition, function, effectiveness, and success of the School Management Board (SMB), to add to the richness and thickness of the interview data. The school policy documents from each school were collected and analysed using content analysis prior to the interviews to understand the policy and practice of harmony as it relates to implementing shared leadership and SCPs, and to be able to triangulate this information with the two interview data sets.

The key government documents used as a source of evidence for this study were the *Bhutan National Education Policy (Draft), 2019*, *A Guide to School Management, 2011*, and the *Bhutan Education Blueprint, 2014-2024*. Document reviews are regarded as one of the most effective methods to generate in-depth textual data in qualitative studies (Cohen et al., 2011; Neuman, 2006). The analysis of these documents was necessary as they outlined the policy on shared leadership and democratic school governance and articulated the need for SCPs for the realization of the 'Educating for GNH' agenda. Analysis of these documents provided insight to the nature of the policy regarding shared leadership, democratic school governance, and SCPs, and informed later analysis of *how* and *why* shared leadership and democratic governance were enacted in current school leadership and governance systems. These data were then able to be validated by claims made by the study participants and considered in relation to possible answers to the research questions specified in Chapter 1.

### 3.3.3 Transcription

All audio recordings of the online interviews with the principals and community representatives were transcribed using symbolic transcription, in line with protocols such as those outlined by Silverman (2009). The decision to personally transcribe the data was supported by the research methods literature, not only for cost-effective reasons but also because this typically provides richer transcriptions as the researcher



is so familiar with the concepts and implied meanings (e.g., Morris, 2015; Silverman, 2009)

### **3.4 DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis was conducted by using content analysis with an a priori approach (therefore this is not a grounded study), where descriptors and codes are explicitly linked to previously established themes noted in the literature review. Within this qualitative study three a-priori themes are derived from the *Gross National Happiness* literature and two from the leadership literature. As noted in Chapter 1, the a priori themes used in the analysis of this study are: *good governance*; *community vitality*; *wholesome education*; *collaboration*; and *respect*. It is hypothesised that these a priori themes underpin the mechanism that strengthens the SCP partnership. Delineating the proposed qualitative study into these five areas provided opportunity for in-depth analysis of the data to reach understanding of how the participants viewed their role in supporting SCP (Yin, 2009).

#### **3.4.1 Thematic analysis of interview data**

Thematic analysis is usually chosen for two main reasons: its accessibility and flexibility, and its usefulness in managing confusing and challenging procedures. As noted above the data generated from the interviews were analysed using a priori thematic content analysis to allow for the identification, organisation, and reporting of patterns from the qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

Thematic analysis (TA) is flexible because it can be conducted in a number of ways. As Braun and Clarke (2012) explain,

TA has the ability to straddle three main continua along which qualitative research approaches can be located: inductive versus deductive or theory-driven data coding and analysis, an experiential versus critical orientation to data, and an essentialist versus constructionist theoretical perspective. Where the researcher locates their research on each of these continua carries a particular set of assumptions, and this delimits what can and cannot be said in relation to the data as well as how data can and should be interpreted (p. 58).

A deductive approach was adopted in this study - a deductive or top-down approach being when the researcher brings to the data a series of concepts, ideas or topics that they use for coding and interpretation. However, in reality coding and analysis often combine these two approaches (Braun & Clark, 2012).

It is worth noting that thematic analysis is referenced throughout the educational leadership literature as an analytical approach consistently used for interpreting qualitative data in terms of latent themes (e.g., Bills et al., 2017; Heffernan, 2018a). The process of thematic analysis in this study was guided by the structures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), who describe the approach as encompassing searching across a data set – in this case interviews or documents - to look for repeated patterns of information related to the a priori themes or meanings.

Five phases of thematic analysis were undertaken in this study, based on Braun and Clark (2012). These were:

1. **Familiarising with data:** The researcher listened to the audio data and watched the video data several times. Some of this happened while transcribing the data. The researcher made notes, highlighted items of interest, and started to think about the meaning of particular data. The aim of this phase was to become intimate with the data's content and to start to observe and identify particular information considered to be relevant to the study. Further familiarisation with the data involved reading through the transcripts to identify key concepts that emerged (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

2. **Generating initial codes:** This was an important first step of carefully organising the data in the systematic analysis process. The *generation of initial codes* was relevant to answering the research questions, the codes being aligned with the a priori themes. This alignment allowed the transcript to be reduced to the underpinning ideas contained in the data, irrespective of the precise words used to describe them (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, a sentence describing the importance of a principal building trust with the community, or of a community being involved in supporting school governance, was coded under the code 'developing mutual trust'.

3. **Searching for categories:** This stage involved a shift from *codes* to *categories*, representing a higher level of synthesis. A number of codes were

aggregated into a single category theme. The sequence was to generate codes then to search for categories by looking to group codes into categories with reference to a deductive guide (Braun & Clarke, 2006), such as the initial conceptual framework, with a priori themes being used to group codes around appropriate categories. For instance, the a priori theme of *good governance* has two categories, *transparency* and *shared leadership*. Similarly, *community vitality* has two categories, namely, *preservation and promotion of culture and tradition*, and *community participation*; *wholesome education* has two categories, namely, *educating for gross national happiness* and *accountability*; *collaboration* has two categories, namely, *synergy* and *support*; and *respect* also has one category, *trust*.

4. **Reviewing potential codes:** This stage involved quality checking of codes against the collated extracts of data and exploring whether the codes in fact worked in relation to the data. This stage provided an opportunity to discard unwanted data and to relocate codes under different categories if required. Some codes were collapsed, reordered, renamed, and expanded as appropriate, in the continuing search for categories. Once all the potential codes were identified and confirmed the categories were reviewed for internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Patton, 2002): the codes were rationalised within categories to ensure that all codes within any one category were related (internal homogeneity), and differentiated through naming and grouping (external heterogeneity) (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2002).

5. **Defining and naming themes:** Defining themes requires the researcher to state clearly what is unique and specific about each theme. Since deductive themes derive from the literature, it was more useful in this case to *clarify* rather than *define* the themes, clarification providing information regarding the theme itself and also its relationships with other themes.

### 3.4.2 Research Rigour

Merriam (2009) argues that triangulation of data analysis is a critical element in ensuring the dependability and comprehensiveness of a qualitative study. Throughout the data collection process, methodological triangulation was conducted through the collation of multiple data sources – via interviews and document analysis (Merriam, 2009). This was necessary to achieve the most accurate and fullest representation of

the participant's perspective or the issue in focus, through the capture of various views from different perspectives. In this study these various views were captured through the recording of both verbal (interviews) and non-verbal cues (video recordings); and data triangulation was achieved through the comparison of policy documents with the interview data. In this way multiple perspectives were captured on the key focus of the case: democratic leadership as a means of managing conflicting expectations of innovation and compliance (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2018).

### **3.5 ETHICS**

#### **3.5.1 Ethics**

While the fundamental ethical principle in all research - irrespective of methodology - is to “do no harm”, ethical issues present in any kind of research experience (Simon, 2009, p.97). All research that includes people requires an awareness of ethical issues that may arise from interactions. Since the current study is based on exploring, examining, and describing people – their views and their actions - it was necessary to comply with the professional and institutional standards of ethical requirements for conducting research involving human participation (Simons, 2009). As suggested by Creswell (2012), relevant permission for data collection was obtained to ensure participants' cooperation in supplying information during the data collection process.

Also, to ensure the anonymity of participants, all data were de-identified and codes were used to refer to them. In this way utmost care was taken to protect the confidentiality of all participants and to reduce the possibility of coercion, in accordance with research ethics protocol (Lichtman, 2014). This study followed the QUT Ethics Committee Guidelines and the ethical requirements of the Ministry of Education, Bhutan, before undertaking the field work.

### **3.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has outlined the research methodology and design adopted for the study, providing information about the research site and the selection of participants. It has described the elements of the qualitative study and the methods of data collection and analysis. It has also offered a reliable framework for capturing principals' and community representatives' views on the subject of democratic school

leadership and SCPs. Finally, relevant ethical considerations have been detailed.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

### 4.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports on the data analysis and findings of this study. The data were collected from *school principals* and *community representatives* (SMB members) as they are the main players involved in the school-community partnership and are therefore the people best positioned to provide informed responses regarding options for strengthening School-Community Partnerships (SCPs). As noted in the previous chapter, data were collected via semi-structured interviews. The pseudonyms P1 and P2 are used for Principal 1 and Principal 2 respectively. Similarly, the pseudonyms SMB1, SMB2, SMB3, SMB4, SMB5 and SMB6 are used for School Management Board members (community representatives) 1 to 6 respectively.

To recap, the overarching research question that guided this study is:

*How do Bhutanese school principals' leadership and governance practices affect school-community partnerships for the realisation of 'Educating for GNH' through a shared school governance system?*

This was supported by the following two sub-questions:

1. How is *Educating for Gross National Happiness* interpreted and enacted by key educational stakeholders, the Principals and community representatives?
2. How are *School-Community Partnerships* interpreted and enacted by key educational stakeholders, the Principals and community representatives?

Further to the discussion presented in Chapter 3, a brief summary of data organisation will be discussed in Section 4.1 to provide a context to the analytical procedures. This section is followed by an account of the initial exploration of the data sets and recaptures the a priori themes (a deductive thematic analysis) as introduced in Chapter 3 (Section 4.2). Sections 4.3 to 4.7 present the data analysis which details a priori themes and categories of both GNH and School Leadership. Section 4.8 then further explores these themes by considering the relationship between macro and micro policies as per the ecological model used in the conceptual framework. Finally, the summary of the chapter is presented in section 4.9.

#### 4.1 DATA ORGANISATION AND CODING

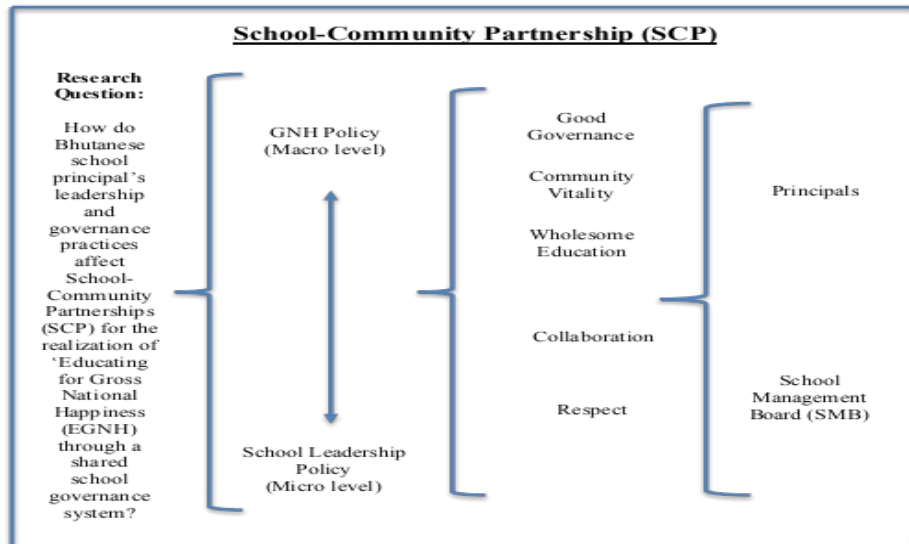
To recap, the data were collected through online semi-structured interviews because of Covid-19 restrictions to travel from Brisbane to Bhutan. Recorded interviews were transcribed and shared with respective participants for member checking. The majority of the participants were in agreement with the meanings captured in the transcripts, with some suggesting minor corrections largely related to language comparability, and these were made. For example, one participant had inserted two words, '*sense of*', into the transcript, which then read as 'to promote the *sense of* oneness in the school'. The email conversations confirming the member checking can be seen in Appendix 1. Once the transcripts were corrected, all were stored in QUT RDSS for safety reasons, and each data set was coded individually for both principals (P1 and P2) and for the SMB members (SBM1, SMB2, SMB3, SMB4, SMB5 and SMB6). Extracts from the data were linked to the individual participant and to the cohort they represented.

Figure 4.1 below provides an illustration of the vertical (macro-micro) relationships and the many horizontal SCP relationships found in the data analysis.





Figure 4. 1: Data Organisation



The central research question relates to how SCP may be strengthened through democratic school leadership, which is bifurcated by the two levels of an abridged ecological system, those of the GNH and School Leadership. In this study GNH represents the Macro level influence on SCP, while School Leadership influences SCP at the Micro level. Under the GNH policy there are three a priori themes derived from the literature: *Good Governance*, *Community Vitality*, and *Wholesome Education*. Likewise, in School Leadership documents there are two a priori themes: *Collaboration* and *Respect*. These five a priori themes guided the data analysis.

The data were imported into NVivo software to be managed and organised. The data coded using the NVivo software were judged against each a priori theme. Each theme was analysed separately, and the analysis is presented below. Finally, having the data coded for GNH and school leadership allowed the researcher to understand how the micro and macro factors noted in the conceptual framework impacted the SCP implementation.

## **4.2 DATA ANALYSIS**

There are two parts to the analysis presented in this chapter. The first looks at the relationship between school and community, referred to as the *horizontal relationship* in the conceptual framework. The second part examines the *vertical relationship* (between macro and micro levels in the ecological system).

As noted above, the data analysis was undertaken in relation to each of the five a priori themes: Good Governance, Community Vitality, Education, Collaboration and Respect. Each theme was organised in Nvivo to allow for interrogation and organisation of the data and to find terms or phrases that linked with the respective theme. Some considerations by the participants included challenges for the school community partnership, community trust, support, partnership enhancement programmes, school community partnerships prominent in rural areas, alumni systems in city schools, advantages of school community partnerships, shared leadership, and educating for GNH. These concepts/principles were then aggregated into key categories associated with the a priori themes as identified from the data. As illustrated in Figure 4.1, the data from school principals and SMB members were analysed separately to identify

categories that contributed to each a priori theme and to identify the level of shared understanding between the two groups. The categories reflect the views of the participants regarding how key actions within each category support the school-community partnership.

The analytical process first reviewed individual interview transcripts to identify the codes that supported the five a priori themes. For instance, Table 4.1 shows the key words in the data and identification of final codes under the theme *good governance*. The brief procedure is presented below showing how the final categories were derived from the data. The analysis scanned the data to find which words and phrases in Table 4.1 were the most frequently used by participants when talking about *good governance*.

**Table 4.1**

***Key words in the interview transcripts on Good Governance and final categories***

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Key words</b>	<b>Final categories</b>
<b>P1</b>	Collective decision; democratic/election process; student council body; SMB; parents' support group; parent-teacher meeting.	Shared leadership and accountability.
<b>P2</b>	Leadership matters	Shared leadership
<b>SMB1</b>	Democratic leadership; shared leadership; transparency; educating for Green school; SMB.	Shared leadership and accountability.
<b>SMB2</b>	SMB; shared leadership	Shared leadership
<b>SMB3</b>	SMB; integrity, trust, professionalism; commitment; democratic/shared school leadership; parent-teacher meeting.	Shared leadership and accountability.
<b>SMB4</b>	Shared responsibilities; collective decision-making; decision-making power with parents and alumni; parent-teacher association.	Shared leadership and accountability.
<b>SMB5</b>	School board; alumni; school leadership team; collective decision; democratic processes/election.	Shared leadership and accountability.

The key words in Table 4.1 were selected based on the frequency count of the words associated with good governance in each individual participant's interview transcript. These codes were then reviewed to aggregate and derive meaning. For example, the category 'shared leadership' was straightforward, since all eight participants (2 principals & 6 SMB members) explicitly mentioned it in their

interviews. It is therefore important and is included as one of the final categories under the theme ‘good governance’.

Similarly, the second final category ‘accountability’ under ‘good governance’ was derived based on the meaning of the key words associated with good governance. For example, ‘accountability’ was implicit in Principal 1’s commentary on ‘student council body’:

*We also have a student council body where student counsellors and class captains find time to meet together at least once a month to thrash out the issues that they have and also to put up the suggestions to the school administration (P1).*

This statement was coded and combined with other similar statements in the category ‘accountability’. It was also mentioned as an actual enactment of actions by the school administration as suggested by the student council body. The student council body therefore appears to provide some oversight of their expectations, and therefore implies accountability from the school administration.

On a similar note, the use of the words ‘Educating for Green School’ by SMB1 was identified as an instance of SMB1 suggesting ‘accountability’ as a key mechanism for supporting the concept of *Educating for Green School* which is connected to GNH aspirations. As GNH is a national agenda every individual and institution in Bhutan - such as a school - has the responsibility to fulfil its aspirations. Through implementation of the concept of *Educating for Green School* the aim is to produce GNH graduates by taking care of both the physical and the psycho-social environment to enable students to grow as productive and responsible citizens of the country. Embedded in the *Educating for Green School* concept, therefore, is the accountability of schools in Bhutan to mould future citizens into GNH graduates: the ultimate goal of *Educating for Green School* is to achieve the aspirations of GNH. This idea is implied by SMB1 when referring to *Educating for Green School*:

*We also have our Educating for Green School like that. These are all parts of Gross National Happiness (GNH) (SMB1).*

The above comment is reinforced by SMB6:

*Some of the GNH principles that we use is normally the concept of Green School as it is the key point of Educating for Gross National Happiness. Green*

*School does not mean making only the environment green, but it is all the values that we can infuse (SMB6).*

It is clearly understood, as indicated in the above comment, that schools in Bhutan have the responsibility for producing GNH graduates through the infusion of GNH values in curriculum delivery and in other programmes associated with the delivery of Educating for Green School curricula. The comment on Green School indirectly references the responsibility and accountability of schools in Bhutan in relation to fulfilling the aspirations of GNH. This illustrates the existence of a vertical relationship between the GNH policy mandates and school leaderships' responsibility for accountability.

In a similar way the word 'SMB' (School Management Board) as used in the data is closely related to good governance, with 5 out of 8 participants explicitly mentioning it, indicating its apparent importance. Implied in this term is the concept of 'accountability', as the SMB functions as the operator of checks and balances between the school and the community to achieve the aspirations of GNH. Also, as the SMB is the highest decision-making body in the school governance system in Bhutan, accountability is one of its key functions. Power and accountability go hand in hand. SMB has the power to make decisions, it is therefore bound to have accountability and responsibility. Thus, accountability has been established as one of the categories under *good governance*.

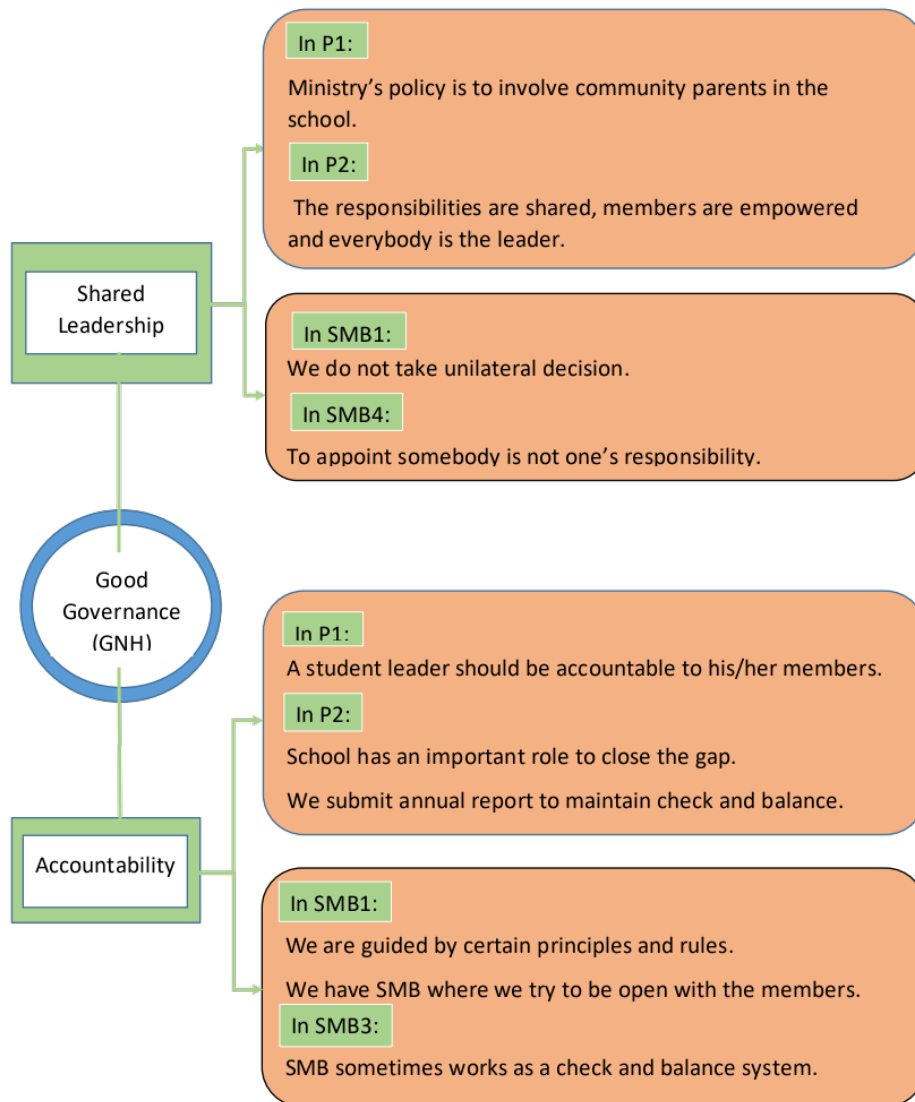
The above procedure was applied to identify the final categories of the remaining four a priori themes. In line with the study's methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2012), the emerging categories were subsequently mapped against each of the five a priori themes, which are discussed below.

### **4.3 GOOD GOVERNANCE**

The theme of *good governance* was derived from the GNH policy directive which emphasises concepts such as responsibility, empowerment, non-discrimination, and commitment (GNH Centre Bhutan, 2016). One of the major aspects of good governance as conceived by GNH is that of service delivery, which aligns with the school governance system in Bhutan whereby schools deliver educational services throughout the country. Analysis of the data revealed that good governance is manifested in two categories, 'shared leadership' and 'accountability'. Extracts from the data are presented as codes to illustrate principals' and community

representatives' views regarding how the theme of good governance may influence school community engagement. Each of the categories are discussed below.

Figure 4. 2: Good Governance



### 4.3.1 Shared Leadership

As shown in Figure 4.2, both principals in the study mentioned the importance of sharing the responsibility of running a school with community members. They also talked about the need to empower and engage community representatives (SMB members) in all aspects of school governance. Being a school principal in Bhutan is seen as a privilege to serve; and the principals described shared leadership as the

sacred responsibility bestowed upon them by the Ministry, to help schools work jointly with the community to provide education services.

*So, for me, the school community partnership is where the parents and other stakeholders are directly involved for the development of the school, be it infrastructure development and imparting of wholesome quality education (P1).*

While the schools in Bhutan are mandated by the Ministry of Education to involve the community in governing the school the above comment by a Principal describes how this happens, as both direct and indirect involvement. The comment indicates the Principal's acceptance of all members' roles in leadership, and his understanding of the Bhutanese government's emphasis on shared leadership. In order to enhance school community partnerships, principals practice shared leadership by sharing responsibilities, and empowering and engaging their community in school affairs. As P2 commented,

*The responsibilities are shared, members are empowered and everybody is the leader in the school (P2).*

Community representatives (SMB members) also acknowledged the importance of collective decision-making and shared responsibility in running the school, as shown in Figure 4.2. SMB1, for example, stated that '*we do not take unilateral decisions*' (SMB1), meaning that it is neither the SMB members' nor the principal's sole responsibility to make decisions. The responsibility is shared. In addition, SMB1 commented that:

*...teachers alone in the school and school alone cannot meet and then achieve without the support of our parents, guardians and anyone who have direct engagement with the student. So that's what I believe (SMB1).*

The SMB member here is describing the shared responsibility of determining who is included in making decisions. SMB members do not appoint themselves; this is a shared responsibility. Implicit in the above extracts is the recognition that the school governance system acknowledges and practises collective decision-making through the sharing of responsibilities. This is an integral part of shared leadership that further cements the relationship between school and community.



### 4.3.2 Accountability

Accountability is about being responsible to others; and it is considered by the participants as an integral part of good governance. Two types of accountability are discussed in this chapter: accountability at the macro level (GNH) and accountability at the micro level (school leadership). Accountability at the macro level is discussed here while accountability at the micro level is discussed in Section 4.5.3.

Accountability is intertwined with the role and function of the school as schools in Bhutan are seen as key social institutions that hold a community together and fulfil the mandate of the GNH policy. Being accountable to the community is key to adopting mutual responsibility. This was noted by P1:

*I don't find much difficulties in implementing the GNH principles and also maintaining the School community partnership because both go together. So, I can say that, since the policy itself says that Community parents should be involved in the school we have been guided by that policy and then so far we are following the policy framed by the ministry (P1).*

Schools in Bhutan are not only seats of academic learning; they are also considered as a sacred place for the propagation of GNH values, as GNH policy acknowledges that unless the country has well disciplined, knowledgeable, and productive citizens, the Bhutanese community can become very fragmented. Bhutanese schools are therefore accountable for producing GNH graduates, which in turn will help close the gap between students and parents and students and community members, helping to further strengthen school-community partnerships.

Considering the crucial role that schools in Bhutan play in materialising the GNH aspirations, the government mandates certain policies and regulations to be observed by the schools in order to ensure accountability. This was noted by SMB1:

*We are guided by certain principles, rules that is put in place. We follow school policy where it gives us guidance as to how to go about it whenever we have to make any decision that has something to do with the school be it in the learning or be it in the teaching staff, anything. So we have a policy or rules that guide us. So we are bounded by that one and also we follow school policy that is prescribed by the Ministry of Education and that is what we also try to follow (SMB1).*

It is indicative in the above comment that there is limited sense of autonomy for schools in Bhutan; they are expected to follow the policy prescribed by the Ministry of Education. Such compliance can be viewed as a source of tension with school-based management, as noted by P2:

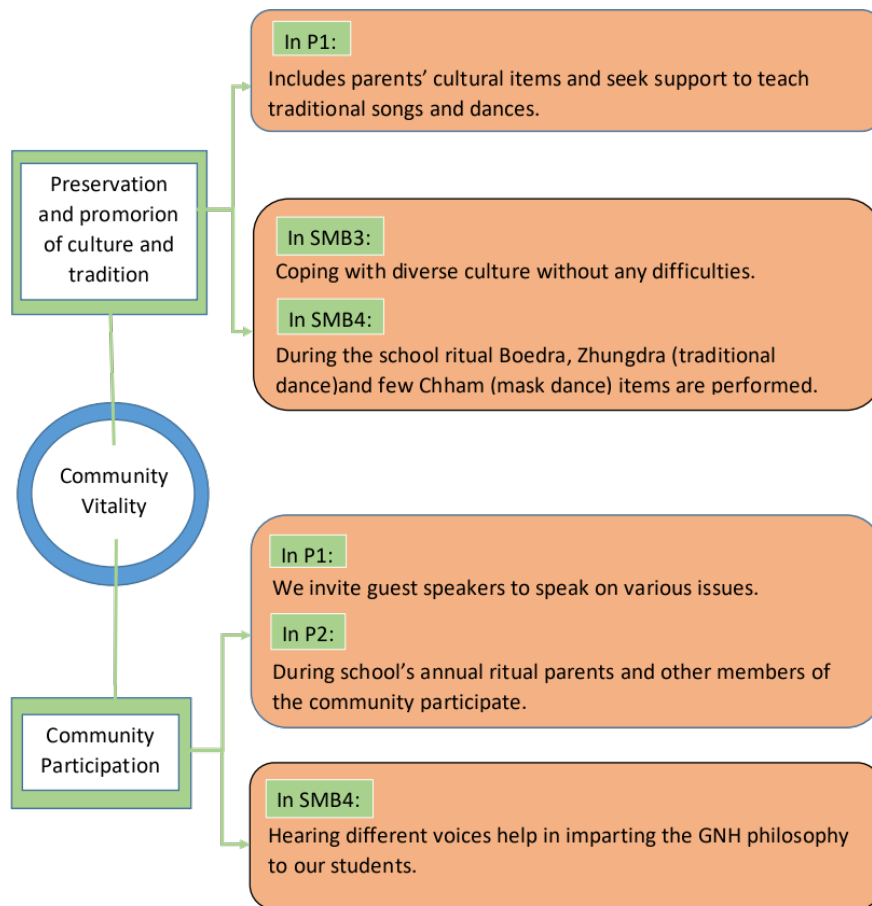
*Ours is something that where the school has no liberty to really implement our own curriculum. Our curriculum at the moment is a more of a prescriptive and we already have a pre prepared curriculum and the school delivers that. So that way we are little more confined, which may or may not be good, but to me I feel this is also one way is helpful so that we have the link with the Ministry (P2).*

The above extract indicates that school principals may not be totally happy about the current system of curriculum delivery due to the perceived rigidity created by the prescriptive and pre-prepared curriculum, which may be seen to jeopardise the autonomy and accountability of the schools. While the MoE policy advocates for schools to develop individual mechanisms to strengthen SCP, school principals may feel that there is no provision for them to introduce their own initiatives, and that the schools have no liberty to implement their own curriculum. This is in itself in contradiction to the government's policy of democratisation, thereby creating tension between aspiration and implementation. Nonetheless, the school principals affirm that on one level such influence is necessary as it allows schools to maintain the link with the Ministry (macro), as noted by P2 in the above extract.

#### **4.4 COMMUNITY VITALITY**

The theme of *community vitality* has been derived from GNH and the values that are closely related to it are those of reciprocity, fairness, family closeness, equality, unity, cooperation, sociability and cohesion. Principals are expected to apply these values, which are manifested at the school level under *preservation and promotion of culture and tradition* and *community participation*. Figure 4.3 below presents data from participants in these two areas of community vitality. A fuller description of these concepts follows.

Figure 4. 3: Community Vitality



#### 4.4.1 Preservation and promotion of culture and tradition

Cultural, moral, ethical, cardinal, and spiritual values are imparted to the students through various activities and programmes, such as the inclusion in programmes of parents' cultural items, and seeking support from parents to teach traditional songs and dances to the students. This was noted by P1:

*We include parents' cultural items in school programme and seek their support to teach traditional songs and dances (P1).*

Community involvement includes a range of activities that honour the customs and rituals of Bhutanese life, as described by P2:

*Because normally in Bhutanese custom we have a system that any ritual irrespective of the venue and the sponsors, people can join the ritual on voluntary basis, and they come. Similarly, during school annual ritual parents and others come to the school on that day and then do their offering on the altar and then and get blessings for their own well-being, and also for the well-being of other people. So that is one avenue where we create how the community is brought on board (P2).*

This extract shows how school and community work together to preserve and promote culture and traditions through the inclusion of parents' cultural practices which are shared by others. This extract also indicates how community vitality can strengthen school community partnership.

The community representatives (SMB members) also agree that the values detailed by P2 above are imparted through various programmes and activities, such as annual cultural rituals and programmes such as Boedra, Zhungdra, and mask dances, as noted by SMB4:

*During the school ritual we also have some programme on Boedra, Zhungdra (traditional song/dance) and few Chham (mask dance) items (SMB4).*

The data presented here indicate that the community representatives are cognizant of SCPs strengths and potential to support, preserve and promote their cultures and traditions, especially through recognizing and valuing the uniqueness of each culture and tradition, as shown in Figure 3. The values of unity and cohesion are also explicitly referenced by noting being in unity amidst different cultures, as expressed by SMB3:

*We are actually coping with the diverse culture here without even the smallest difficulties in fact (SMB3).*

This comment reflects the strengths and potential associated with recognising and valuing the uniqueness of every culture and tradition. This participant's valuing of the preservation and promotion of culture and tradition strengthens school

community partnership and contributes towards the creation and nurturing of a harmonious society.

#### **4.4.2 Community participation**

Schools in Bhutan generally maintain cordial relationships with their communities and encourage them to share their knowledge, for example by involving them in school activities as guest speakers and also through inviting them to participate in annual rituals, as noted by the principals in Figure 3. For example:

*We invite guest speakers to speak on various issues ranging from climate change, environmental issues and so on (P1).*

Similarly, P2 stated:

*Whenever we have annual ritual in the school we have the participation of parents and other members of the community (P2).*

Here the principals have clearly identified key areas where community members participate and contribute in delivering socio-cultural knowledge.

On a similar note, community representatives acknowledged advantages associated with community participation, as they discussed the role of parents in the school. For example:

*...we also try to invite parents to take up some of the lessons like commerce class and economic class. We have tried to call and invite few parents who are practitioner in those subjects. So, this is also one direct way of involving those community people and...another is through sports events. (SMB1)*

This was a common theme that emerged through the data, that parents or other community members with particular expertise were invited into the class to share their knowledge and experience with the students. Through this level of community participation, the school is able to include diverse voices from all contexts, which contributes to jointly imparting GNH values to the students, as noted by SMB4:

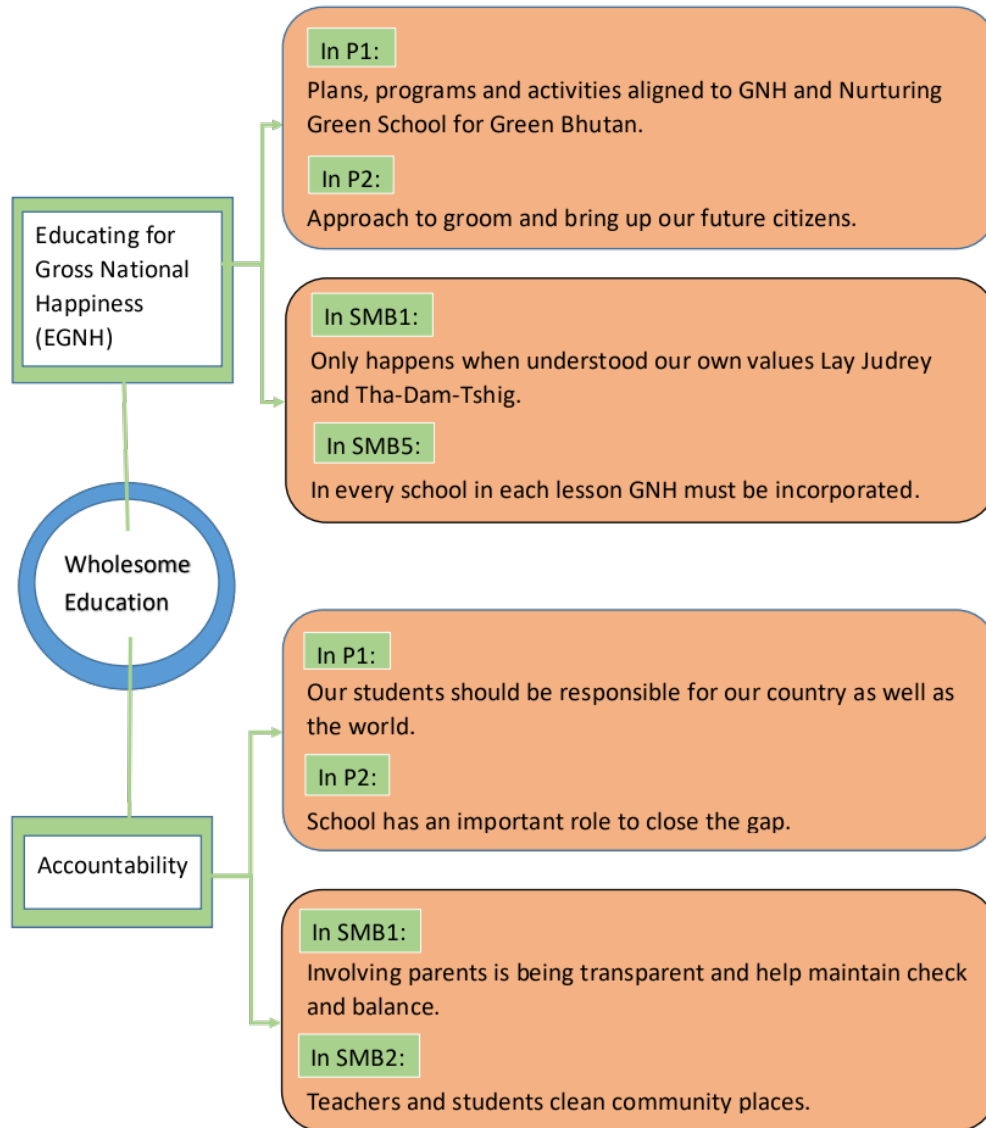
*We are hearing a different voice from the different corners and then it is really helping in imparting the GNH philosophy to our students (SMB4).*

By including the different voices, schools are preserving and promoting Bhutanese culture and traditions, and further strengthening the school-community connection, thereby contributing to community vitality.

#### **4.5 WHOLESOME EDUCATION**

This theme has been incorporated into the Bhutanese education system through the GNH indicator *wholesome education*. This is the concept that promotes holistic, contemplative, eco-sensitive, and culturally responsive educational approaches which combine theory and practice: they are both taught and put into practice (GNH Centre Bhutan, 2016). Wholesome education is manifested in two forms, *Educating for Gross National Happiness (EGHN)* and *Accountability*. Figure 4.4 (below) illustrates the important elements of a wholesome education, such as Green Schools, the GNH values, and the roles and responsibilities of schools and communities.

Figure 4.4: Wholesome Education



#### 4.5.1 Educating for Gross National Happiness (EGNH)

Wholesome education in the Bhutanese context is known as *Educating for Gross National Happiness (EGNH)*; it is the overarching philosophy of the education system in respect to formal and informal education and to both schools and university-level education services. It is vital for education leaders to recognize the important role that education needs to play in a range of areas such as civic duties and social development, the character building of citizens, and the transmission of cultural values. Schools in Bhutan therefore attend to these values and imperatives by aligning

the school's plans, programmes, and activities with the principle of Gross National Happiness; and this is done in significant part through the involvement of parents and the broader community.

This philosophy can be considered as similar to 'values education' in western systems; the element of education that concerns itself with the moral aspects of education; the elements that contribute to making the individual into a good citizen, someone who is conscious of their innate strength. ENGH is adopted by the Bhutanese education system, as noted by P2 as shown in Figure 4. For example, P2 explained:

*EGNH is an approach to groom and to bring up our future citizens of our country (P2).*

The approach focuses on social and community responsibilities that each individual shares in Bhutan. It is easier said than done, however - to fulfil the aspirations of EGNH. However, one area where schools in Bhutan seem to be progressing well is in relation to the physical and psycho-social ambience. Progress in these areas has been made possible mainly through the guidance provided to schools by the policy *Nurturing Green School for Green Bhutan* as noted by P1 who referred to:

*...plans, programs and activities aligned to GNH and Nurturing Green School for Green Bhutan (P1).*

Principal (P1) elaborated further on how the community is involved in imparting the values of GNH:

*...we also invite guest speakers to speak on various issues ranging from climate change, environmental issues and so on. We invite the guest speakers from the community, so this is also very much in line with our educating for Gross National Happiness in terms of protection and preservation of rich diversity or a natural environment... Likewise, other pillars of Gross National Happiness, like good governance, are also taken care of by inviting guest speakers from the community to give talks on the good governance and other areas as well (P1).*

As mentioned above, the concept of Nurturing Green School for Green Bhutan focuses on two aspects: *physical ambience* and *psycho-social ambience*. The physical



ambience involves the external factors, environmental greenery and aesthetic greenery; while the psycho-social ambience relates to imparting/establishing the internal factors of cultural greenery, intellectual greenery, moral greenery, spiritual greenery, and social greenery in every student in the country, with the objective of shaping and producing productive future citizens, as noted by P2 above. These *greeneries* are integral elements of the provision of Wholesome Education to all future citizens of the country. The above extracts from the data indicate that the school principals are well aware of the concept of Green School (macro) as the overarching element - alongside GNH - of the national education policy. School and community leaders accordingly align their plans, programmes, and activities with the principle of GNH as a means of providing Wholesome Education. This further emphasizes the need for strong partnerships between schools and communities: designing and providing *wholesome education* demands joint efforts of both the school and the community.

It is significant to note that - like the school principals - the community representatives have similar levels of understanding of the importance of EGNH and of this alignment with Green School policy:

*Now what we practice in the school is, we believe in wholesome education. So, like cultural preservation and...when we try to say cultural preservation is by giving a platform for student to come up with their culture show and there we involve parents... So this is how we try to achieve the principle of GNH, by involving the parents, which means what we are doing is transparent even to them. So, maybe this is one way of achieving GNH. We also have our educating for Green School...these are all parts of Gross National Happiness (GNH).*

Members of the SMB identified that one strategy adopted to impart GNH values to the students is the infusion of GNH values in every lesson taught:

*In every school in each lesson the GNH must be incorporated (SMB5).*

The community representatives are also aware that such transmission of values can only happen when those transmitting them understand and practice the core Bhutanese values of *Tha-Dam-Tshig* (sacred commitment) and *Lay-Judrey* (cause and effect) themselves, as noted by SMB1:

*Core values can only happen when we ourselves understand our own values like Lay Judrey (cause and effect), Tha-Dam-Tshig (sacred commitment), so these are everything (SMB1).*

It is clear from the data that the values of GNH are not only to be imparted to students in the classroom; they must also be part of the everyday practices of the school community members.

#### **4.5.2 Accountability**

As indicated earlier in the Chapter, accountability is a theme which appears throughout the data at every system level. It is visible, for example, in the student leaders' enactment of being accountable to their members, as noted by P1 in Figure 4.4.

*A student leader should be accountable to his/her members (P1).*

*...our children should learn right from their school days...like taking care of everything, being accountable to their teacher, being accountable to their friends, if a student is a student leader or class captain, one should be accountable for their members...So, even in the teachers' lesson plan we have a space where we also include GNH values, and this is to guide teachers to teach in the classroom to instil those values or target those values to students (P1).*

This extract indicates leaders at all levels in the system are expected to feel responsible and to be transparent in all their dealings with respect to school governance and their community members. This kind of accountability not only builds trust between the leader and the community members, it also strengthens the school-community partnership. In essence, all members of the school community are ideally accountable to each other and to the community as a whole.

One aspect of accountability noted by P2 and included in Figure 4.4 relates to record keeping and the requirement to report on finance and performance.

*We have the system of submitting annual report to the higher authority and that is how we maintain the check and balance (P2).*

This comment explicitly describes the requirement that accountability is maintained legitimately and systematically as a means to ensure checks and balances

as required by the MoE. This is deemed necessary due to the noble role of the schools in Bhutan and also in order to maintain an effective relationship between the macro (reporting upwards to the Ministry of Education via the District Education Offices) and micro levels (Principal and SBM reporting to the community) of successful school-community partnership.

In congruence with data from the school principals' commentaries, the community representatives also noted two aspects of accountability. The first relates to the sharing of information with the community through the School Management Board (SMB):

*We have SMB where we try to be open [sharing information] with the members as much as we can (SMB1).*

This comment references the need for transparency between the community representatives (SMB members) and the other members of the community; and shows that transparency is driven by the accountability that they have towards the broader community members. Such openness between them not only builds trust, but also enables members to share information with confidence - which again helps in strengthening the school-community partnership.

The second aspect is more related to record keeping and reporting on school performance, including finance requirements, as was noted by SMB3:

*SMB sometimes works as a check and balance system [performance monitoring] (SMB3).*

This comment reinforces what was noted above by P2, that accountability is maintained legitimately as a systemic requirement.

The influence of Buddhism is evident in the data. As a Buddhist, every Bhutanese strongly believes in serving others without any expectation in return. One way this is manifested is in the practice of teachers and students physically cleaning community places:

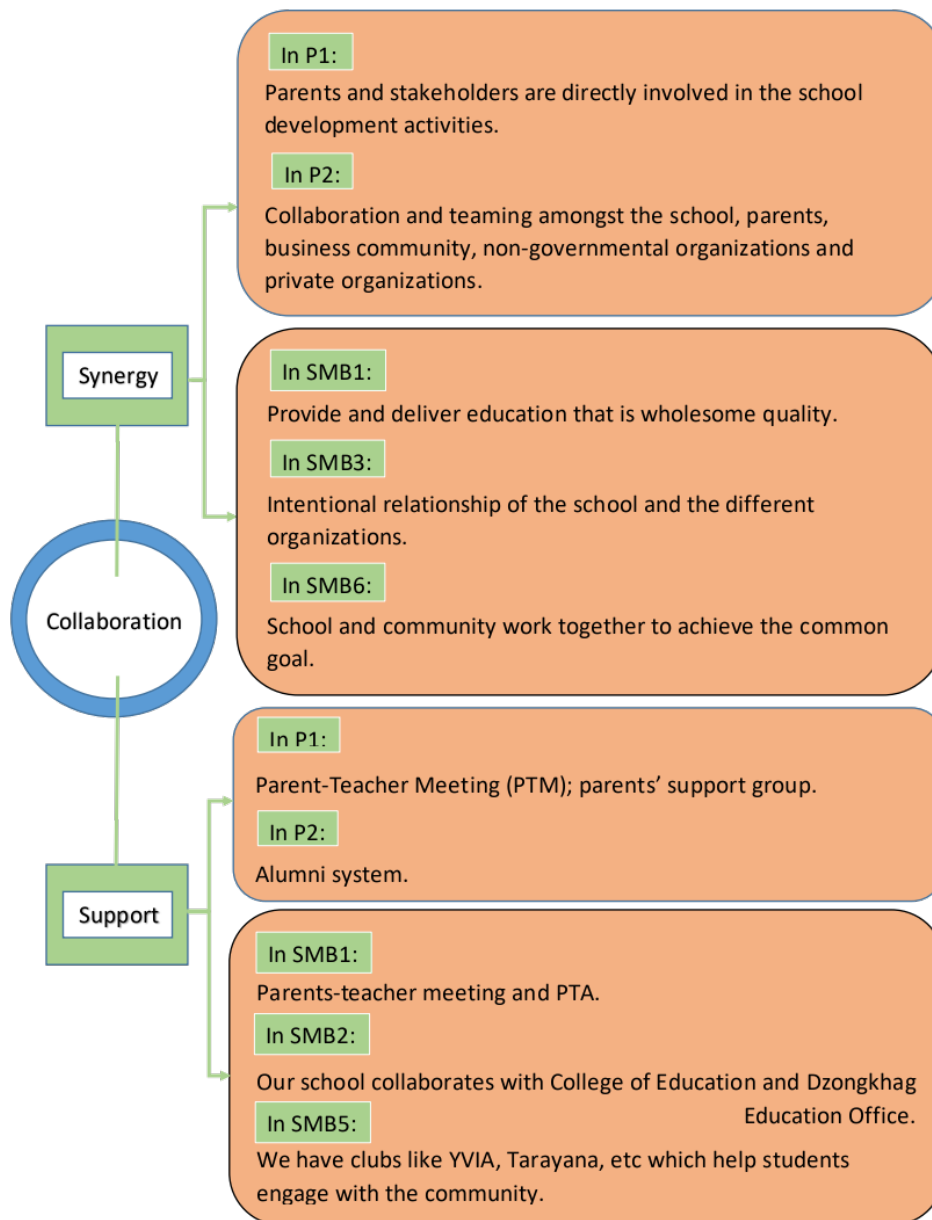
*Teachers and students go out of the school and clean community places (SMB2).*

Both teachers and students take this as an opportunity to serve the community; but they also believe that they are accountable to the community. This is another illustration of how the Buddhist value of interdependence binds schools and communities together; and of the belief that the health of the school will depend on the wellbeing of the community and vice-versa. As a Buddhist, one is naturally accountable to one's own community, therefore actions such as cleaning are common activities carried out as an element of *wholesome education* by all schools around the country.

#### **4.6 COLLABORATION**

Collaboration is a key mechanism in ensuring the success of SCP. A mutually positive relationship between the school and its community is essential, as neither can do without the other. In Bhutan, community support for schools plays a significant role; schools depend on this for most of their resources because of the lean budgetary allocations from government. Adherence to the principles of GNH is important, as GNH encourages the community to give generously to schools (in line with the Buddhist value of sharing), to provide the education needed to ensure that children become productive and caring citizens. A sense of the mutual responsibility of schools and communities to educate children with culturally appropriate values is a core indicator of GNH; and this would be impossible to achieve without collaboration between school and community. This collaboration involves a range of activities and communications, including conversations, support, relationships, and partnerships; all crucial elements needed to promote and strengthen SCPs. Schools in Bhutan build and strengthen collaboration through different forms of 'synergy' and 'support' as shown in Figure 4.5; these are the key components of Collaboration as indicated in the data: *synergy* - striving to achieve a mutual purpose as an outcome from the SCP - and *support* - operating between school and community members. These two elements are described in more detail below.

Figure 4.5: Collaboration



#### 4.6.1 Synergy

Synergies are of various forms and exist at both micro and macro levels. The purpose of such synergies varies according to the requirements of each school and its community and how they interact with district and central MOEs. The main synergy between schools and communities in Bhutan relates to achieving the common goal of providing Wholesome Education (EGNH) to the future generations of the country. As indicated in Figure 4.5 above, synergy occurs between the school and various members of the community. To this effect, both principals agreed on the need to

involve their community, including parents, business communities, non-governmental and private organisations, as shown in Fig 5. P2 commented:

*In fact, when we say partnership, it doesn't really confine with the parents only. It also goes beyond the parents of the school in the sense that I would like to say if it is in our Bhutanese context, then we have other stakeholders like the business community, then likewise other non-governmental organizations, other private organizations and so on and so forth (P2).*

As this comment indicates, schools in Bhutan have various different relationships, not only with parents of their students but also with other stakeholders, with various members of the community who engage in different activities to collectively provide a Wholesome Education (EGNH) to the future citizens of Bhutan.

The community representatives also recognised the purpose of synergy as providing and delivering education that is wholesome, as noted by SMB1:

*The school alone cannot achieve in delivering what it is mandated to do, because when it involves students, today, we also have to take care of the parents and it also has to do with other stakeholders, not only parents. Then we also see relevant stakeholders like Dzongkhag (District), DEO (District Education Officer) and then anyone who has direct and something to do with the children. So this is what we believe - that even the community must come together when it comes to providing and delivering education that is wholesome quality. So teachers alone in the school and school alone cannot meet and then achieve without the support of our parents, guardians and anyone who have direct engagement with the student (SMB1).*

This comment explains why there has to be horizontal synergy between the schools and relevant stakeholders within the community, detailing the common purpose of school and community as mandated by the government (the vertical relationship) to provide Wholesome Education and produce GNH graduates who are productive and responsible citizens of the country.

The community representatives believed this synergy to be an intentional relationship, needed to achieve the common purpose, as shown in Figure 4.5. As SMB3 explained:

*School community partnership is an intentional relationship of the school and the different organizations and institutions in the vicinity for educating children in particular and the community and society in general (SMB3).*

This comment further clarifies the larger purpose of synergy between school and community: besides educating children, synergy is useful for educating the community and society at large. This objective is very relevant in the context of Bhutan since the majority of people in the community/society are illiterate; and great expectations are placed on students today to gain a wholesome education to become active citizens. Without such an education the population is left in ignorance, with no incentive to become active participants in society; this situation was implicitly acknowledged by six of the participants in this study, and explicitly mentioned by two others. For example, from the school perspective, P1 commented:

*We also have quite a large number of parents who are not educated. Since they are uneducated, sometimes they don't participate and even if they participate they don't understand. Hence, there is no active participation (P1).*

From the community perspective, SMB3 observed:

*Most of the parents in the community here are illiterate. Basically if parents are illiterate there cannot be effective partnership and then sometimes they may not be able to observe or absorb what is happening in the school and what is being informed to them. Sometimes even the literate communities are not very aware of the education system of the country. So, that is another challenge which I feel we have it in our school system (SMB3).*

The above extracts provide insight to the challenges that schools and communities in Bhutan face. On one hand the schools and communities are mandated to fulfil the noble aspiration of GNH, while on other hand they are challenged by difficulties such as lack of active participation from parents because of their low literacy levels. Therefore, while the partnership between school and community is necessary for mutual benefit in general and for the fulfilment of common purpose in particular, to facilitate this partnership, school leaders may be expected to educate the community.

SMB3's comment notes that sometimes even the literate communities are not very aware of the education system of the country, which then made the delivery of

EGNH more difficult. The need for synergy between the school and the community is evident in SMB 6's comment:

*School-Community Partnership is where school and community work together to achieve the common goal for the betterment of the school, for the betterment of the students and may be even for the betterment of the people who are working in the school. So, I believe this is about working in partnership to create a stronger synergy where school and community come together (SMB6).*

The data revealed that creating synergies between the school and the community members should be a deliberate act born out of a common purpose and goal, which in turn may provide a Wholesome Education for future generations.

#### **4.6.2 Support**

The schools in Bhutan seek support from the community through various programmes and activities like parent-teacher meetings, parents' support groups, and an alumni system, as noted by both the principals in Figure 4.5. Similarly, the community representatives also agreed that the school garners support from the community through parent-teacher meetings, the parent-teacher association, by collaborating with colleagues and the district education office, as noted by SMB1 and SMB2. P2 described how that support can come in various forms and sometimes it is the school's responsibility to directly ask for help:

*We solicit supports both in terms of kind as well as in terms of cash and whenever we have that kind of needs we receive supports. And that is also another way how we bring the community on board, for that matter, in partnership with the school and the community (P2).*

The above data refers back to the government expectation that the SCPs will work as a team effort to support the education of children. In addition, the schools not only receive support from the community but also provide support to the community through clubs like Youth Volunteers In Action (YVIA) and the Tarayana Club (charity club). This was noted by SMB5 who said:

*We have clubs like YVIA, Tarayana, etc which help students engage with the community (SMB5).*

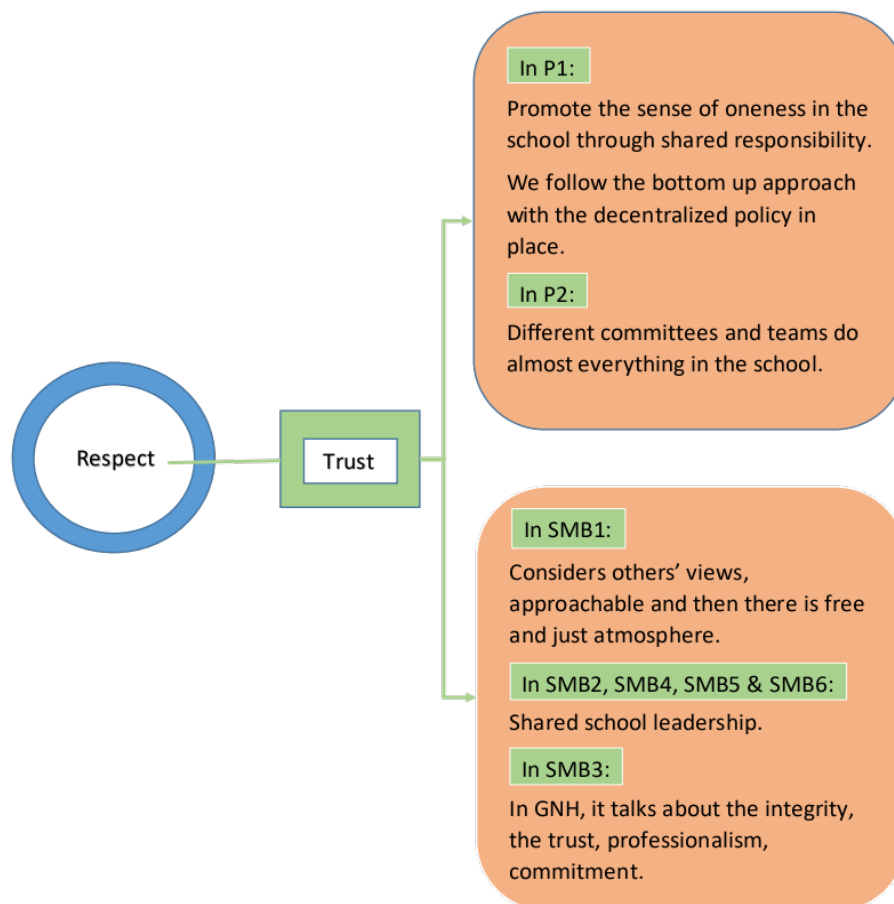


It is a reciprocal support system. The data above indicate how support is bi-directional and acknowledged as necessary to achieve mutual goals for education.

#### **4.7 RESPECT**

Respect is an overarching consideration and represents recognition of each human being's intrinsic value, which is a core element of Buddhist philosophy about life and living in harmony. Respect referred to here is in relation to school community partnership in Bhutan, and therefore takes into account the elements that foster respect in this context. Although there can be many elements that foster respect, 'Trust' was the most significant determining element in the data, as it was described as the factor that mainly fosters respect in relation to school community partnership. This was noted by the participants as shown in Figure 4.6. Trust is significant in the overall enhancement of school community partnership as discussed below.

Figure 4.6: Respect



#### 4.7.1 Trust

Both the school principals noted that trust can be established by valuing and recognising shared responsibility and by having a decentralised policy. For example, P1 commented:

*Promote the sense of oneness in the school through shared responsibility; now with the decentralized policy we follow the bottom up approach rather than top down approach (P1).*

In a similar way, P2 stated:

*We have different committees and the teams in the school and almost everything is done by all these different committees (P2).*

Having a bottom-up approach allows each school and its community more local power and autonomy over decisions relating to education at least at the micro level. However, this shared responsibility only works if the partners have a trusting, collaborative relationship. Schools in Bhutan gain the trust of the community by promoting a sense of *oneness* in the school through sharing responsibility, as noted by P1 in the above extract. The sharing of responsibility creates stronger understanding between schools and communities, including trust between members of the community and the school staff. The ability to accept the bottom-up rather than the top-down approach in running the school, as noted by P1 in the above extract, indicates trust between the school and the community; a high level of trust is required when decisions are made based on what comes through the bottom-up approach, as noted by P1 above.

In instances where different committees are entrusted to carry out almost everything in the school without interference from the school management team, as noted by P2 in the above extract, it shows the level of trust that the school management has established in the committees. This trust develops social cohesion, which ultimately strengthens the school community partnership.

Community representatives also acknowledged the importance of recognising and valuing shared leadership as an integral part of fostering trust in the SCP. This was noted by SMB2, SMB4, SMB5 and SMB6, as shown in Figure 4.6. SMB2, SMB4, SMB5 and SMB6 were among the community representatives who all used the term, '*shared school leadership*'; while SMB3 noted that trust occupied an important space in GNH, as did other values such as integrity and professionalism:

*In GNH, it talks about the integrity, the trust, professionalism, commitment (SMB3).*

Some community representatives, however, cautioned that trust can be diminished or destroyed if school principals did not consider others' views, were unapproachable, or if the atmosphere was not just and fair.

*What I believe is, a leader whoever is in that position should have certain and some elements of the democratic way of doing things (SMB1).*

Effective collaboration is founded on trust, which needs to be established by all partners – but especially by the school principals in Bhutan, where democracy is still young and monarchical ways of doing things are still evident in almost everything that is done in the country - including school governance. This was noted by SMB2:

*When it comes to school community partnership, other in-charges share the leadership role to work closely with the community by seeking advice and permission from the Principal as the head of the school (SMB2).*

This comment makes clear the crucial role of school principals in Bhutan in ensuring the success of school community partnerships; accountability rests with them. This involves establishing and maintaining a trustworthy relationship between the principals, their staff, and the community. In the absence of such a relationship, the principals will not be able to appreciate and support staff initiatives that may actually have a positive impact on the school community partnership. While the principals play the prime role, they need to establish this relationship of trust with staff and community to establish the school-community partnership through the involvement of staff and community in decision-making processes, as noted by SMB4:

*Now with the change in time, I feel like even the principal is also taking care of teachers' involvement in decision making because of the fact that, if the teachers are involved and if the responsibilities are shared among the teachers, things are happening in much better way and what we educate at the end seems much better and efficient (SMB4).*

Involving teachers in decision making processes and shared responsibilities is an indication of trust on the part of the principals, which – as the above comment indicates – makes things work more effectively. The desired results are more achievable because of improved efficiency by people involved in carrying out the tasks - due to the trust established. This comment by SMB4 reinforces the observations of the school principals: that trust can be established by valuing and recognising shared responsibility and having a decentralised policy.

The above sections have mainly discussed the horizontal relationship that exists between schools and communities in Bhutan. The next section explores direct and indirect vertical relationships and the influence of the MoE on schools in Bhutan. The discussion intends to capture the vertical influences as per the EST.

## **4.8 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MACRO AND MICRO POLICIES AND PRACTICES**

The common phenomenon in an ecological system is the relationship that exists between different players (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). These relationships can be vertical as well as horizontal. In the school community partnership both vertical and horizontal relationships are in evidence. In this section some categories discussed in the previous section will be revisited to illustrate the relationship (both positive and negative) between the macro and micro factors as noted in the conceptual framework. This is necessary to identify how they may be connected, either to support or to hinder SCP.

### **4.8.1 Good Governance**

The theme of governance is captured in both school and national GNH policy. The EGNH policy operates at the macro level across all sectors of society in Bhutan; it is equally important for school leadership and for the success of the school-community partnership. It encapsulates critical values of shared leadership and accountability; and having it recognized and valued at both macro and micro levels reinforces GNH's importance to democratic leadership in Bhutan. A closer look at the data shows that two categories identified the horizontal relationships as being equally important to the vertical relationship: *shared leadership* and *accountability*; and these are seen to be required at both macro and micro levels to achieve good governance.

### **4.8.2 Shared Leadership**

At the macro level it is the policy of GNH that promotes shared leadership to support the shift from monarchy to democratic leadership across all ministerial lines, including the MoE. This direction has an impact on all kinds and levels of leadership in the country, including school leadership. From the macro level it filters down to the micro level, where it is implemented either by the school principals or through other line ministries, such as the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs, the Gross National

Happiness Commission, the Royal Civil Service Commission, and other stakeholders. In Fig 4.2, P1 commented:

*The policy framed by the Ministry says that community parents should be involved in the school (P1).*

This statement shows how the school principals (micro level) take into account and reinforce the national policy framework formulated by the national government (macro level): this illustrates the vertical relationship between macro and micro levels.

The horizontal relationship at the micro level between school and community is perhaps best illustrated in Fig 4.2 by the comment from P2:

*The responsibilities are shared, members are empowered and everybody is a leader in the school (P2).*

This observation suggests that in order to garner community support and bring the community on board in relation to school affairs, principals have the responsibility to encourage community leaders to embrace shared leadership as the necessary mechanism for supporting good governance. The SMB and the principal are both recognised as having responsibility for the performance of the school. This seemingly achievable task may in reality be difficult to achieve because of the diverse backgrounds and different expectations of school staff and community members. This is suggested by the following comment by SMB1:

*We do not take unilateral decisions (SMB1).*

It is evident that there is a need not only for horizontal relationships existing at the micro level between schools and communities, but also for vertical relationships between the GNH-based policy (macro) and schools (micro). While the horizontal relationship has been discussed above, evidencing cooperation and collaboration between school and community, it is not apparent that the existence of vertical relationship is implicit in the above extract because of the fact that decisions are taken collectively, by adhering to the relevant policies framed by the government and schools. On a similar note, the existence of both vertical and horizontal relationships is acknowledged by SMB2:

*To appoint somebody is not one's responsibility (SMB2).*

The data overall illustrate how collective decisions occur by involving stakeholders representing both vertical and horizontal positions in the relationship; this indicates that there is a good harmonisation of macro and micro levels when examined through the lens of Good Governance (shared leadership).

#### **4.8.3 Accountability**

The significance of the relationship between macro and micro factors can also be identified under the category of *accountability*. The data show that accountability can be considered from two perspectives: that of community vitality and that of Buddhist communal values of looking after each other and achieving interrelatedness which is embedded in GNH policy. As P1 observes (Fig 4.2):

*A student leader should be accountable to his/her members (P1).*

This comment indicates that starting from the level of student leaders, all school leadership stakeholders have accountability towards his/her members (micro); as mentioned earlier, this understanding reflects the Buddhist communal values of looking after each other, the manifestation of the Buddhist belief of *Tendrel* (interrelatedness) (macro).

*School has an important role in closing the gap between students-parents and students-community (P2).*

The school's role in this regard is guided by GNH-based policy directives (macro) which are driven by Buddhist values; and accountability is seen as relating to the people in the community and the nation more generally. To strengthen links between the school and community, school principals need to demonstrate the complementarity that exists between national and school expectations regarding accountability. The principal/school must gain the trust of the community; without this trust it is impossible to close the gap between students and parents and students and community (*role of the school*). There is also, however, a school level (micro) accountability, which is more related to elements such as record keeping to support compliance issues, as reflected in the following comment by P2:

*We have the system of submitting annual reports to the higher authority and that is how we maintain check and balance (P2).*

This comment indicates that school principals are cognizant of their roles (micro and macro) in relation to closing the gap in terms of collaboration with the community (micro). This is the kind of relationship that is revealed between macro and micro levels when it is viewed through the lens of accountability; and it certainly has the potential to strengthen school community partnership.

Similar understandings are reflected in the community representatives' data. For example, in Fig 4.2, SMB1 stated:

*We are guided by certain principles and rules [school governance rules framed by the govt.] that are put in place (SMB1).*

This extract shows the vertical relationship that exists between macro and micro levels. People working at the micro level respect the rules promulgated by the national government (macro) when they carry out their responsibilities at the micro level, thereby maintaining a vertical relationship, which is important because disregard of rules and policies framed at the macro level will only hinder the implementation of micro level accountability practices.

#### **4.8.4 Community Vitality**

Culturally Bhutan is a very collectivist society based on Buddhist philosophy. Schools are considered a vital part of a community's existence. The importance of reciprocity between individuals and their community is a very significant factor in shaping the lives and practices of people in their community; and a community where groups of people support and interact positively and provide social support to one another based on a sense of cohesion among community members is said to express community vitality. A community must therefore possess a strong relationship with the school (micro); and *community vitality* in this context is manifested in the form of '*preservation and promotion of culture and tradition*' as noted by participants, the relationship is a vertical one but is embedded in the macro factors of the country's commitment to GNH.

#### **4.8.5 Preservation and promotion of culture and tradition**

At the micro level (school leadership) preservation and promotion of culture and tradition is one of the most effective strategies to encourage school community partnership. As shown in Fig 4.3, P1 stated:



*We include parents' cultural items in the school programme and seek their support to teach traditional songs and dances (P1).*

This comment explicitly identifies the horizontal relationship that is encouraged between the school and community. The school's decision to include parents' cultural items in the school programme indicates close relationship between the two to support SCP. Since this requires reciprocal support, parents' willingness to participate in the school programme also shows their engagement to support SCP.

In this same extract a vertical relationship between macro and micro levels is implied although not mentioned explicitly. This is due to the fact that enactment of such programmes at the micro level actually represent the vision of GNH (macro level) being put into practice. In its endeavour to preserve and promote culture and tradition, the school recognises the micro level activities supporting SCP, linked with the macro policies of community vitality and engaging the community in the actual implementation of the policy. This is evidence of how the relationship between macro and micro policies strengthens school community partnerships. Effective synchronisation of macro and micro levels activities related to community vitality are thus seen to strengthen school community partnerships by building close relationships between the two.

On a similar note, the ability to collectively negotiate challenges is facilitated by the existence of a relationship between macro and micro policies, as implied by a comment by SMB3:

*We are actually coping with the diverse culture here without even the smallest difficulties in fact (SMB3).*

This comment conveys the message of 'unity in diversity', one of the aspirations of GNH (macro level). The community representatives are able to 'cope with' cultural diversity without difficulty as they situate their challenges within the GNH aspiration of recognising the uniqueness of every Bhutanese culture and valuing what each culture has to offer, creating a society which values unity in diversity. In the context of SCP in Bhutan, therefore, there is harmonious coexistence between the school and community due to the appreciation of both vertical (macro and micro) and horizontal (school and community) relationships. These relationships between macro and micro levels strengthen school community partnership.

#### **4.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has detailed the process of data analysis, presented as a priori themes and categories of both GNH and School Leadership. The five a priori themes discussed in this chapter were Good Governance, Community Vitality, Education, Collaboration and Respect. They have been discussed in relation to both the macro and micro levels of policy and practice for education in Bhutan. The data were also considered in relation to the ecological model used in the conceptual framework, which considered the data as positioned in both vertical and horizontal relationships.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

### **5.0 INTRODUCTION**

This study has investigated the connection between Bhutanese school principals' leadership and governance practices in relation to strengthening school-community partnerships (SCPs) using the theoretical lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. The analysis has investigated the horizontal relationship between the school principals and the school management boards which represent the school community. The analysis also sought to understand the vertical relationship between the national Gross National Happiness (GNH) policy (macro) and the school leadership (micro) policies. The data collected through online semi-structured interviews with two school principals and six community representatives from two higher secondary schools in Bhutan have been analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, as described in Chapter 4. The in-depth analysis of data was carried out against each of the five a priori themes, Good Governance, Community Vitality, Wholesome Education, Collaboration and Respect. A detailed account of findings in relation to these five themes has been presented in Chapter 4.

This chapter discusses findings of this study and links to other research studies seeking to address the challenge of strengthening SCP as one of the key factors in the implementation of democratic leadership. As noted above, the discussion draws on two sets of literature: that relating to the national governance policy guided by the GNH, and that associated with school leadership policies premised on democratic leadership principals. Section 5.1 focuses on school leadership supporting SCP. Section 5.2 provides a discussion of the complementarity of national and school level leadership policies. Section 5.3 provides an account of collaboration and support necessary for supplementing the lack of resources in Bhutanese schools through SCP. Section 5.4 discusses the cultural sensitivity that binds school and community together; and Section 5.5 discusses the issues of autonomy, empowerment and accountability, and the notion of *trust* in SCP in Bhutan.

### **5.1 SCHOOL LEADERSHIP SUPPORTING SCP**

As discussed in chapter 2, the school leadership recognises the importance of SCP (Leithwood et al., 2008; Leithwood, & Mascal, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2009; Leithwood, & Louis, 2012; Leithwood, & Azah, 2016). While schools are often a key

social institution in communities, the concept of SCPs is conceptualised differently in the international literature, particularly in the literature based on Western values of leadership. While the concept is also important in relation to the Bhutanese concept of SCPs, the national policy of Gross National Happiness (a national leadership and governance framework) reinforces the significance of community in school education leadership.

The GNH's explicit values-based approach has a significant impact on education in Bhutan generally as well as on the school community partnership. As one of the community representatives in this study noted, school-community partnerships are stronger where people talk about the values of *Tha-Dam-Tshig*, and *Lay Judrey* (SMB6). *Tha-Dam-Tshig* means sticking to one's promises or utterances, like carving in stone, and it is similar to what is understood by *integrity* in the West. Likewise, *Lay-Judrey* is a belief that good deeds bear good results and bad deeds bear bad results; that the consequence of either deed is undeniably to be borne by the individual; there is no way that the consequences of one's deeds can be shared by other people. These values guide the thinking and actions of leaders and individuals in Bhutan, both at macro and micro levels. Moreover, these values constitute the foundation of GNH; they constantly remind the Bhutanese people of the importance of doing only good deeds, to accumulate merit for themselves, as well as to bring happiness to others in the society. The biggest challenge ahead, therefore, is to ensure that every Bhutanese, through formal or non-formal education, comes to understand GNH as it is intended; that they internalise the values so that they form the basis of their behaviour as citizens, in general terms, and help to strengthen school community partnerships in particular.

Although there are differences in the conceptualisation of school community partnerships and school governance internationally, every nation shares common aspirations, such as seeking greater involvement of the community in managing and running a school to increase the sense of transparency and ownership by the community. As noted in Chapter 2, national and district policies for school leaders in Bhutan call for the establishment of a shared vision, the development of a good learning environment, effective management, and collaboration with both faculty and community members (Bhutan Education Blue Print, 2014-2024; Weiss & Siddall, 2012). The findings of this study provide interesting insights to understanding and appreciating the purpose of SCPs when juxtaposed against current literature.

## 5.2 COMPLEMENTARITY OF NATIONAL AND SCHOOL LEVEL LEADERSHIP

In order to understand the complementarity of national and school level leadership, it becomes important to revisit the theoretical framework of this study since it explains the nature of such relationships. As noted in the literature in Chapter 2, SCP is complex and multilayered, involving a range of relationships between as well as within the layers.

Considering the complexity of interactions between schools and communities, Ecological Systems Theory (EST) was identified as a theoretical lens which suits this study (Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Leonard, 2011). The strength of ecological systems theory is that it acknowledges the vertical and horizontal roles of stakeholders and their associated relationships. The original Bronfenbrenner model has four layers (*micro, meso, exo, macro*) of nested systems, which constitute the theoretical framework. For the purpose of this study, as discussed in chapter 3, the influence of three layers is considered - the *micro* system (schools & communities), the *exo* system (district/regional and national MoE), and the *macro* system (GNH). The micro level has two variables, the school leadership teams and members of the school community, which provide the context in which SCP is most important.

As previously discussed, the macro and micro level relationships in the Bhutanese education system changed when the country moved from monarchy to democratic leadership at the national level and adopted the Gross National Happiness (GNH) framework as a fundamental aspiration of leadership at all levels. These changes in the education system have presented schools with a unique opportunity for strengthening SCPs. One of the major aspects of good governance as conceived by EGNH (Macro) is that of 'service delivery' (Ura et al., 2012, pp.26-28), an element which aligns with school governance policies (Micro) in Bhutan. Both the GNH and school policies reinforce the understanding of all education sector stakeholders that '*school has an important role in closing the gap between the students and the parents, students and the community members*' (P2). The responsibility of service delivery is not just a job – it is considered as a must be taken seriously. Service delivery involves supporting the national aspiration of producing GNH graduates (macro); a strong SCP (micro) has the potential to support the successful graduation of students characterised by a balance between academic and socio-cultural knowledge.

It is through this complementary reinforcement of governance by the GNH and school leadership that understanding of the age-old saying, ‘*it takes a village to raise a child*’ can be realized in practice. As Guajardo et al. (2016) posited, local communities can usefully provide insight into the content, pedagogies, and conditions required to train, develop, and sustain community-oriented educational leaders. This is particularly important in the context of Bhutan as it not only provides an opportunity for school principals to work with the communities, it also creates an avenue for school principals to learn about their own leadership practices. This reciprocal and reflective arrangement potentially fulfills the Bhutan government’s national expectation that school leaders should work with community members such as parents and other stakeholders to achieve quality student learning outcomes (BEB, 2014-2024). Furthermore, such complementarity of national and school level leadership responds to the State’s greater call for *vibrant democracy* as a means of strengthening good governance and further cementing the bonds between schools and communities.

The notion of shared responsibility for the education of future generations clearly involves more than passing examinations. The aspiration of the country’s education policy is to provide ‘wholesome’ education, which in the context of Bhutan is defined as *Educating for Gross National Happiness* (EGHN). This is the concept that promotes holistic, contemplative, eco-sensitive, and culturally responsive educational approaches, that are both taught as ideas and implemented in practice. For example, one of the community members made the following comment:

*My personal experience as I know myself, how important GNH is placed in our life. This philosophy is something that serves as a guideline for us. Now what we practice in the school is, we believe in wholesome education. So, like cultural preservation and then like when we look when we try to say cultural preservation is by giving a platform for students to come up with their culture, show ... and there we involve parents (SMB1).*

It is vital for educational leaders to recognize the important role that education plays in a range of areas, such as civic duties and social development, the character building of citizens, and cultural and values transmission. If ‘wholesome education’ is construed as a framework of holistic education, this may be similar to the ‘values education’ that is represented in western education systems (Tobgay, 2014). The

intention of the policy is to develop the ‘head, heart and hand’ of each student in the country, as noted by one of the principals and reported in the previous chapter. Educating for GNH, therefore, is not just a governance approach to students’ growth in school, it is also a philosophy that Bhutan has put into practice; and this philosophy guides everything that happens in the schools. For example, the ‘Nurturing Green School for Green Bhutan’ imperative goes beyond school leadership to achieve academic success, and highlights why the SCP is important, as it can facilitate the many non-academic learning outcomes which are expected from education. This in effect is the essence of the underlying principle of the Bhutanese education system. This sense of national aspiration is possibly unique to Bhutan as EGNH transcends vertical as well as horizontal relationships, providing an opportunity for easy holistic synchronization of vertical (macro) and horizontal (micro) relationships in the ecology of Bhutanese school community partnerships.

### **5.3 COLLABORATION AND SUPPORT**

The shared responsibility discussed throughout this study requires reciprocity. This is crucial, not only in terms of sharing Bhutanese cultural values, but also in helping the school leadership to resource learning activities, for example by inviting community members to teach certain topics, to act as guest speakers or lecturers, as noted by one of the school principals who talked about the value of the competent, knowledgeable people in the community - especially in relation to imparting the values of GNH (P1).

These initiatives are necessary because often schools in Bhutan are constrained by limited resources - both in and outside the classrooms, as noted by one of the school principals. When good school community partnerships are established the schools in Bhutan feel safe and secure, at least in terms of obtaining basic Teaching Learning Materials (TLMs) from the community, which may have an abundance of resources.

Guajardo et al. (2016) provided evidence in their study that local communities may also provide insight into educational content and pedagogies; a finding which supports the case for shifting the mainstream context by reframing the engagement process as one that nurtures a shared vision of possibility, accountability, and collective leadership (Block, 2008; Guajardo et al, 2016; McKnight & Block, 2010). Bhutan has a strong starting position for this model since both the national

governance (macro) and school governance (micro) systems are based on the philosophy of GNH - an observation noted by participants in this study. SMB2, for example, emphasized the need for shared school leadership for things to work out on time and efficiently.

Schechter and Shaked (2017) also identified the importance of the principal being able to create a collaborative climate. Their study revealed that principals as leaders usually set the tone for school partnerships by establishing a positive atmosphere for stakeholders, and by helping teachers and parents to develop the required skills to work collectively towards realising students' success. Bhutanese principals therefore need support to understand and adopt practices which reflect and are informed by the highest standards of good quality educational leadership as envisaged in the Bhutan Education Blue-Print (BEB, 2014-2024). The transition from the previous top-down management model to that of democratic leadership is not easy; the principal's personal beliefs and attitudes require reconfiguring, as they in turn re-shape how their educators interact with students and community members (Francis et al., 2015). This leadership transition - particularly in relation to allowing the community to have an equal say in school management - is not easy. It involves a major shift in the conceptualization and enactment of SCPs. This was noted by participants in this study:

*We need to frame a better policy and then change or develop or support the school. To do that, we need to also enhance the governance; the school management body, and then the community. I think that is necessary and I think there is a lot of space for building a better school community partnership (SMB3).*

*I feel that we are quite late in actually building the community partnership while there is a need for a very strong school community partnership as it will bring harmony in the community and can help in student's learning (SMB2).*

One area that may help to support and enhance school community partnership in Bhutan is that of being mindful of the cultural sensitivities of the people in the community.



## 5.4 CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Empirical studies have agreed that school improvement is context-specific (Datnow et al., 2002; Elmore, 1995; Fullan, 1991; Harris, 2002) and cultural in nature (Dimmock, 2000; James, 2008). The focus of school community partnership efforts therefore should also be determined by contextual factors such as the existing culture(s) within a given school at a given time (Ainscow & West, 2006; Harris & Chrispeels, 2006).

In relation to this important consideration, one of the principals referred to the *cultural greenery*:

*Cultural greenery is the way we do things. For instance, school has a culture of bidding farewell to a teacher who leaves on transfer; conducting annual rituals altogether; hosting activities that are not organized by the school itself and other associations (P2).*

Being sensitive to local culture(s) and drawing on their strength to support the SCP is a key element in fulfilling the expectations of GNH.

Cheng (2000) similarly argued for a more holistic understanding of the cultural factors in play in educational reform, suggesting that any framework should specifically account for societal, community, school, and classroom influences. Cultural norms provide those at leadership level with significant positions, power and informal authority and the opportunity to catalyse and sustain the change process (Chen, 2000, 2008; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000). However, the obligation to comply with this culturally embedded power and authority can create surface politeness or passive resistance among staff (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000); it therefore becomes important for leaders to transform existing cultural norms by reducing the power distance between them and their followers/community members to initiate stimulus for change (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000); change which can be effected through autonomy and empowerment, as discussed in the next section of this chapter. Culture can have different meanings for different people – for example, there is school culture, leadership culture, or ethnic culture.

Culturally Bhutan is a very collectivist society. It is based on Buddhist philosophy and cultural values are closely linked to professional cultures as they are

embedded in the whole way of life. Culture and tradition are considered strengths of Bhutanese society; key elements which bind the Bhutanese people together at all levels of society (GNH Centre Bhutan, 2016). The results discussed in Chapter 4 have illustrated how the leadership values noted above are inherent in support of SCP cultures and traditions. This cultural appreciation is considered central to every individual in Bhutan; it is characterised by the deep conviction that it is their role to support the country's unity and independence. School leaders, therefore, must revere the core structural and institutional values - the cultural, moral, ethical, cardinal and spiritual values - which then constitute the normative values which are crucial for harmonious coexistence and the fostering of partnerships between school and community. These values are inherent in Educating for GNH principles, as noted by P2:

*Educating for GNH is not just an approach to grow our students in the school, it is also a philosophy that we put into practice, and this philosophy guides in that it is the essence of the education in Bhutan (P2).*

It is an expectation that school principals apply these values (Branch et al., 2013). As in other parts of the world, school principals in Bhutan are considered as a major source of knowledge, of learning opportunities and of inspiration for both students and communities. Schools are key social institutions, especially in many rural communities where the relationship between schools and communities is mutually dependent. Principals being mindful and appreciating the culture and traditions of the locality certainly gain the communities' respect and create positive conditions for enhancing school community partnerships. Understanding of local cultures and traditions has much to teach about the immense influence of culture in general and of the embedded roles of leaders within the culture.

Given that culture and traditions are highly valued by people in Bhutan, school principals must take extra care to be sensitive to the sentiments of the local people, especially in terms of valuing and appreciating their culture and traditions. As previously noted, the majority of the people in the villages are not well educated, therefore principals are becoming more and more sensitive to their culture and traditions since that is what they believe in and live by. There is a popular saying in Bhutan: *'Like every religious leader has one religion, every village has its own culture'*. This saying is widely used by educators in Bhutan to promote the importance

of each village's culture and traditions. Another Bhutanese saying, '*After having drunk the water of a village, one is bound to adhere to the norms of the village*', is widely used by the Bhutanese people. It too foregrounds adherence to the culture and traditions of each village. A similar understanding is implicit in the comment of one of the community representatives:

*Now what we practice in the school is, we believe in wholesome education. So, like cultural preservation and then like when we look when we try to say cultural preservation is by giving a platform for student to come up with their culture show and there we involve parents (SMB1).*

Disregard of the culture and traditions of villages and communities has no place in the school-community partnership. If a school principal disregards or fails to understand community sentiments then the community people will not come back to participate in school affairs. Cultural sensitivity in the establishment of school community partnerships in Bhutan is given top priority; being able to manoeuvre effectively through different cultural circumstances to establish a meaningful school community partnership is testimony to the quality of leadership. The present role of a principal is generally judged by their ability to preserve harmony among school stakeholders and the school community (Kowalski, 2010).

## **5.5 AUTONOMY, EMPOWERMENT, AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

Autonomy and empowerment are concepts which are naturally attached to accountability, as noted by participants in the previous chapter. Møller (2009), reviewing two studies, one from Australia and the other from England, summarised the investigators' definition of educational accountability as being 'more about regulation and performance than educational improvement, local capacity building, and the encouragement of democracy in schools' (p. 39). Møller contends that accountability has shifted from being the method *used by* the system to *being* the system. A similar observation was echoed by one of the principals in this study:

*We have the system so called reporting and then also submitting the annual report like for instance the school's performance report and then teachers' performance report. That is how we maintain the check and balance (P2).*

In the context of Bhutan, accountability is about being responsible to others, and it is an integral part of Good Governance. Being accountable means taking ownership

of roles and responsibilities bestowed upon oneself; and it is viewed as a privilege to serve. It is therefore natural to feel accountable for anything and everything that one does; and this feeling comes from the very core of the Bhutanese values of *Tha-Dam-Tshig* (sacred commitment) and *Lay-Judrey* (cause and effect). This was explained by one of the participants:

*Being a Buddhist, I personally feel that the pillars of GNH and its principles are taken care of. Even if it is not explicitly spelled out in curriculum, at individual level most teachers take care of GNH while delivering the curriculum. I feel that it is ingrained in our genes (SMB2).*

Accountability is intertwined in the overall role and function of the school; and the school's role and accountability are inseparable from the village community. In effect schools in Bhutan are seen as key social institutions that hold a community together, as explained by various participants in this project (see Chapter 4). Schools in Bhutan are not only places for academic learning, they are also considered as sacred places for the propagation of GNH values. There is a belief among Bhutanese people that GNH is at risk unless the country has well disciplined, knowledgeable, and productive citizens; and schools are accountable in terms of producing these GNH graduates.

Clearly the Bhutan government's emphasis on democracy and its expectation of the delivery of GNH-infused, high quality education further increases the need for robust SCPs: a strong SCP not only has the potential to support the successful graduation of students with a balance of academic and socio-cultural knowledge, it also fosters transparency and accountability among stakeholders, because of the greater autonomy and empowerment that come together with democracy and expectations.

In the West, SCPs are established with the intention of creating long-standing relationships between schools or school districts and organisations in the local community (Fullan, 2016; Wallace Foundation, 2012). They generate social and cultural resources to improve outcomes for young people and families (Warren & Mapp, 2011; Yosso, 2005). The strong emphasis on the importance of community in the concept of GNH provides strong ground for SCPs in Bhutan, where community vitality is manifested through groups of people supporting and interacting positively with each other and by individuals providing social support to one another. There is

commitment to upholding values such as reciprocity, fairness, family closeness, equality, unity, cooperation, sociability and cohesion; values which are derived from and aligned with the concept of GNH; values which help to provide autonomy and to empower the stakeholders of SCPs. The example provided in the data of the participant who described how teachers and students go out of the school and clean community places as part of their social responsibility activities reflects this commitment and value (SMB2).

The values discussed are specifically upheld through the implementation of the Green School concept, as explained by one of the participants:

*Green School does not mean making only the environment green, but it is all the values that we can infuse. So, if we can do that and involve and work with the community, then we can build school-community partnership more strong. If we can do these small, small acts it will certainly help in consolidating school-community partnership (SMB6).*

The importance of reciprocity between individuals and community is a very significant factor in shaping lives and practices in Bhutan; it is also a key driver of SCP because of its inherent potential for mutual benefit. This finding aligns with previous research evidence that establishing and nurturing fruitful SCPs can generate capital and leverage resources that benefit the entire community (Hands, 2005).

Strong relationships with a community benefit a school because of the abundance of knowledge and skills that are offered, as noted by one of the principals cited in Chapter 4. This may not be the case in every community, however, and sometimes it can be a struggle to establish a strong SCP because rural communities with lower literacy levels may feel they have nothing to contribute.

The school principals can help with this situation. They need to continuously upgrade their own competencies through regular professional development programmes, keeping up to date with recent developments in the country, learning more about how to empower and engage their community as an equal partner in educating the children. His Majesty the King clearly identified the need for ongoing teacher education in His statement:

*...You cannot tell children to be strong if you are not strong yourself. If you don't know anything about the subject that you are teaching how much of it are*

*you going to give to your students, you cannot give what you do not have...*  
(BBS, 2014).

Although His Majesty the King was speaking in the context of ongoing teacher education, the advice is relevant for any other profession or position, including that of school Principal. His Majesty is explicitly addressing the need for in-depth professional knowledge and skills. In relation to strengthening the school community partnership – a core element of a principal’s professional responsibility – part of the ‘strength’ the King is advocating for is the capacity to guide others towards reaching their full potential (Zhu et al., 2004).

## **5.6 TRUST IN SCP**

Trust can be viewed in two ways: firstly, trust allows leaders to create a safe environment in which to have meaningful communication. This is particularly important in the context of Bhutan, where rural village communities have very low literacy levels and thus are reluctant to participate in SCPS. Most people in the community are not well educated, which causes inhibition and lack of confidence to freely express opinions. This problem is further aggravated by the introvert nature of the Bhutanese people in general and the submissive nature of the culture, which is based on Buddhist values of loving, kindness, and forgiveness. Trust is therefore central to creating a conducive environment for safe engagement; and at the school level it is complemented by the principle of GNH. Participants in this study noted that trust occupied an important space in GNH - like the other values of integrity and professionalism:

*In GNH, it talks about the integrity, the trust, professionalism, commitment*  
(SMB3).

Previous research studies have demonstrated that the leadership style of the principal, specifically an ‘inclusive leadership’ style which involves all stakeholders and guidance towards change, correlates positively with a healthy school climate that is built upon trust (Moolenaar et al., 2010).

Trust facilitates collaboration, and collaboration between school and community represents a mutual partnership in providing oversight and leadership for school management. This process is paramount in ensuring the success of SCPs: neither can do without the other. As indicated earlier, the community plays a significant support

role in Bhutan, with schools depending on them for almost everything because of lean government funding. Again, as noted earlier, the sense of mutual responsibility of schools and communities to educate children with culturally appropriate values is a core indicator of GNH. Nonetheless, this would be impossible to achieve with poor collaboration between school and community. Collaboration involves a range of activities and communications; it needs conversations, support, relationships and partnerships to promote and strengthen SCPs; commentaries from both groups of participants in this study demonstrate understanding of this scenario.

The importance of the relationship is supported and evidenced by prior research which provides evidence of school leaders taking responsibility for working with others, in developing strategies to increase the effectiveness of SCPs, and creating spaces where meaningful conversations can take place. These are important steps in creating a climate and culture that nurtures both student and adult development (Block, 2008; Comer, 2004; Fullan, 2016; Senge, 2012; Sergiovanni, 1999; Sergiovanni, 2000).

However, as indicated by the participants in this study, in the context of Bhutan such meaningful conversations can only take place if there is a fundamental recognition of attributes such as *Tha-Dam-Tshig* (sacred commitment) and *Lay Judrey* (cause and effect), which take precedence over values or practices of a prosperous society. These attributes should not just be talked about; they must be operationalised and practised by the schools' leaders (Griffith, 1984). The *cause and effect* referred to here is in relation to the consequences of school leaders' actions.

Other values like accountability and transparency also help to create a climate and culture that nurtures SCP in Bhutan. Accountability is seen as being responsible and is viewed as an integral part of good governance, as noted in Chapter 4. This was noted by one of the participants, for example, who stated that

*School has an important role in closing the gap between the students and the parents, students and the community members (P2).*

In Bhutan, being accountable means taking ownership of allocated roles and responsibilities; and it is viewed as a 'privilege to serve'. Further, the current state of education has created opportunities for the teachers and school leaders to create the environments and conditions that help educate children and provide enriching

learning experiences that inspire imagination, creativity, and civic duty (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

In Bhutan it is considered 'natural' to feel accountable for anything that one does; this feeling comes from the core Bhutanese values of *Tha-Dam-Tshig* (sacred commitment) and *Lay-Judrey* (cause and effect) referenced earlier. Some of the participants in the study suggested that these core Bhutanese values create a desire for stronger partnerships between school and community, since these values foster trust among the stakeholders of SCP. Such views not only show how trust helps build partnerships but also indicate the perceived need to make changes in the mainstream context by reframing the engagement process to one that nurtures a shared vision of possibility, accountability, and collective leadership (Block, 2008; Guajardo et al, 2016; McKnight & Block, 2010).

## **5.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has identified important implications which emerge from the analysis of data and the review of relevant studies. These implications are relevant to school community partnerships policy and programmes. These implications are also relevant to school principals themselves such as a substantial account of school leadership supporting SCP, the complementarity of national and school level leadership policies, collaboration and support necessary for supplementing through SCP the lack of resources in Bhutanese schools, cultural sensitivity that binds schools and communities together, and the issues of autonomy, empowerment, accountability and trust in relation to SCPs in Bhutan.

The findings show the both vertical and horizontal relationships that existed in Bhutanese SCPs. Through employment of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1976, 1989) EST as the theoretical lens it is evident that the variables at play in SCPs such as school leadership supporting SCP; complementarity of national and school level leadership; collaboration and support; cultural sensitivity; autonomy, empowerment and accountability; and trust in SCP all may have capacity to influence and strength SCP. Therefore, Bronfenbrenner's EST as the theoretical framework for this study has been appropriate and useful in examining the overall aim of this study - to examine current perspectives of Bhutanese school principals and community representatives in relation to SCPs, and to assess the challenges currently faced by school principals in Bhutan with regard to the recently introduced democratic governance and SCPs.



## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMEMENDATIONS**

### **6.0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter consists of five parts: Part One focuses on the policy implications; Part Two on the practice implications; Part Three on the limitations of the study; Part Four on possible directions for future researchers and Part Five on chapter conclusion.

### **6.1 PART ONE: POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The study has demonstrated that both school principals and community representatives wish to have strong school-community partnerships. To cite an example from one of the participants:

*Only if a school has strong school community partnership, things are going to work out well, not just to run the school smoothly, but in making meaningful learning for our children (SMB2).*

Using this argument, the establishment is recommended of strong school-community partnerships in which both the school and the community contribute towards providing meaningful learning for Bhutanese children.

The school principals and community representatives in this study were provided with the opportunity to reflect on current practices during the online interviews, which gave them further insight into the importance of both school-community partnerships and the role of a good leader. Participants felt that successful engagement in school community partnerships depended above all on effective leadership. As one of the two Principals commented,

*...at the end of the day what matters is the leadership of the school as well. It is the leadership of the school who brings on board otherwise not so much [happens for school community partnerships] (P2).*

On a similar note, community representatives talked about the need for a leader who is democratic, and who practises shared leadership to establish strong partnerships. As one of the community representatives commented, it was always good for the school principals to have certain elements of democratic leadership to be able to understand and respond to the urgent needs of their school (SMB1).

The above comments by participants align with evidence from the international research literature. International researchers have argued that the central role of a

principal - as a school leader facilitating community involvement - is determined by their leadership style, their communicative capabilities, and their attitudes and expectations (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; Jeynes, 2018; Lazaridou & Kassida, 2015; Povey et al., 2016). Empirical studies have provided evidence that leadership is consistently a strong determinant of community involvement (Arar et al., 2016; Lazaridou and Kassida, 2015).

However, Abraham (2003) and Okorie et al. (2009) observed that a symbiotic or mutual relationship needs to exist between the school and its community as no school is an island. Neither can do without the other; and for this reason the school and community must always take equal responsibility. This applies to the context of this study about the education of Bhutanese children. Principal 1 made a clear statement that the culture of collaboration among all stakeholders, including parents, must be continuously strengthened, as the operation of the school is not just the school's business (P1). Therefore, this leads to the recommendation that the Ministry of Education seriously consider implementing policy relating to the need for schools to work with the community to provide contextualised and meaningful learning experiences to the future generations of Bhutanese - as envisaged in the policy document, the Bhutan Education Blue-Print, 2014-2024.

Having acknowledged their importance, school-community partnerships should be supported through policy intervention; and sharing such policies with the community is likely to lead to greater engagement and attention paid to SCPs by both schools and communities. One community representative expressed the opinion that the current SCP policy and practices require significant changes and implementation strategies, as the current ones lack rigour, mainly because of dependence on the lone SMB as the only way to build a SCP - which he described as being inactive and non-functional in most cases (SMB3). There appears to be, therefore, a need to frame a more effective policy of community involvement, to enhance governance and the school management body, and to create awareness of education policies by the general public.

It is therefore recommended that the Ministry of Education deliberate on this issue and arrive at a necessary solution.

The findings of this study suggest that the existing SCPs should incorporate additional values to further enhance the partnerships. One of the participants made this suggestion:

*If we can do that [incorporate values] and involve and work with the community then we can build school-community partnership more strong where we talk about the values, Tha-Dam-Tshig, Lay Judrey. If we can do these small, small acts it will certainly help in consolidating school-community partnership (SMB6).*

Such reconsideration should encompass the GNH elements of theories, beliefs, and practices. Perhaps the existing ‘Educating for GNH’ could be reconstructed into a more inclusive form incorporating wholesome education, so that all inherent values are included. This is one potential area for further research. Such an approach would help in the merging of values, local values and others that are relevant to the plans and programmes designed to enhance SCPs. There is a need to investigate how GNH and traditional and cultural values can best be linked to SCPs.

One opportunity for the school and the community to integrate such values is in the domain of schools’ extra-curricular activities. Both the school principals and the community representatives in this study indicated that time constraints limited their capacity to initiate school community partnership programmes, as the schools are mandated to cover the prescribed syllabus. Engaging students in extra-curricular activities in non-school time could help to complete the syllabus on time, as noted by participants in this study; but how does one understand ‘extra-curricular activities’, and who will take ownership? These are important questions that need to be addressed.

Extra-curricular activities in schools are traditionally understood as participation in cultural and religious programs, sports, debates, quiz competitions and other activities organised either on or outside school premises. Other extra-curricular activities for school community partnerships could include project work for students, or work that can be carried out in their homes out of school hours, that may even engage parents and siblings. Students could seek ideas from parents or community members to complete assigned projects.

These kinds of initiatives may require schools to establish formal systems that can legitimise the participation of parents, siblings, and communities in a student's project work. In the international literature it is recognised that parents are children's first teachers, and that transmission of Bhutanese age-old values begins through parental involvement – and it could continue through parental involvement in schools. The Ministry of Education could initiate formal procedures to seek parents' input for managing certain learning activities. These formal procedures could be adapted as part of the curriculum in the form of teaching-learning activities. It is recommended, therefore, that the Ministry of Education recognizes extra-curricular activities in their formal curriculum documents, and recognizes that wherever parents and siblings are involved in the completion of a student's project work, such collaborations at home enhance the parent-child relationship as well as enrich the child's learning. It will also inculcate a sense of responsibility in parents in relation to the education of their children; and it will ultimately result in sharing the schools' burden in terms of the timely completion of the syllabus.

Parents' and siblings' participation in students' learning activities is also expected to improve children's behavioural development, particularly if there are disciplinary problems in the school. It is not uncommon for parents to be the only people unaware of their children's behavioural problems at school; therefore, increased parental involvement is likely to help both parents and schools work together to address concerns.

It is also recommended that involving parents in the education of their children would improve students' sense of *Driglam Namzha*, *Tha-Dam-Tshig* and *Ley Judrey*. One Principal made the following observation:

*The school community partnership is one of the most important practices and it is in the school that our children must learn how to associate socially, emotionally, spiritually, and in all these aspects with other person (P2).*

Sherab (2014) recommends that the Ministry of Education's task is to bring parents and schools closer, as the task of promoting GNH values does not only rest with schools. It is important that home and school values are complementary. There is a general assumption among the Bhutanese people that if parents live by example, children naturally grow to have the same values that their parents have.

In this regard, Ura (2009) has argued that children's educational progression does not *'only involve the lessons in value education in schools, but also the values we as adults transmit to our children, which must be constantly demonstrated through our own actions, decisions, emotions and behaviour. Parents must be example'* (p.3). He added that the border between adult behaviour and children's behaviour is very thin; that adult behaviour can easily reach and influence children. It is recommended, therefore, that the Ministry of Education should formulate a policy that requires community participation in the teaching-learning activities of children in Bhutan.

Given what has been discussed concerning the need to rethink current SCPs in Bhutan, there is a need to review both the recruitment and the deployment of principals in schools across the country. Even after recruitment, there should be regular and ongoing professional development for principals. Khalifa et al. (2016), and the Wallace Foundation (2016) have pointed out that the creation and implementation of innovative and cutting-edge educational programs that promote dynamic, adaptive approaches to school leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is critical to the educational outcomes of young people and schools; and professional development is a key priority. Turnbull et al. (2013) have also argued that to lead in these dynamic and socially oriented environments, school leaders need rich learning opportunities that support their growth and development in ways that ensure their capacity to perform their duties effectively.

Darling-Hammond (2009) has also argued that this development capacity for both school leaders and community representatives is critical in most countries; and capacity constraints pose a particular risk in developing countries with low rates of community literacy - a finding replicated in this study with Bhutanese principals and communities. Professional development programs will help schools to assist their teachers to assist their students, to apply knowledge and skills to active citizenship contexts.

In summary, the study makes three recommendations in relation to policy matters.

1. The Ministry of Education to come up with policy that facilitates parents and other relevant agencies to participate in the teaching and learning activities of values and cultural education

2. The Ministry of Education to deliberate on SCP school community policies and formulate any necessary solution to perceived problems

3. The Ministry of Education to recognise extra-curricular activities as part of SCP enhancement programmes.

## **6.2 PART TWO: PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS**

Just as there are policy implications, there are also practical implications drawn from the interview data. As discussed above, principals talked about inadequate time for building SCPs because of their heavy workload in the schools. The community representatives said that building an SCP is challenging because of heavy school routine work which leaves little time for this. In addition, meetings with parents/community are very infrequent, and this creates a vacuum between the school and the community, adding another layer of challenge in the process of building the SCP (SMB 1 & SMB3).

It is recommended, therefore, that the Ministry of Education reform the curriculum with an emphasis on community as a learning hub; this could solve the current issue of not being able to complete the syllabus on time and therefore not having time to build SCPs.

The 'Educating for GNH' initiative requires schools to consciously instil GNH values through curricular and extra-curricular activities. Every teacher has to ensure that students are given opportunities to interact with and develop understanding of these values. As revealed both through the review of literature and the interview data, values are seen as an integral part of supporting children's development as they grow to become moral adults. One principal said:

*Considering the holistic aspect of Educating for Gross National Happiness, we always go beyond our own confinement and then we try and connect with the community outside, and that way our students they have this education of social values, social connection, and for that matter they also value a positive interpersonal relationship. So all these are some of the key social principles that are imparted through the principle of Educating for Gross National Happiness (P2).*

It is recommended, therefore, that teachers should try to identify the appropriate values to link with classroom lesson content and experience and the surrounding community.

Finally, it is useful to consider the role of school leadership as it is the actual focus of this study. Principals have a key role in setting the school goals and supporting staff in achieving these. Sherab (2014) reminds us that any project or reform [including school community partnership] would be a failure if there were no support and effort from the head of the institution; thus engaging principals in curriculum and pedagogical reform with an emphasis on community involvement is essential. This could be achieved by involving principals from the formulation stage through to implementation.

In summary, the practical recommendations arising from this study are:

1. The Ministry of Education to reform the curriculum with an emphasis on community as a learning hub
2. Classroom teachers to identify appropriate values to link with both classroom teaching and learning and the local community
3. Principals to get involved right from the initial formulation stage of community-based curriculum through to implementation
4. Principals to liaise between schools and communities.

### **6.3 PART THREE: LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

No single piece of research can ever fully address complex issues, which generally require abstract thinking and the use of multiple lenses and perspectives (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). However, this study was carried out with the expectation that its findings could help to improve school community partnerships in Bhutan. It has in effect made significant contributions, particularly in relation to identifying implications for school community partnership policy and programs, as discussed above. However, it has had certain limitations that need to be acknowledged. Due to the circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the initial design that involved collecting data from twelve community representatives from two schools in Bhutan had to be reduced to six community representatives, because only six consented to participate out of the twelve approached via email. Reluctance to participate in research amid the concerns and distress caused by the pandemic was acknowledged, and data were therefore collected using online interviews via Zoom. Even though the

researcher was able to obtain good quality data, it is recognized that the involvement of a larger cohort of participants could have led the analysis of data into a different direction, possibly producing different findings. Nevertheless, since the purpose of qualitative study is to analyze data in-depth to obtain a rich description of the findings, as noted in Chapter 3, rather than generalizing the findings, it is believed that this research has in fact provided a useful way to explore how school principals and community representatives in Bhutan understand the notion of school community partnership and the underlying concepts of Good Governance, Community Vitality, Education, Collaboration and Respect.

**Coverage of schools:** Due to time constraints and the different geographical locations of the schools and the researcher, only two schools in Bhutan participated in the study. Although four higher secondary schools (government) and one primary school (government) were purposively selected from two regions (West and South), only two of the higher secondary schools consented to participate.

**Sampling of participants:** The researcher recognises the limitations associated with conducting this study. These refer primarily to the sampling of participants. Community representatives who were interviewed had some experience of democratic school governance and of SCPs as they were members of SMBs. However, the generalisability was limited to their views and experiences. A broader understanding of the issues would have required exploration of the perceptions of non-SMB members as well. However, understanding experiences of democratic governance and of SCPs as a new concept within the Bhutanese context, it was necessary to focus on the experiences of SMB members who had been involved in school governance either directly or indirectly.

**Semi-structured interview:** Another limitation of this research is associated with the use of the semi-structured interview as the main method of data collection. Inevitably, the transcripts that resulted from the interviews were filtered through the individual biases of the interviewer and the analytical frames applied to the generation of data (Morris, 2015). The validity of the interviews was consequently limited by the extent to which the transcript accurately recorded the social reality of the participant (Morris, 2015; Pernecky, 2016). This limitation was minimised by the use of data triangulation (Merriam, 2009) to ensure multiple views of each participant's perspectives were sought, and that perspectives of multiple participants were used to



illuminate the case (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2018). Similarly, the use of member checking at various points throughout the study ensured that participants were provided with the opportunity to check the representativeness of their perspective within the data and the study overall (Stake, 1995). The research has provided input for school governance improvement through the enhancement of SCPs and appropriate decision-making by the government in the future.

#### **6.4 PART FOUR: POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCHERS**

Further research might include:

**Study of the concept of school community partnership in the Bhutanese context:** Since this study appears to be the first step towards understanding the views of school principals and community representatives there was no benchmark for comparing conceptualisations and views. A broader perspective can be gained by involving additional potential stakeholders, such as parents, religious personalities, the Gross National Happiness Commission, the Ministry of Education, the District Education office, and also through SCP school enhancement programme observations.

**Integration of Bhutanese ethos into school community partnership programmes:** There is a need to investigate the inherent link between GNH and Bhutanese core values of Tha-Dam-Tshig and Lay Judrey.

**School community partnership in rural areas:** Future researchers could usefully explore how and why school community partnerships are more effective in rural areas. (This is a suggestion made by participants in the study).

#### **6.5 PART FIVE: CHAPTER CONCLUSION**

A profound aspiration was shared by His Majesty, King Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck (2009), during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Convocation of the Royal University of Bhutan:

*We can dream of a nation of environmental conservation, GNH, a strong economy, a vibrant democracy and yet none are possible or sustainable if we have not already toiled and sweated in the building of a strong education system. (paragraph 16 & 17)*

His Majesty further reminded the nation of what the fourth King once said: *‘the future of our nation lies in the hands of our children.’* His Majesty explained:

*We must know that His Majesty, my father, meant that quality of education for our young Bhutanese is of paramount importance. And that it is our duty as today’s parents, leaders, and citizens to provide it. We must ensure that their young little hands grow to become strong and worthy of carrying our nation to greater heights.* (2009, paragraph 16 & 17)

To meet these national aspirations, the entire approach to school community partnership has required redesign. A changed approach will help to shift the conceptualization and enactment of school community partnerships in Bhutan along the lines articulated in the literature review in Chapter 2 of this study.

The research identified the need to revisit the policies related to community involvement in schools; and to make them better known to stakeholders, to assist their better implementation. Participants who contributed to this research study noted that current policies are ‘there’, but hardly known by the stakeholders.

Various reforms, which include the enhancement of school-community partnerships, will enable the education system to support schools to achieve their aspirations, which focus on producing moral, productive, skilled, and participative citizens. School-Community partnerships need to be strengthened in all areas, such as shared leadership, accountability, the preservation and promotion of culture and traditions, community participation, educating for GNH, synergy, support, and trust; all the elements considered by participants as essential for school-community partnership enhancement.

This chapter has presented findings from the literature review and from the data collected from the online interviews with school principals and community representatives. It has also identified policy and practice implications, recommendations, and a way forward for future researchers.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: QUT Ethics Approval



Date of Issue: 22/3/21 (supersedes all previously issued certificates)

Dear Prof Hitendra Pillay

This approval certificate serves as your written notice that the proposal has met the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and has been approved on that basis. You are therefore authorised to commence activities as outlined in your application, subject to any specific and standard conditions detailed in this document.

#### Project Details

**Category of Approval:** Negligible-Low Risk  
**Approved From:** 16/03/2021 **Approved Until:** 16/03/2023 (subject to annual reports)  
**Approval Number:** 2021000132  
**Project Title:** 'School-Community Partnerships: Bhutanese principals' impact on community involvement in schools' within the Educating for Gross National Happiness (EGNH) framework in the Bhutanese education system.

#### Investigator Details

**Chief Investigator:** Prof Hitendra Pillay

#### Other Staff/Students:

Investigator Name	Type	Role
Dr Donna Tangen	Internal	QUT Associate Supervisor
Dr Glenys Mann	Internal	QUT Associate Supervisor
Mr Sonam Tashi	Student	Masters (Research)

#### Conditions of Approval

##### Specific Conditions of Approval:

No special conditions placed on approval by the UHREC. Standard conditions apply.

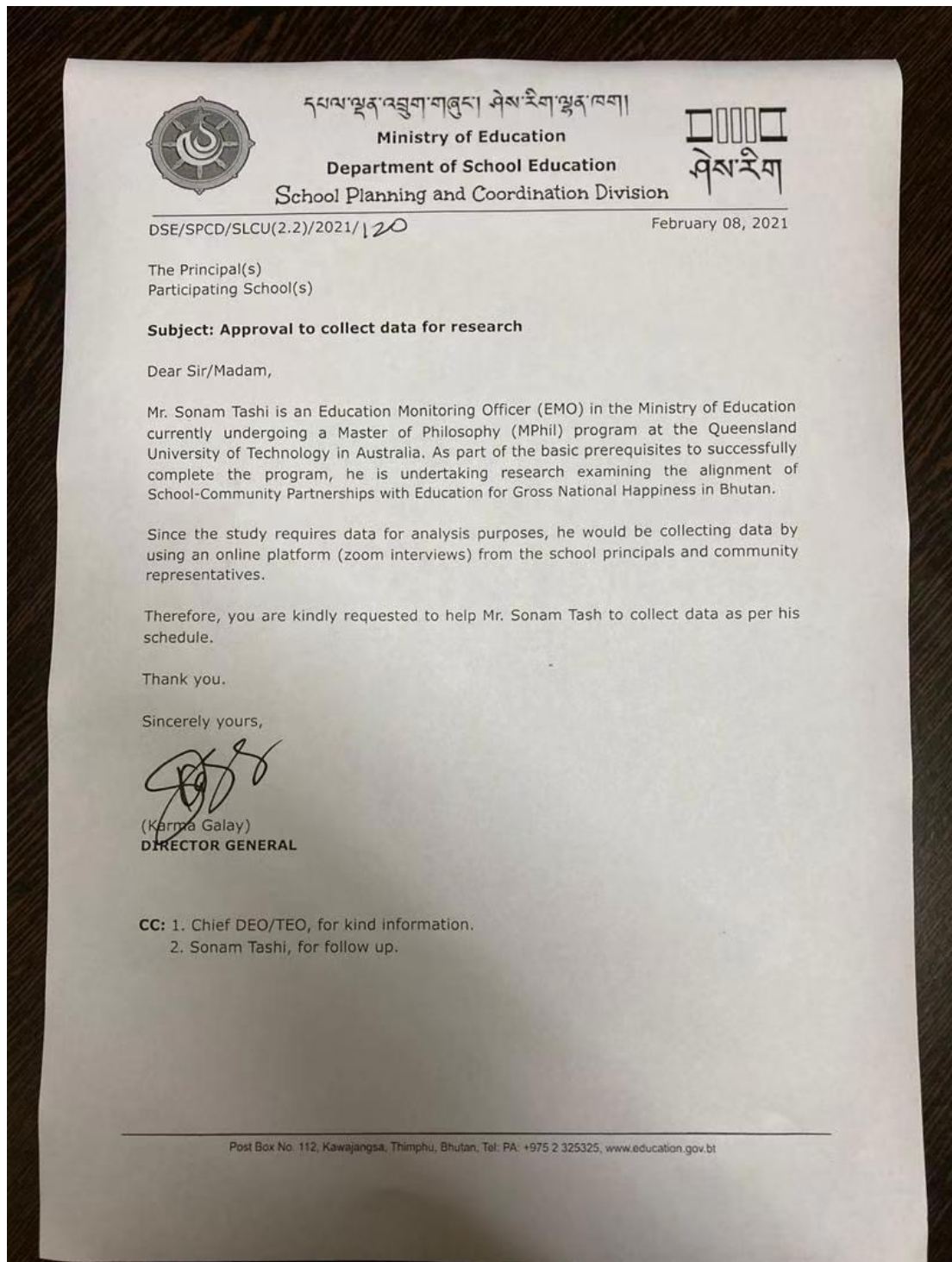
##### Conditions of Approval:

1. Conduct the project in accordance with the principles of the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007, the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, any additional specific conditions defined by the UHREC, any associated NHMRC guidelines and regulations, and the provisions of any legislation which is relevant to the project;
2. Conduct the project in accordance with the standard and any additional specific conditions defined by the HREC, the principles of the NHMRC National Statement
3. Obtain any additional approvals or authorisations as required (e.g. from other ethics committees, collaborating institutions, supporting organisations);
4. Maintain research records and data in accordance with MoPP D/2.8 Management of research data.
5. Respond promptly to the requests and instructions of UHREC;
6. Declare all actual, perceived or potential conflicts of interest (NS 5.4);
7. Immediately advise the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity (OREI) of any concerns, complaints or adverse events including (NS 5.5.3):
  - o if any unforeseen development or events occur that might affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project;
  - o if any complaints are made, or expressions of concern are raised, in relation to the project;
  - o if the project needs to be suspended or modified because the risks to participants now outweigh the benefits;
  - o if a participant can no longer be involved because the research may harm them.
8. Report on the progress of the project at least annually, or at intervals determined by UHREC (NS 5.5.5);


*If any details within this Approval Certificate are incorrect please advise the Research Ethics Advisory Team immediately.*

End of Document

## Appendix B: Approval from Ministry of Education, Bhutan



## Appendix C: A sample of consent form

	<b>CONSENT FORM FOR QUT RESEARCH PROJECT</b> <b>Principals and Community representatives</b> <b>– Semi-structured interview–</b>
Investigating the alignment of School-Community Partnerships (SCP) within the Educating for Gross National Happiness (EGNH) framework in the Bhutanese education system <b>QUT Ethics Approval Number .....</b>	

### Research team

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3138 0186				

### Statement of consent

**By signing below, you are indicating that you:**

- Have read and understood the information document regarding this research project.
- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.
- Understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team.
- Understand that the research project will include both audio and video recordings in the semi-structured interview as the Zoom app records both audio and video at a time automatically.
- Understand that if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the research project you can contact the Research Ethics Advisory Team of Queensland University of Technology at +61 7 3138 5123 or email [humanethics@qut.edu.au](mailto:humanethics@qut.edu.au). You may write in Dzongkha and QUT will arrange for translation services.
- Agree to participate in the research project.

**Name**

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**Preferred email**

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**Signature**

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**Date**

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**Please return the signed consent form to the researcher.**

## **Appendix D: Full details of interview questions**

### **Semi-Structured Interview Questions:**

1. What do you understand by the term ‘School-Community Partnership’? How do you uphold School-Community Partnership in your school?
2. What are your views about democratic school governance or shared school leadership? How are democratic practices being practiced in the School-Community Partnership?
3. What are some of your thoughts on aligning School-Community Partnership with Educating for Gross National Happiness?
4. How challenging is it for you to establish School-Community Partnership alongside Educating for Gross National Happiness?
5. What are some of the Educating for Gross National Happiness principles you use in consolidating School-Community Partnership?
6. What are some of the challenges you face in establishing School-Community Partnership?
7. What are your feelings about working in a School-Community Partnership established school?
8. What type of support system do you have in ensuring a success of School-Community Partnership?
9. How do you maintain the balance between Ministry of Education’s compliance and community relationship?
10. What are some of your thoughts on Educating for Gross National Happiness? How is Educating for Gross National Happiness upheld in your school?
11. What is your thought in general about the school community partnership in Bhutan?

## **Appendix E: A sample of extracts from interview transcripts**

### **Q1. What do you understand by the term school community partnership?**

**Your Response:** As much as the term for that matter, the very particular term so called school Community partnership is concerned to me, I feel it is about the collaboration and the association of the school with the community and also the broader members like the various stakeholders who have direct or who are directly dependent on the school. When I say directly dependent, they are the members who are strongly associated with us through their children. In our school, to me, my understanding is that a school community partnership means all about the collaboration, the teaming and those joint team between the school and parents. In fact, when we say partnership, it doesn't really confine with the parents only. It also goes beyond the parents of the school in the sense that I would like to say if it is in our Bhutanese context, then we have other stakeholders like the business community, then likewise other non-governmental organizations, other private organizations and so on and so forth. Of course, the government organizations they are directly related with us, so this is what is my understanding.

### **Q2. How do you uphold school community partnership in your school?**

**Your Response:** This is such an important aspect in the school community partnership. I would say in fact, the key thing that involves in upholding the partnership between the school and the Community is mainly through their involvement in the school affairs. And for that matter an example that I would like to share with you is in Bhutan. In our country, we create an avenue to the parents, to the business community so that they can collaborate with the school. For instance, anytime that our school has a programme we invite the parents. For example, our school has a system of organizing Rimdro (annual ritual), which is very important in our Bhutanese education system and whenever we have this annual ritual in the school we have the participation of parents and other members of the Community, like for instance even non-parents. Because normally in Bhutanese custom we have a system that any ritual irrespective of the venue and the sponsors, people can join the ritual on voluntary basis, and they come. Similarly, during school annual ritual parents and others come to the school on that day and then do their offering on the altar and then and get blessings for their own well-being, and also for the well-being of other people. So that is one avenue where we create how the community is brought on board. Likewise, for instance, in the school where I am working at the moment, normally, we solicit supports both in terms of kind as well as in terms of cash and whenever we have that kind of needs we receive supports. And that is also another way how we bring the community on board, for that matter, in partnership with the school and the community. So that is the second thing. Likewise, there are also other ways how we bring the community on board with the school. For instance, since my school is located in the capital city of the country, we have many distinguished alumni and they are invited to the school to interact with the school members for that matter, with their students and then normally they come and then deliver motivational talks. So that is the third one. Likewise, school also has a programme like the school annual conference where we have parents coming to the school and then they share their issues about their children and then likewise we also share the school's expectations, the school's vision, the school's goals to the parents so that everybody is on board. So, these are some of the things in general that we do here in the school that I am working basically to uphold school community partnership.



**Q3. What are your views about Democratic school governance or shared school leadership?**

**Your Response:** Actually, as much as my understanding is concerned, the school operation is not just one man's show. Operation of the school is all about teamwork. It is all about the collaboration, and for that matter, to my understanding school is successful if we have a shared leadership. Principal alone cannot run the school, but as a team it is possible. If the principal alone thinks to operate everything in the school, then obviously school will never ever be successful and school will fail. So, for that matter, Democratic way of school operation for that matter shared leadership is so important where the responsibilities are shared, responsibilities are delegated and not just the responsibility delegation of responsibilities, here we also have to define and describe the responsibilities that are entrusted or that will be entrusted to the members of the school and that way the members will be empowered and then everybody is the leader in the school. So, this is what is my understanding about the shared leadership.

**Q4. How are democratic practices being practiced in the school community partnership?**

**Your Response:** Indeed, as I mentioned earlier, my school is one of the largest schools. In terms of the number of students, we have almost 1500 students in the school with over 75 teachers and other non-teaching staff and this is quite a big school. And this school has grades from 9 to 12, and considering the sheer number of the students as well as the teachers in the school, trying to manage the school just by one, by the principal only will be a disaster. So that is why there has to be delegation of the responsibilities, delegation of the jobs, assignment of the duties, and these are what I am doing. We have different committees and the teams in the school. These teams and the committees they have their own specific responsibilities and duties to carry out and I simply catch hold of the in-charge of the committee and the team leader of the team. But as a whole, almost everything is done by all these different committees and this is what I would say is the democratic operation of the school.

**Q5. What are some of your thoughts on aligning school community partnership with educating for gross national happiness?**

**Your Response:** Actually, Educating for Gross National Happiness is an approach. It is a holistic approach to cater wholesome education. To our students in the school through this educational approach so called Educating for GNH, will help students groom and then they become productive citizen of our country. That way Educating for GNH approach actually takes care of 3 H - Head, Heart and Hand, which means cognitive, affective and psycho-motor aspects of our education. So that way Educating for GNH is not just an approach to grow our students in the school, it is also a philosophy that we put into practice, and this philosophy guides that. Actually, that is the essence of the education. So in a way, the underlying principle of the Bhutanese education system, the underlying values, the underlying philosophy of the education system as a whole, is all within this approach so called Educating for GNH and in this we have one domain so called Community Vitality and this community vitality is one of the domains or I would say one of the pillars of the Educating for GNH and through this domain so called Community Vitality we bring the community on board with the school. So, that is how our partnership is strengthened and that is how our bonding is upheld. Through this domain, what we call the Community vitality, school sometimes go out and then help the community in and around in disseminating information on social media consumption; disseminating information about substance use. Sometimes we also engage ourselves in social work, community work, and these are all as per the domain of the Educating for GNH so called Community vitality.

**Q6. How challenging is it for you to establish school community partnership alongside educating for gross national happiness?**

**Your Response:** It is indeed a challenging to bring on board and then strengthen the partnership between the school and the Community. It is challenging because this may be different in the rural setting and different here in the urban setting. In the urban setting, what I have personally realized is that everybody is so busy, people have no time and because of that, it is little challenging to bring everybody on board, particularly in context to school community partnership. Nevertheless, there are also the supports where the Community is giving due importance. For the purpose of the school we do get supports from the community. But as much as the recent years is concerned we are really hindered by the pandemic and because of this pandemic now, particularly last year (2020) and this year (2021), we are not really able to have our face to face contact, a physical contact for that matter, or the physical presence of the community members in the school because we cannot have gathering and all. So, these are some of the things that is little bit hindering in the school community partnership. Otherwise when we did not have this pandemic then not so much of a challenge because the school has numerous social activities like annual ritual and then school sports day, annual cultural programme. In all these activities of the school, we always had the presence of our parents, our business communities, alumni association and the members from the NGOs. So we really had a good strong community vitality indeed.

**Q7. What are some of the educating for Gross National Happiness principles you use in consolidating school community partnership?**

**Your Response:** Actually one of the principles of the educating for gross national happiness is the approach. As I said, it is a holistic approach where community vitality is one important pillar. This approach has other important pillars and one such pillar is Social and Economic development. When it comes to this social and economic development, our main focus is the development of the social aspect. Social aspect of the students in their school and considering the main principle, the main principle as a holistic aspect of the educating for gross national happiness, as much as possible, we always go beyond our own confinement and then we try and connect with the community outside, and that way our students they have this learning. They have this education of social values, social connection, and for that matter they also value a positive interpersonal relationship. So all these are some of the key social principles that are imparted through the principle of educating for gross national happiness.

**Q8. What are your feelings about working in a school community partnership established school?**

**Your Response:** Actually, school community partnership is the important aspect that we need to strengthen in all the schools in our country. Because, today considering all those developments in the technology, we forget the development in other various aspects like school community partnership. This situation is elsewhere and even here in our own country, Bhutan. Actually, our society has a strong social bonding, but gradually we are seeing this. The gap or the distance among the elders and the youngsters even in our society has widened. Now because of the development in the technology, I have noticed myself that in number of families at home we hardly see children and the parents interacting much. Often times we see the children are busy with their own gadgets, and parents, they are busy may be watching television and not much of interaction. So if that is so, then I think sometime down the line we see not really a good thing coming for us, particularly as a society, so that's why each school has an important role. School has an important role in closing this gap between

the students and the parents, students and the community members. And I think that is what we call it again School community partnership. So that is why the school community partnership is one of the most important practices and it is in the school that our children must learn how to associate socially, emotionally, spiritually and in all these aspects with other person. So this is how I feel. I feel that this aspect so called school Community partnership is very, very important.

**Q9. What type of support system do you have in ensuring a success of school community partnership?**

**Your Response:** Actually, we do have numerous support systems, like for example school has three vice principals and out of three vice principals, one vice principle is given sole responsibility to develop plan, implement all the social support system to the students and then along with him we have different small committees and these committees always plan and then implement activities that bring the community members on board. That is how we do it and then as I mentioned earlier, there are also other things, like whenever we come across a child not really having strong connection with their guardians or parents then school also have programmes like a counseling program, mentoring programme, coaching programme, and through all these programmes we help students to associate. And these programmes are not just for the students. We also have the monthly meeting, we have a school collaboration meeting, and through this school collaboration meeting again the partnership among ourselves is also enhanced. So all these are the mechanisms that we have to provide supports not just the community inside the school, but even the communities outside the school. Coming to the support from outside, actually Thromde or the municipality they are not directly involved with the school, but they do provide supports in terms of fund and sometimes in terms of the policy guidelines. These are some of the supports, and likewise we also receive supports in terms of policy guidelines and directives from the Ministry of Education as well, but as I said, school is solely responsible that is why it is the school that does the planning, implementation and all. Whatever operations and then collaboration that need to do with the community outside municipality and ministry they are not directly involved with the school. Like for instance making the physical presence and then involving in the school activities by the municipality and ministry is not there. I mean that does not happen. Actually the support just comes in terms of the policy directives and the instructions, so that is the only thing.

**Q10. How do you maintain the balance between Ministry of Education's compliance and community relationship?**

**Your Response:** Actually, operation of the school in our country is, I would say, pretty much guided by the policy, the instructions from the Ministry of Education. As much as the broad guidelines of the Ministry of Education is concerned, the school does have the freedom, the liberty to come up with its own activities and programmes provided that we, the schools fulfill the main guidelines. So that way, school has its own mechanism, has its own ways and plans through which we maintain the link and the balance between the Ministry of Education as well as the municipality administration. I would say, as much as the balance is concerned we have the system so called reporting and then also submitting the annual report like for instance the school's performance report and then teachers' performance report. That is how we maintain the check and balance. Also, we maintain this check and balance, as much as our connection with the officers are concerned we have a strong connection. So to say, because ours is something that where the school has no liberty to really implement our own curriculum. Our curriculum at the moment is a more of a prescriptive and we already have a pre prepared curriculum and the school delivers that. So that way we are little more confined, which may or may not be good, but to

me I feel this is also one way is helpful so that we have the link with the ministry. This is how we maintain this connection with the ministry as well as the municipality office.

**Q11. What are some of your thoughts on educating for gross national happiness?**

**Your Response:** Honestly, Educating for Gross National Happiness is the strategy, is an approach to groom and to bring up our future citizens of our country. They are well guided, they are well trained with the Bhutanese values with the strong sense of belongingness, with a strong sense of compassion, with a strong sense of love to know to not just oneself, but also to others. Educating for GNH is also the approach that promotes a sense of self discipline in the school. This is also the approach that enhances the leadership of the students as well as the members of the school. So considering all these various perspectives of this approach, personally, I feel educating for GNH is such a useful, important, necessary approach in delivering the curriculum. The education system in our country actually has many hindrances, challenges and difficulties because there are, I mean, the field reality is sometimes a little difficult because often times we are constrained by the required resources - resources in our classroom, resources outside the classroom, and of course ours is also something that the school which has to conduct and host so many activities and because of this sometimes the school gets bogged down with so many ad-hoc activities and that we sometimes almost lose our focus. But actually educating for gross national happiness is such a beautiful, such a nice approach of delivering the education actually, and so that we have somebody, an individual who is a well-developed, has all aspects of any individual being given due consideration and that person is really productive actually. So that is the overall philosophy and this is what I feel about educating for GNH because it talks all about assessment, it considers, as I told you, head, heart and then the hand. It also considers the way that one looks at the thing. It also considers how one should feel about others and then also one's own skills - psycho motor actions. So all these are important aspects that are considered by this approach so called educating for GNH.

**Q12. How is Educating for Gross National Happiness upheld in your school?**

**Your Response:** As I said, Educating for gross national happiness entails 8 domains which we called it 8 greeneries like academic greenery, spiritual greenery, social greenery, intellectual greenery and so on. Academic greenery is one key aspect at school. It is always given due importance and to uphold this academic greenery in school, the school has all those systems of having an interactive teaching-learning in the school and the school has a system of assessment so called formative assessment. The school has a system of assessment so called objective assessment that promotes a learning of the students. So that is one domain - academic greenery. So that is how we do it and then like for example, may be like in the classroom, now we have departments - Department of English, Department of Dzongkha, Department of History so they themselves again work in collaboration and then their main objective is to enhance or achieve academic excellence. So academic greenery is taken care. Likewise, cultural greenery. Cultural greenery is the way we do things. For instance, school has a culture of bidding farewell to a teacher who leaves on transfer. The school has a culture of conducting annual ritual altogether, the school has a culture of hosting activities that is not organized by the school itself, like for instance, may be a NGO would like to come to our school and then conduct a program may be a kind of exhibition, like for instance, a year before last in 2019 before the pandemic we received a group of people from Thailand and these were people from Thailand and they wanted to show their Thai boxing in our school. So we hosted that. So that is

again the culture of collaboration. Likewise, we also have other association so that I would say that is a cultural greenery. We have another that is environmental greenery. Again, environmental greenery is all about developing school campus or flower garden and our students are given an area to develop and with their creativity they do all those landscaping and designing. So that's how we again uphold environmental greenery. So like that we have all the eight domains being put into practice which is actually the pillars, the domains of educating for GNH. And that is how, I mean, we practice in the school.

**Q13. What is your thought in general about the school community partnership in Bhutan?**

**Your Response:** The school community partnership in general is so much strong in many schools in the country. And particularly in the rural schools, remote rural schools where there is a school community has so much of role and communities play proactive role. They do all those supports there, and likewise in urban schools also, we do have this, but at the end of the day what matters is the leadership of the school as well. It is the leadership of the school who brings on board otherwise not so much but as compared with the past, I would say this culture of collaboration is increasingly noticed among all schools going very strong and it should go very strong because the operation of the school is not just the business of the school alone, because here now we have to think about the shared responsibility. So for that matter, the parents should also be responsible. The school should be responsible. The other stakeholders should be responsible. So I would say, this is one thing that school community partnership must be enhanced, strengthened and instituted in all the schools across the country.