Exploring the experiences of primary school principals in transforming their schools into professional learning communities

By

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ABSTRACT

School principals as curriculum leaders need to transform their schools into professional learning communities. The need for collective working among teachers, in schools is emerging.In the past, teachers have been working in isolated environments, and this practice has limitedtheir opportunities of receiving and giving support to other colleagues. Therefore, introduction ofcollaborative learning among teachers has been advocated by different researchers as a culture that allows for reciprocal growth among teachers. School principals as leaders can play a significant role in promoting and transforming schools into professional learning communities. As a result, a qualitative case study was undertaken to explore the experiences of two primary school principals in developing a collaborative learning culture among teachers in schools. The focus of the study was based on the assumption that these principals would have established this culture after completing an Advanced Certificate in Education - School Leadership (ACESL) which promoted collaboration in schools.

The study has made use of semi-structured interviews and documents analysis to generate data. Interview sessions were recorded and transcribed before they were analysed. On one hand, the data from transcriptions was coded and the themes were developed from the coded data. On the other hand, documents were analysed through critical analysis; which was done to ensure reliability and conformability of documents. The results of the study revealed that, (i) Schoolprincipals are still trying to implement ideas learnt from ACESL programme on professional learning communities (ii) Schoolprincipals are faced with a challenge of instilling commitment on teachers and this challenge results from the lack of relevant leadership qualities from the principals. (iii) School principals are using motivation of learners and teachers, as well as the alternation of teachers between different grades as strategies to respond to their challenges (iv)School principalsare promoting professional learning communities through team working and staff meetings.

DECLARATION

I, VenableThembizwiMsomi, declare that

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

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

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

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This dissertation is submitted with/without my approval.

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INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

17 December 2013

Mr Venable T Msomi (9804634)
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Protocol reference number: HSS/1506/013M
Project title: Exploring the experiences of principals who have been professionally trained in leadership to transform their schools into professional learning communities

Dear Mr Msomi,

Expedited Approval

I wish to inform you that your application dated 04 April 2013 has been granted Full Approval.

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

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

Yours faithfully
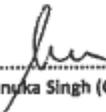
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Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/ms

cc Supervisor: Dr TT Bhengu
cc Academic Leader Research: Dr MN Davids
cc School Administrator: Mr Thoba Mthembu

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my family. Let us invest in education to live a better life.
A reading nation is a winning nation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

❖ My first acknowledgement goes to 'him who gave me power and strength', without God, all this would be impossible (**Shembe is the Way).**

❖ Second, I would like to convey my gratefulness to my supervisor, Dr T.T. Bhengu for immense support and guidance he has offered. Dr S. E. Mthiyane also supported me in many ways.

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ABREVIATIONS

ACESL	Advanced certificate in Education (School Leadership)
DoE	Department of Education
HOD	Head of Department
PLCs	Professional Learning Communities
SMT	School Management Team

TABLE OF CONTENTS	

CHAPTER FOUR
DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

1. CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Over the past few years, there has been a paradigm shift whereby teacher professional development is no longer viewed as individualised learning but where this process occurs within groups (Ono & Ferreira, 2010). Therefore, a move to this perspective has been collected motions with regard to professional development of teachers. To this end, one model that has evolved and gained prominence as a way of assisting this change of paradigm is that of professional learning communities (PLCs). The notion of learning communities is not restricted to the teachers or the learners only but is also applicable to school principals. School principals are expected to play a pivotal role in the creation of professional learning communities (Bhengu&Gounder, 2014). This study therefore explores the experiences of principals in two primary schools in Pinetown District. The principals from two primary schools had studied and completed Advanced Certificate in Education: School Leadership (ACE: SL) programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal between 2007 and 2010. Such a programme had been conceived by the Department of Education as part of its endeavour to build leadership capacity among school principals (Bhengu, Naicker&Mthiyane, 2014). In addition, it was also aimed at developing knowledge, skills and values that principals needed to lead and manage schools effectively and to transform their schools into learning communities of professionals.

The notion of professional learning communities is consistent with the South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996) which promotes the principles of inclusivity and participation of all stakeholders in carrying out various activities of the school. Senge (1994) is generally regarded as the father of the concept of learning organisations and (Bhengu, 2005), and in this study, the two concepts are used interchangeably due to the close relationship. Senge (1994) looks at learning organisation as exhibiting transformative way of doing things, whereby all participants share a vision of the organisation. Viewed from this perspective, professionalleaning communities discourage teaching in isolation and unhealthy competitions amongst teachers are discouraged; instead a culture of shared risk-taking and problem solving is promoted and celebrated (Seo& Han,

2012). Learning communities of teachers are therefore characterised by values of mutual vision, collective and cooperative leadership.

1.2 Background to the study

This section provides a detailed discussion about the background to the study. The study sought to explore the extent to which the Advanced Certificate in Education (School Leadership) Programme has enabled them to transform their schools into Professional Learning Communities (PLC) as anticipated in the ACE: SL programme. One of the assumptions of that programme is that students who have participated in it and completed it should be able to work collaboratively and in clusters, and also that they should be able to learn from others and change their schools to become more effective. This study therefore, also attempted to explores the challenges, the opportunities as well as the benefits that the principals obtained during the course of studying in the ACE: SL programme.

The ACE: School Leadership programme was aimed at capacitating school principals to manage their schools in the effectively. The skills which these school principals acquired enabled them to introduce the concept of professional learning communities in their respective schools. These school principals were also enabled to instil values that support transformation agenda of the government in the South African. Since values of collaborative learning are important in a transforming South African society, learning in the ACE: SL programme was also underpinned by the principles of shared learning, directed and self-directed learning in teams and in clusters (Department of Education, 2008). Collective learning, through teacher teams such as debates, stimulus problem-focused discussions and debates in teacher teams, formed an important component of this programme (Department of Education, 2008). Therefore, as part of the agenda of this study, it was important to also shed some light on the extent to which school principals that have participated in ACE: School leadership programme were making a difference in their school in terms of their leadership practices.

1.3 Rationale of the study

This section aims at providing an explanation about the need to conduct a study of this nature. It needs to be acknowledged that there is a wide variety of factors that interact and

impact on the quality of the education system in South Africa (Harber&Muthukrishna, 2010). Some of these include teachers' poor subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (Zwane, 2012). In order to address these challenges, intervention processes like the establishment of PLCs in the schools are needed to in order to enable individual teachers to identify their own learning and professional development needs (Lassonde& Israel,2010). However, my view is that the establishment of PLCs is not an easy job and I have doubt that the majority of school principals have managed to achieve this. This view is shared by some researchers within the context of South Africa (Zwane, 2012).

In my 23 years of teaching experience in 2 primary schools, I have observed that principals are not promoting collaborative learning, and are therefore not transforming their schools into Professional Learning Communities. Besides my personal observation, there is a body of knowledge within the South African context which suggests that school principals, particularly in rural areas (the context of my study), have had difficulties in making their schools learning organisations (Department of Education, 2011; Zwane, 2012; Bhengu, 2013). Although there is research that has been conducted in South Africa in the area of Professional Learning Communities, in my literature search I have not found many studies that deal with experiences of primary school principals in their attempts to establish professional learning communities. Viewed from this perspective, it is evident that a study such as this one came at an opportune time and provides a credible attempt to fill that gap. In addition, in spite of a few studies that have been done on collaborative learning, there is limitedfirst-hand evidence on its efficiency in schools, particularly in relation to a need to emphasise teamwork which a significant ingredient of the PLC concept.

1.4   Key research questions

The study is underpinned by the research questions outlined below:

- ❖ What are the experiences of principals who have completed ACE: School leadership in transforming their schools into professional learning communities?
- ❖ How do principals establish professional learning communities at their schools?
- ❖ What are the challenges faced and opportunities obtained by school principals who completed ACE: School leadership programme?

1.5 Significance of the study

This study aimed to understand the experiences of two primary school principals as they attempted to establish professional learning communities in their respective schools after they completed the Advanced Certificate in Education (School leadership) Furthermore, this study also aimed at developing knowledge, skills and values that principals needed to lead and manage schools effectively and to transform their schools into teacher learning communities. Therefore, this study may add value to the existing body of knowledge about how principals enact their roles in leading the process of creating professional learning communities in schools.

This study has the potential in providing lessons for researchers in the field and also for other schools about how professional learning can be established. Furthermore, the study may shed more light on how challenges that these principals faced can be overcome. Teachers need to be innovative thinkers, problems solvers, and make shared decisions (Seo& Han, 2012). Therefore, any attempt that assists the creation and improvement of creative thinking skills through collective learning is important. Leadership is the main ingredient for the successful schools, and my view is that the notion of professional learning communities provides an environment for continuous learning as groups and form a community dedicated to learning (Hord, 2000; Stoll &Bollam, 2006). Given that this study focuses on how the two primary schools may have, through their leadership practices, achieved this aspect, there are potential benefits for scholars, especially novice researchers, who want to engage in similar research projects.

1.6 Understanding the key terms

There are three concepts that underpin this study, and these are professional learning communities; instructional leadership and transformational leadership. The three concepts are briefly explained in this section.

1.6.1 Professional learning community

Different scholars have different views about what professional learning community entails. For instance, Mitchell and Sackney (2000) regard it as a team of teacherswho are engaged in

avigorous and thoughtful exercise which is done in a collective manner with a view to solving teaching and learning related matters. While agreeing with the view expressed by Mitchell and Sackney (2000), Stoll and Bollam (2006) seem to emphasise the importance of the sustainability of the engagement of learning collaboratively so that learners within the school reap the ultimate benefits. Stoll (2006) further provide the characteristics of the PLCs. These qualities include shared vision and values, co-operative responsibility for the learners' academic achievement, partnership that is always dedicated to learning, as well as individual and group professional learning, to name just a few.

Drawing from the discussion presented in the above paragraph, it is clear that PLCs are communities that can and do provide the setting and necessary support for various stakeholders whose responsibilities are to ensure that there is a sustained personal and institutional development in the schools. These stakeholders include groups of classroom teachers, heads of departments within the schools as well as, school principals. It is in my view that ultimately, the key players in the establishment of PLCs in a school will be the teachers themselves. The school can assist in providing an environment where PLCs can be established and that these help teachers to incorporate their professional understanding with the current research-based information about practice and content.

1.6.2 Instructional leadership

Instructional leadership theory maintains and focuses on improving teaching and learning by helping the teachers to improve their pedagogical practices and also by making sure that learner achievement receives the highest priority (Pansiri, 2008). School principals as heads of their respective institutions are tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that effective teaching and learning takes place in the school; some do this by focusing on gathering evidence of learner achievement (Pansiri, 2008). In terms of instructional leadership, school principals have to do everything they can as long as such actions are going to enhancelearning and teaching. Learning from one another in the context of professional communities can fall within the ambit of doing everything in order to ensure improvement of classroom practice and contemplated in instructional leadership.

1.6.3 Transformational leadership

One of the key concepts undergirding this study is transformational leadership theory. While many scholars such as Bass (1990), Leithwood and Steinbach (1991), Ross and Gray (2006),

have written about this theory, Burns (1978) is generally regarded as the father of transformational leadership theory. The main tenet of this theory is the notion of influencing fundamental changes in the attitudes of workers or subordinates so that the goals of the organisation and the vision of the leader can be realised (Burns, 1978). Therefore, transformational leaders can come up with changes, and they can develop new ideas out of the old ones. Transformational leaders can also change in the process of changing their followers in an organisation. They build strong relationship with their followersand they promote each individual's growth (Bass, 1990; Leithwood& Steinbach, 1991; Ross &Gray, 2006).

1.7   Review literature on professional learning communities

The reviewing of literature for this study tended to lean more on the international arena mainly due to the fact that this concept of professional learning communities is well-established there compared to South Africa. A detailed description of literature on professional learning communities is presented in Chapter Two which is dedicated to this aspect. This chapter provides just some signposts of key aspects of the literature. These include different conceptions of professional learning communities, characteristics of leaning communities of professional, the relationship between PLCs and the practice of teaching as well as factors that promote such communities. More details on this are provided in the next chapter.

1.8 Research design and methodology

The study is a qualitative research that was conducted using a case study design and was located within an interpretative and constructive research paradigm. Mouton (2001) mentions that case studies involve generation of qualitative data and that they intend to providean comprehensiveaccount of lesser number of participants. Other scholars such as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), regard a case study as anexplicitcase that is normallyplanned to demonstrate more commonstandards. A detailed description of methodological issues is presented in Chapter Three.

1.9 The structure of the study

This section outlines the structure of the entire study on the experiences of two primary school principals regarding the manner in which they transformed their schools into

Professional Learning Communities. The presentation of this study is prearranged into five chapters and these are summarised below.

Chapter One

This chapter is the summary of the study. It gives the introduction to the study, its focus and purpose. The three critical or research questions guiding the study are also provided. Furthermore, this chapter offers the rationale and the significance of the study, an explanation of three key concepts underpinning the study. A summary of the reviewed literature is also outlined together with the theoretical framework undergirding the study. It also provides a brief review of research design and methodology that was used and the demarcation of the problem.

Chapter Two

This chapter reviews literature on transformational leadership and how such approaches to leadership facilitate changes in schools. In addition, a critical review of national and international literature that is relevant to the research topic is also done.

Chapter Three

This chapter presents a thorough explanation of research design and methodology that was utilised in generating the data. It further describes how the generated data was recorded and analysed.

Chapter Four

This chapter presents and discusses data that was generated through semi-structured interviews with the participants. The data is presented in the form of themes that emerged from the process of analysing the data had been generated.

Chapter five

Chapter five presents a synthesis of the key findings drawn from generated data. On the basis of the research findings, recommendations are made

1.11   Chapter summary

In this chapter I commenced by introducing the overview of the study. The main focus which is the experiences of principals in transforming their schools into Professional Learning

Communities was presented. Other pertinent components are also presented and are summarised in the outline of the study section above. The next chapter presents a detailed description of the literature that was consulted and the theories that framed the study.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The first chapter presented an orientation to the study. Having outlined the orientation of the study, this chapter focuses on the literature review on professional learning communities from both the national and the international perspectives. The review of literature is connected directly to the key questions that are outlined in Chapter One. The main purpose of this chapter is to gain insights into major trends and critical issues relating to the roles played by school principals in transforming their schools into professional learning communities.

As it has been indicated previously, this study seeks to explore the experiences of principals in transforming their respective schools into learning communities of professionals. This chapter commences with a discussion of the literature that relates to professional learning communities. This is presented around concepts and themes namely, professional learning communities, characteristics of professional learning communities, professional learning communities and teaching practice, professional learning communities and school culture and professional learning communities and student achievements. Later on, an exposition of theoretical underpinnings of the study is made. The two theories that frame this study are transformational leadership theory and instructional leadership theory.

2.2 Review of related literature

Before I present a discussion on the literature that I reviewed, it is important that I provide a brief overview of what literature review is essentially about. The literature review can be regarded as a critical and integrative synthesis of the ways in which various scholars have dealt with the problem that being examined. The main purpose of doing reviewing what other scholars have said about the phenomenon under scrutiny is to identify a gap or perspective through which you can approach the study and also justify the need for conducting your own research (Ahmad, 2003). A similar explanation is provided by Ebeling and Gibbs (2011) when they define literature review as a piece of writing that is systematically organised and that provides a critical assessment of the existing body of knowledge. Furthermore, Ebeling and Gibbs (2011) maintain that the body of knowledge can be witnessed in published scholarly works such as research findings and theories that relate to the area of focus. This

view is further corroborated by Green (2011) when she states that a literature review serves multiple purposes which include the need to explore and to summarise previous research work in the field in order to identify the research base on which your own research is to be built. In this section I look at the different conceptions of professional learning communities; essential characteristics of professional learning communities, professional learning communities and teaching practice; professional learning communities and school culture, as well as professional learning communities and learner achievements.

2.2.1 Different conceptions of professional learning communities

In order to put this study into proper context, one needs to understand what is meant by the term professionals learning and communities. Obviously, different scholars emphasise different aspects of the concept. Notwithstanding, there are also points of convergence among various scholars regarding the essence of what constitutes a professional learning community. For instance, there is comprehensive view of the professional learning community. I say comprehensive because it includes almost all stakeholders in education, particularly within the school community. This view maintains that learning communities of professionals entail the provision of a setting and required assistance of classroom teachers, school managers or school principals as well as subject advisors to engage collectively in determining their own developmental routes (Gokhale, 1995). This scholar further argues that there is influential evidence that students working in teams achieve at higher levels of thought and preserve information longer than those who are working in isolation (Gokhale, 1995). Clearly, this notion of a professional learning community advocates collaborative and shared learning compared to individualised learning. Learning collectively gives learners a platform to deliberate in the arguments, to assumelearning as their own responsibility and consequently become critical thinkers. Stoll and Bollam (2006) agree with this view as they state that there is a robust belief that PLCs bring about positive impact on the learners' learning.

According to Matthews and Crow (2010), leadership should come from different people within the community of learners. This tends to increase and enrich the leadership capacity within the schools. Therefore, school principals need to realise that teachers need both skills and knowledge to participate effectively in teams. Matthews and Crow (2010) further suggest a number of areas wherein teams are required to develop requisite skills and knowledge. These include areas such as the role of an individual in a group, group development stages,

operational communication, the building of trust, problem-solving, planning, decision-making, effective ways to conduct meetings, dispute resolution and conflict management, to mention just a few. A study conducted by Browne-Ferrigno and Muths (2006) showed that readiness to assume principalship appears to be linked to an individual's encouragement and support from leadership mentors and the opportunity to engage in authentic leadership activities. According to Seo and Han (2012), learners are capable of performing better when they are working in collaborative situation as compared to isolative working in silos. It appears that in order forlearning communities to prosper, we need to shift our paradigm from the way we used to look ateducation (Lafee, 2003).

Rismark and Solvberg (2011) contend that collective learning method improve strategies of solving problem. One of the main reasons for this is that cooperative approaches provide opportunities for the learners to deal with different interpretations of any given scenario. The role that is played by leadership in bringing about quality education through improved learner performance has increasingly been receiving attention by scholars in the field of educational leadership and management (Bush, 2007; Moloi, 2007). According to Ono and Ferreira (2010) in the context of South Africa, neither the school principals nor the teachers have had much experience of participatory decision-making. This is mainly due to the fact that during the apartheid era, school principals were generally considered to be the only people with the knowledge and authority to make decisions. In the study conducted by Adams and Waghid (2005), the findings suggest that major challenges exist in relation to the way democracy is practiced in the disadvantaged Schools. Successful leaders in schools that have adopted professional learning community concept tend to create a situation that assist in achieving mission and vision of the school; they enable collaboration on finest practices for fulfilment.

Leadership is the main ingredient for successful schools and the notion of professional learning communities provides an environment for continuous learning as groups and also for forming a community that is dedicated to learning (Stoll &Bollam, 2006; Hord, 2009). According to King (2002), teachers tend to be uncertain about participation in professional learning communities as they have no confidence on one another. This study that is reported in this dissertation sought to understand how school principals transformed their schools into professional learning communities. Therefore, the concept of learning communities of professionals is a major focus area.

According to Matthews and Crow (2010), professionals are accountable and responsible for supplying an operative instructional programme to the learners so that they can learn effectively. Communities are made up of individuals who come together in a teamwith an intention of interacting meaningful activities and also to engage in deeper learning with co-workers, especially about topics identified to advance their shared meanings. The concept of PLC is taken from the business sector and it involves the ability of organisations to learn. This concept is now adapted to meet the requirements of the education sector; the learning organisation concept became that of a learning community that would attempt to establishthe culture of collaboration among teachers (Thompson, Gregg, &Niska, 2004).

2.2.2 Essential characteristics of professional learning communities

Hord (2004) presents fivefeatures of professional learning communities, and these are, mutual vision and values; cooperative responsibility; thoughtful professional analysis; collaboration and the promotion of individuals and group, as well as individual, learning. Each of the five characteristics will be outlined below.

First, mutual norms and values must be established with regard to such issues as the group's collective views about children's ability to learn, school priorities for the use of time and space, and the proper roles of parents, teachers, and administrators. A second important feature is a clear and consistent focus on student learning. DuFour (2004) restates this notion when he states that the mission is to ensure that learners learn than just ensuring that they are taught. I also support the norm that there should be a balance between teaching and learning. The third feature isthoughtfuldiscourse that results to wide and on-going discussions among teachers about curriculum, instruction, and student enhancement (Newman, 1996, p.182). According to Newman (1996), collaborative practice to make teaching public and focusing on collaboration are the last two characteristics of a PLC.

Bolam (2005, p.145) synthesises these characteristics to define a PLC as a community "with the capacity to promote and sustain the learning of all professionals in the school community with the collective purpose of enhancing student learning" I argue that most principals are struggling to establish PLCs in their schools. DuFour (2004) asserts that all groups of individuals with a particular shared interest are now regarding themselves as PLCs. DuFour (2004) cautions, "the term has been used so ubiquitously that it is in danger of losing all

meaning" DuFour (2004) recommends that teachers should reflect on their ways of working with the view to embed student learning and collaboration among teachers into the school's culture. According toDuFour and Eaker (1998) the four pillars oflearning communities of professionals are mutual vision, mission, goals and values. It is my view that teachers must examine the results of their efforts critically in terms of student performance. According to Matthew and Crow (2010), principals must assume the role of visionary leaders; direction-setter, change agent, spokesperson, and coach for effectively establishing and communicating a vision for a PLC. It is my view that professional learning communities must pay attention to on-going enhancement, shared vision, mission and values, collective teamwork, results-oriented, collective inquiry, context-specific, aligned with reform initiatives and on-going. Another feature of learning communities of professionals is helpful and cooperating leadership. Prosperous learning communities of professionals have leaders who part decision-making power. In PLCs the isolation and contesting cultures are altered intomutual risk-taking and problem-solving culture.

2.2.3 Professional learning communities and teaching practice

This section provides a description not only of what a professional learning community is all about, but it also describes the connection between this type of community and the practice of teaching. At the beginning of this chapter, an explanation of what a professional learning community is all about was given from different scholars' perspectives. Hence, the focus of this section is on the linkage between professional learning community and the practice of teaching. Shared learning has been cited as one of the major characteristics of professional learning communities. In addition, professional learning communities are expected to promote a teaching practice of a particular kind; that is where collaboration and shared learning and development among the professionals is encouraged. The ultimate goal remains that of delivering effective instructional programmes to the learners so that they can learn effectively.

Teachers need to be given adequate time to collaborate. The principle of learning communities rests on enhancement of student learning through improvement of teaching practice. It is important to consider the relations between classroom practice of teachers and participation in a learning community. It is my view that participation in a learning community leads to changes in teaching practice. Dunne (2000) for instance, states that

participation in PLCs will equip teachers with a flexibility skill in classroom management, will also enable teachers to be able to learners at different levels of content mastery. Arguing along similar lines, Louis and Marks (1998) maintains that the existence of PLCs in a school contributes to greater levels of social support for achievement and greater levels of authentic pedagogy. Similarly, Strahan (2003) concludes that as a part of change process, teachers who work collaboratively develop a shared school vision and mission which encapsulate guiding values which include integrity, respect, discipline, and excellence. It is such values that enable them to develop stronger instructional norms and make them to be receptive to working with curriculum facilitators in the areas where they require change and improvement.

Lord and Miller (2000, p.102) highlight four areas where teacher leadership can take place. These are "working with individual teacher in the classroom setting conducting activities like lesson planning teaching and team teaching; working with groups of teachers in workshops or in professional development settings; working with various constituents to address crises and teacher evaluation, and working with teachers, administrators, community members at meetings or conferences". Besides these four areas where teachers can take lead as part of capacity building among themselves, Andrews and Lewis (2002, p.78) highlight the view that teachers involved in a learning community "are also known as Innovative Design for Enhancing Achievement in Schools (IDEAS)". Drawing from this view, we can argue that PLCs also help teachers to incorporate their existing professional knowledge with the latest research-based knowledge on both content and practice. In this way their teaching can change for the better.

It is evident that PLCs promote and encourage groups of teachers to engage in a variety of activities including, including the analysis of learner results on evidence-based assessments such as Annual National Assessment (ANA) and other curriculum oriented activities. Hargreaves (2003) notes that professional learning communities demand that teachers develop grown-up norm in a grown-up profession where difference, debate and disagreement are viewed as the foundation stones of improvement. The above discussions indicate that there is a close relationship between the existence of professional learning communities and the practice of teaching. It is therefore important that these communities are established and sustained in schools. For that to happen there are certain conditions that have to exist. The

next section addresses this aspect so that we have a better understanding about the factors that promote the existence of professional learning communities.

2.2.4 Factors that promote professional learning communities

There are many factors that promote professional learning communities in schools. These include the school ethos, collegiality, collaboration, professional development and learner achievement, support from the school principals and SMTs and teacher motivation. York-Barr and Duke (2004) oppose that there are noticeable conditions that must happen in order for teacher leadership and development to effectively take place. School principals need to consider these factors when they seek to promote and to develop professional learning communities in their schools.

2.2.4.1 Positive school culture

According to Frost and Harris (2003) an organisational culture involves the system of values, beliefs and normal ways of behaving which underpins practice within that organisation. Bush and Anderson (2008) claim that the school culture symbolises the informal features of an organisation and that these features can be described as the way of doing things in the organisation. For example, Grant (2006) states that a culture of an organisation is embodied in the attitudes of people, their values and skills, which sequentially stem from people's personal backgrounds and also from their experiences of life. Viewed this way, it is evident that where teachers easily become amenable to working collaboratively may be closely related to the way leadership has entrenched a school culture that promotes this. For example, Grant (2006, p. 524), is of the view that the "success of the concept of teacher leadership would be directly related to school culture."

It is my belief that principals of schools as well as SMT members have a significant role to play in promoting a school culture that advances professional learning communities. According to Grant (2006), schools must develop a culture which recognises leadership of all teachers. Similarly, schools can develop a positive school culture in which every stakeholder has a positive view about the school; what it can achieve and the role they can play to realise such goals. In such a school culture, teachers are willing to learn from each other and from one another as professional. I also believe that if school principals can understand that if a

school culture encourages taking initiatives, irrespective of the position one holds in the school, and then professional learning communities stand a better chance of being developed.

Harris and Muijs (2007) suggest that teacher leadership can only display where the school culture and associated structures both allow it to develop. Ntuzela (2008) additional suggests that schools need to have a strong culture that encourages positive relationship between the school head and ordinary teachers also allow for more participation in making decision. According to Harris and Muijs (2007), involving teachers in making decisions is imperative, and can help in creation of shared feeling of responsibility for the goals of the organisation and a shared sense of direction. It is my view that if all schools can develop or promote such cultures one can see some enactment of professional learning communities. My understanding of school culture is that, it refers to the patterns of behaviour in an organisation.

Morabir (2009) claims that as a strong culture that encourages positive relationship between principals and teachers must be developed, more participation in decision-making, as well as high teacher morale and professionalism. I strongly believe that school culture must aim at developing a sense of professional learning community among the teachers in order to promote professionalism. It is shocking that a study conducted by Grant,*et al*. (2010) reveal that the existence of formal management and governance structures, through legislation, has not translated to the change of school cultures and practices that promote inclusivity and democratic forms of participation. It would have been an expectation of many leaders, managers and professionals like me that democratic leadership principles at schools have reached the peak so that professional learning communities can be promoted.

Hallinger (2008) proposes that prosperous schools establish an environment of academic press by setting high standards and anticipations, and work ethos that promotes on-going improvement. Principals possess a direct influence above teachers and their leadership contributes to factors such as collective efficacy, which has been shown to have a more undeviatinginfluence (Hoy, Tarter & Hoy, 2006). On the same issue of organisational culture and change, was (1992), argues that any endeavour to improve a school that disregards school culture will not succeed due to the fact that organisational culture influences readiness for change. I am therefore persuaded to conclude that the nature and quality of leadership that is offered by the principal has a great influence on the nature of the school culture.

The role that is played by leadership in an organisational set up has been highlighted by many scholars (Tarter & Hoy, 2006;Hallinger, 2008; Hoy, Bhengu&Mthembu, 2014), to cite just a few. Similarly, Morrissey (2000) claims that there the only thing of great importance that leaders do is to create and manage an effective culture of an organisation and that the unique talent of leaders is their ability to work with the prevailing culture. In addition, such leaders need to sustain school cultures that enable individual talents and collective potential of staff to flourish. It is under these conditions that professional feel free to explore possibilities that can improve their skills.

2.2.4.2 Collaboration

The concept of collaboration has been mentioned as being fundamental to the success of the PLCs. According to Harris and Muijs (2007), a culture of collaboration and trust is vital, as is a shared vision of where the school needs to go. According to Birky, Shelton and Headley (2006) the aptitude of a principal to motivate and encourage leadership capacityconstruction is crucial for educational change, transformation and collaboration to occur. This indicates that for effective team work to occur, the school principal and SMT need to exhibit and exercise positive influence in their work environment in order to develop professional learning communities.

From an international perspective, scholars such as Caine and Caine (2000) and Little (2000) for instance, suggest that sharing values and norms in a cooperative setting, and encouraging a culture of reliance, teacher leadership flourishes. In this way, collaborative setting can help in the development of professional learning communities. Viewed from this angle, it is imperative that, within the South African context, school principals and the SMTs as a whole, need to provide time for collaborative activities in their schools. This includes shared decision-making; shared vision and mission creation in the school, and the existence of this encourages collaboration that supports and promotes teacher leadership (Bonduris, 2011).

In a collaborative work culture the value of individuals in the school is acknowledged, as such teachers are empowered and encouraged (Fullan, 2007). Effective collaboration develops trust between the teachers and the administration staff and teachers are encouraged in their leadership role when they felt trusted by their managers (Birky, 2006). According to Harris and Muijs (2007), the schools that were part of a collaborative network in which professional learning communities was stressed, seemed to find this a major facilitating

factor. It is therefore my belief that collaboration can assist in addressing the issue of teachers being confined to the classroom.

Louis and Marks (1998) created a "professional community index" that demonstrated that effective PLCs included both collaborative activity and the deprivatisation of practice. Berry (2005) reports that a learning community structure helps the teachers in a rural elementary school examine their practice through such collaborative structures as sharing lessons, using protocols for decision-making, and relying on systematic note taking to inform colleagues about their work. Phillips (2003) drew on interviews with the teachers in one middle school to report that funding from reform initiatives allowed the teachers to collaborate in many ways. Some of the ways in which they collaborated included observing each other in the classroom, video-taping and reviewing lessons, investigating teaching problems and collectively generating new ideas for their practice, engaging in literature study circles, and also participating in critical friends groups.

Collaboration is at the heart of professional learning communities, as it is premised upon change that is enacted collectively (Harris &Muijs, 2003). Educators who are building a professional learning community recognise that they must work together to achieve their collective purpose of learning for all. Therefore, they must create structures to promote a collaborative culture. It is my view that school principals and SMTs must lay a good foundation for collaborative work and decision making for effective enactment of professional learning communities. I am also of the view that collaboration can only successfully and continually happen in environment that encourages teacher leadership.

2.2.4.3 Collegiality

The notion of collegiality and collaboration are closely related in the sense that, it is unlikely that collaboration can successfully occur where collegiality does not exist. Seo and Han (2012) indicates that school principals could benefit from using the collegial style of management which is associated with a conducive climate and cultures which are based on values such as respect, love, empathy and other values. The school principal assumes a collegial role than a more traditional hierarchical position of dominance. Little cited by Harris and Muijs (2003) suggest that collegiality interactions lay the groundwork for the development of shared ideas. Bush and Anderson (2003) argue that in collegial models, power is shared among some or all members of the organisation who are thought to have a

mutual understanding about the objectives of the organisation. My opinion is that collegiality can be a vital element to promote professional learning communities in schools.

The school principals and SMTs have to ensure collegiality practice. I also concur with Fullan (2007) that teachers need to interact with and support each other in order to develop collegiality. Furthermore, the study conducted by Grant (2008) found that SMTs are the main barrier to professional learning communities because of their lack of trust in other teachers and because they did not involve teachers in decision-making processes. I support this view and my study aims to reveal the role that school principals play in transforming their schools into professional learning communities. Research shows that collegiality plays a key role in the development of teachers (Muijs& Harris, 2003). It is my view that if school principal and SMTs can develop collegial culture in schools, teachers can easily take leadership roles and this can promote the creation and sustenance of professional learning communities.

2.2.4.4 Professional development and learner achievements

This section attempts to show that there is a link between professionally developed teaching staff and the achievement of the learners. Evidently, there is a strong belief that professional learning communities have a positive impact on the learners' learning (Emihovich&Battaglia, 2000). Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) indicate that the culture of on-going support and teacher professional development are essential for teacher leadership and development. The provision of teacher professional development activities aims at influencing and leading changes in the professional learning and changes in professional practice, which ultimately would impact on learner achievement (Supovitz, 2002). When talking about professional development, different authors emphasises different aspects of professional development. For example, Sullivan (1999) focuses on deeper understanding of key concepts. Sullivan (1999) states that professional development is basically based on providing the teachers with opportunities that will provide a space for them to engage in intellectual exercise regarding their subject content. Bellanca (1995, p.6) considers professional development of staff as "the effort to correct teaching deficiencies by providing opportunities for teachers to learn new methods of classroom management and instruction or 'spray paint' the district with hoped-for classroom innovations". Similarly, Thompson, Gregg and Niska (2004) argue that professional development programmes are design to alter the professional practices, beliefs, and understanding of school persons towards an articulated end. The above definition of professional staff development appears to adopt a deficit approach to the understanding of the

concept. It presupposes that there is something wrong in the manner in which the teachers in the school teach. Such an approach may be dangerous. Therefore, it is important that the process of identifying development needs of the teaching staff is handled with extreme caution, and that the teachers concerned need to be involved in that process.

According to Steyn (2009), there is a need for the teachers to keep on renewing their knowledge for the betterment of their facilitation of teaching and learning. Henley (2003) points out that the school managers who view the teachers as the most valuable asset will provide all the necessary support for professional development. Similarly, Duke (1993) also found that the staff development programmes were able to improve the learners' academic programme. Arguing for the connection between professionally developed staff and learner achievement, Bottoms and Fry (2009, p.5) assert that "principals can profoundly influence student achievement by working with the teachers to shape a school environment that is conducive to learning. Professional development also entails using learner achievement data to identify areas of weakness within teaching and learning in the school. According to Grant (2010) teachers require support from the school principal as 'leader of leaders' and through continuing professional development initiatives, both inside and outside the school.

Studies conducted by Louis and Marks (1998); Phillips (2003); Straham (2003); Supovitz (2002); Supovitz and Christman (2003) that examined the relationship between teachers' participation in the PLCs and learner achievement found that, indeed learners' learning improved. Louis and Marks (1998), found that learner achievement was significantly higher in schools with the strongest PLCs. This is indicative of the view that professional learning communities have an influence of learner achievement.

2.2.4.5 Support from school principal and school management teams

 Support from school principals and the SMTs plays and important role in promoting professional learning communities. Literature indicates that administrative support plays a key role in enhancing and maintaining professional learning communities (Harris, 2003). According to Bonduris (2011), if teachers feel supported by the administration, they are more likely to feel valued and take on leadership roles. Furthermore, Bonduris (2011) contends that the school principals' task is to carry the school vision and where teacher leadership is high; vision is shared amongst teachers and administration. Adding to this debate, Birky (2006),

states that school principals who function more as managers than as instructional leaders are less successful schools than those who work closely with the teachers in their roles.

In the South African context, a study conducted by Ntuzela (2008) found that the teachers felt demotivated when they were prevented from taking leadership responsibilities. Similarly, Singh (2008) found that school principals believed that they were developing teacher leadership when they overloaded them with unwanted administrative chores. It is my belief that professional learning communities is meant to empower teachers with leadership skills on various activities and leadership roles. I also believe that if teachers are influenced by school principal and SMTs, they are likely to excel in leadership beyond the classroom. My position as a researcher is that, if teachers are positively influenced by their principals as their seniors, they are likely to take leadership roles in the formation of professional learning communities.

2.3.4.6 Teacher motivation

This concept, like many others, is described by various scholars differently and emphasising different aspects of it. Teacher motivation is the key element in the formation and development of professional learning communities. Romando (2004) postulates that motivation as an inner drive that elicits behaviour and grants it direction. Romando (2004) further asserts that motivation is closely associated with the why and the how human behaviour is activated and guided. Bush and West-Burnham (1994) point out that motivation has three components; namely, the goals that people have and which direct their behaviour; the mental process by which individuals are driven to a particular behaviour and lastly, the social behaviour through which some individuals seek to retain or transform behaviour of others.

Drawing from the multiple definitions and explanations by various authors, teacher motivation can be understood as maximum effort in the form of strategies, techniques and means that school principals, as school managers and leaders in schools, apply in ensuring that all the teachers voluntarily participate fully in aiding all activities that will lead to the accomplishment of the core tasks, teaching and learning. Motivated teachers can work collaboratively and achieve their goals. Steyn and Van Niekerk (2007) attest to this view by

stating that motivated teachers will frequently search for the best ways for accomplishing tasks and responsibility assigned to them.

Motivated teachers can easily form teams which can ultimately help promote professional learning communities. Motivated teachers do the work excellently whether school principals are there nor not, and do not need to be reminded that they have to do their work. Drawing from the debates in the above paragraph, it can be concluded that, motivated teachers can teach effectively and efficiently and as a result, the learners they teach may obtain good results. On the other hand, demotivated teachers do not enjoy their work and it is difficult for them to form groups in the form of professional learning communities.

2.2.5 Factors help or hinder the creation and development of professional learning communities

It is important to consider factors influencing schools' overall capacity for change and development (Hopkins, Harris & Jackson, 1997), and for on-going and sustainable learning of the whole school community (Stoll, Fink & Earl, 2003). Some of these factors are teacher, time factor, trust and positive relations, group dynamics, resources, support from external agencies and partnership and local community. These factors operate at different levels and in complex ways, and are briefly discussed in the following section.

2.2.5.1 Teachers

Teachers are the key element in the creation and the development of professional learning communities. Endorsing professional learning communities requires a huge paradigm shifts in the way we view our roles as teachers (Thomson, Gregg &Niska, 2004). Teachers are often hesitant to participate in professional learning communities because they afraid to trust each other. Clearly for professional learning communities to flourish, we need a paradigm shift in the way we view education (LaFee, 2003). The success and failure of developing professional learning communities lie with the teachers themselves. According to Grant (2006), for professional learning communities to occur, not only do school principals need to distribute authority, but teachers also need to understand and take-up their agency role. It is my view that, sometimes teachers tend to shift blame to school principals for non-formation of professional learning communities. I am not saying principals are not to be blamed but, teachers need to do introspection as well. It is my view that in many schools it is common to

see teachers very reluctant to take on leadership roles but rather consider themselves as only classroom leaders.

In a study conducted by Harris and Muijs (2007), they found that the unwillingness of the teachers to take leadership roles is a barrier to teacher leadership. The lack of experience and confidence of the teachers was also identified as a potential barrier. Grant (2010) conducted a study and found that a further barrier to the teacher development was the teachers themselves. Similarly, Ntuzela (2008) found that teachers played a significant role in undermining their own development. It was found that teachers themselves blocked teacher development, either by refusing to lead, by refusing to accept leadership from other teachers or through a lack of understanding of teacher leadership. It is evident therefore, that teachers can also become a barriers in the formation of professional learning communities. Awareness of this reality is crucial if school principals are to succeed in overcoming these barriers, and therefore, be in a better position to transform their schools into PLCs.

A study conducted by Little (1995) found that leadership in schools is determined by the extent to which teachers accept the influence of their colleagues who have been assigned with leadership roles. According to Wasley (1991), resistance to leadership amongst teachers is caused by a lack of understanding, support or rewards for their additional efforts. According to Grant (2006), teachers do not realise their roles in the transformation of schools, despite the concepts being embedded in the policy documents. Another factor that is closely related to this is raised by Ntuzela (2008), by arguing that teacher's demotivation was also another barrier that emerged from the data, and that it hampered the promotion of professional learning communities. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001, p.2) summarise this idea by saying, "within every school there is a sleeping giant of teacher leadership, which can be a strong catalyst for making change". Teachers need to commit themselves to whole school development including the development of professional learning communities and show their SMTs that they are ready to take on leadership activities, in and beyond their classrooms (Ntuzela, 2008). Teachers need to become intrinsically motivated and view teacher leadership roles as both personal and professional development (Grant, 2006). It is my belief that the success of professional learning communities in schools rest upon interpersonal factors and relationship with the school management team and staff.

2.2.5.2 Time factor

One of the greatest barriers to professional learning communities is the issue of time. For teachers to work collaboratively, they need to shift their traditional view of the teaching day. More time needs to be built into teachers' schedules to afford them time to observe each other's teaching, to discuss common curriculum issues, to team together to plan and engage in action research. Literature (Harris &Muijs, 2003; Grant, 2006) suggests that the lack of time is one of the factors that hinder the development of professional learning communities in schools. Harris and Muijs (2007) contend that time needs to be set aside for the teachers to meet and plan and also discuss issues such as curriculum matters, developing school-wide plans, leading study groups, organise visits to other schools, and a host of other activities relating to their work. Grant (2006) argues that time is one of the factors that prevent the development of professional learning communities in schools. A study conducted by de Villiers and Pretorius (2013), also identified inadequate time for collaboration, leading and learning, as well as, a lack of incentives or rewards for engaging in leadership activities as barriers to professional learning communities.

Rajagopaul (2007) indicates that teachers are reluctant to engage in leadership roles because it is time consuming and it also affects their personal lives. Similarly, a study by Birky (2006) on how administrators influence and encourage teacher's leadership, found that since teacher leadership activities often involve working in teams, administrators should provide time for teachers to collaborate. Scholars have shown that the teachers' reluctance or even failure to take part in developing professional learning communities can be attributed to insufficient time to teach. We cannot deny the fact that teachers are faced with insufficient time in schools as they are engaged in both teaching and leadership responsibilities. Seashore, Marks and Krase (1996) found that in more successful schools, teachers were given more time to collaborate with one another.

Drawing from the above discussion, it is evident that school principals and SMTs have to find a way of ensuring that sufficient time for the development of professional learning communities in schools is provided. Research by Louis and Marks (1998) suggest that the schools need to be organised in ways that allow for time for their staff to meet and talk regularly. Time is critical for any non-superficial learning (Stoll, Fink & Earl, 2003). This means that the timetable must able to cover teachers who attend external training.

2.2.5.3 Trust and positive working relations

This section focuses on and emphasises the importance of trust and positive working relations for the creation of collaboration and professional learning communities. Working together productively in schools depends on positive relationships and collegiality. A school where there is trust and good relationship amongst the teachers can promote and develop professional learning communities; in a school where there is no trust and there are poor working relations, professional learning communities cannot be easily developed (Bass &Avolio, 1994). To add to this debate, De Lima (2001) argues that, the only imperative for establishing a community of professionals, is deep commitment to learners' learning; their development, as well as, their well-being. Nonetheless, a dynamic of dysfunctional relationships can have a negative effect on a school (Reynolds, 1996). Teachers are unlikely to participate in classroom observation and feedback, mentoring partnership, discussion about pedagogical issues, curriculum innovation, unless they feel safe. Trust and respect from colleagues is critical (Louis,*et al.*, 1995).

According to Bryk (1999), the strongest facilitator of professional learning communities is social trust among faculty members. When teachers trust and respect each other, a powerful social resource is available for supporting collaboration, reflective dialogue. Bryk and Schneider (2002) identified four dimensions of relational trust; namely, respect, competence, personal regard for others and integrity. It is my view that the school principal is the key person to develop relational trust in a school. Smylie and Hart (1999) caution, however, that when trust provides a context for predictability, stability, assurance and safety, the response may not necessarily be reflective conversation and professional learning. It might inhibit innovation activity by keeping individuals satisfied with their current situation.

2.2.5.4 Group dynamics

Group dynamics can also help or hinder the development of professional learning communities in schools. Internal politics affects change (Blase, 1998). On this matter, Sarason (1990) argues that educational reforms continuously fail because attention is not paid to the alteration of power relationships. Adding to this debate, Martin and Frost (1996) argue that the differentiations and fragmentation perspectives make greater allowance for dissent and uncertainty that may be a feature of a PLC, and with which their members will have to cope. It is my view that if there is harmony in groups then professional learning communities

can be developed. However, the existence different opinions should not be viewed negatively as robust debates also provide a basis for a strong resolution.

2.2.5.5 Resources

Some schools are located in areas with better resources and better developed professional learning infrastructures than others. Therefore, the nature and quality of professional development opportunities and external support available to staff can impact on a PLC's development. The development of professional learning communities will also depend on the availability of resources. Schools are bounded by structures shaping their capacity to create and develop a PLC (Leithwood& Louis, 1998). Human resources, physical and financial resources are key resources in the formation and development of professional learning communities. Schools with proper infrastructures are able to develop the formation of PLCs.

Collaboration is a necessary component of PLC, a school structure where it is easier to have meetings of professional discussions in a subject workroom is important rather than the staffroom located in another building (Kabi, 2014). On the same issue, McGregor (2003, p. 54) found that, over the course of break times, the majority of the 25 staff of a secondary school science department visited "the tiny office, providing the opportunity for casual, serendipitous contact as well as more focused social or work related conversations".

2.2.5.6 Support from external agencies and partnerships

This section attempts to tell a story that in society, there is inter-dependence between and among various structures. There are strong arguments that schools cannot go it alone and need connections with outside agencies (Bhengu, 2013). Indeed, some time ago Fullan(1993) argued that seeking outside help was a sign of a school' vitality; that organisations that act self-sufficient were actually not going anywhere. This is not to suggest that organisations should not be self-reliant; on the contrary, the argument makes the point that we need one another, and working alone cannot achieve much if we do not look around, outside of us and see potential benefits from working with others. In the context of this study and what it attempts to achieve, my view that to promote, sustain and extend professional learning communities, schools appear to need external support, networking and other partnerships. The amount and quality of external support for any serious improvement effort is critical to

support change (Seo& Han, 2012). External support for professional learning communities comes mainly in form of district support.

External agents may play a significant role in supporting schools' enquiry efforts and helping develop what McGilchrist, Myers and Reed (2004), call school's reflective intelligence. The support to help create a PLC may, however, be different from that to sustain it. Schools vary in their capacity for learning. Building capacity for improvement may necessitate paying attention to fostering and developing collaborative processes. According to Stoll and Fink (1996) this will be different in a cruising school from the one that is struggling or sinking. It is my opinion that schools need to form partnership with external agencies so that they can improve professional learning communities. Many schools have built productive relationship with partners, including parents, governing bodies, local district, and local community members, social services agencies, psychological services, businesses and industry (Myende, 2011). Schools have also engaged in a range of initial and on-going teacher development partnership with higher education institutions. Fullan (2001) concluded that strong partnerships are not accidental; neither do they arise through good will nor *ad hoc* projects. Furthermore, schools require new structures, activities and rethinking of the way each institution operates as well as how they might work as part of this partnership.

Schools need to network with external agencies to promote professional learning communities. In this regard, Hargreaves (2003) suggests that a network increases the pool of ideas on which any members can draw and as one idea or practice is transferred. Ultimately, the inevitable process of adaptation and adjustment to different conditions is rich in potential for the practice to be incrementally improved by the recipient (Hargreaves, 2003). In other words, the networks extend and enlarge the communities of practice with enormous potential benefits. Hargreaves (2003) suggests that networking brings together the knowledge, skills and dispositions of teachers in a school or across schools to promote shared learning and improvement. A strong professional learning community is a social process for turning information into knowledge. A school's location can be another important factor in relation to the links it is able to make with external partners. For example, Yeomans (2000) found that rural pathfinders had particular difficulties collaborating with others because of costs and time of travel, while urban pathfinder collaboration was made easier by relatively easy transport and accessibility of most schools, colleges, and training providers. This raises an

important issue of the need for schools to understand their unique, contextual factors, and utilise that understanding in establishing collaborations and networks.

2.2.5.7 Local community

The local community can also play a key role in the formation of professional learning communities. Schools are located in and serve very different communities. Learners' backgrounds have an impact on their schools' achievement (Reynolds, 1996). One study, however, found that race, ethnicity, socioeconomic factors and even academic background of the body of learners in a school did not strongly predict a school's professional community (Bryk, Camburn& Louis, 1999). It is my view that, if the local community supports the school principal and the teachers then the school environment will improve and be responsive to and conducive for the school principal to develop professional learning communities. A safe environment can motivate teachers to meet even after school and promote collaboration through professional learning communities. One example that I remember is that of political violence and lack of safety in the schools at those times; therefore the teachers could not hold meetings after school hours to develop professional learning communities, and the communities around the schools seemed not to be supportive of what the schools were trying to achieve. Clearly, the link between the school activities, including the creation of PLCs and the local community is a genuine one.

2.3 Theoretical framework

This study is framed by two theories, namely transformational leadership and instructional leadership, and these theories are discussed below.

2.3.1 Transformational leadership

The study is underpinned by the transformational theory. To bring this discussion into proper perspective, the study is essentially about transformation that takes place in the school through the initiative of the school principal. In this instance, the transformation I am referring to entails, the school principal attempting to establish professional learning communities among the teaching staff. This is done as one way in which to improve teachers' teaching and learning skills for the ultimate benefit of the learners in the classroom. It

therefore, becomes important everybody within the school is effectively and positively influenced in such a way that she or he sees the need to change his or her mind set and embrace change. It is on these bases that the theory of transformational leadership is deemed relevant for this study.

The concept of transformational leadership is generally accredited to James Macgregor Burns. According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership can be seen when leaders and followers make each other to advance to a higher level of moral and motivation. Later on other scholars have added on the conception of transformational leadership. For instance, Bass (1985) defines transformational leadership in terms of the impact that it has on the followers. Bass (1996) introduced four elements of transformational leadership. These components are individualised consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspiration motivation and idealised influence. These components are briefly discussed below:

Individualised Consideration:

This is the degree to which the leader attends to each follower's needs, acts as a mentor or coach to the follower and listens to the follower's concerns and needs. The leader gives empathy and support, keeps communication open and places challenges before the followers. This also encompasses the need for respect and celebrates the individual contributions that each follower can make to the team. The followers have a will and aspirations for self-development and have intrinsic motivation for their tasks.

Intellectual Stimulation:

This refers to the degree to which the leader challenges assumptions, takes risk and solicits followers' ideas. Leaders who use this style stimulate and encourage creativity in their followers. They nurture and develop people who think independently. For such a leader, learning is a value and unexpected situations are seen as opportunities to learn.

Inspirational Motivation:

This refers to the degree to which the leader articulates a vision that is appealing and inspiring to followers. Leaders with inspirational motivation challenge their followers with high standards, communicate optimism about future goals, and also provide meaning for the task at hand. Their followers need to have a strong sense of purpose if they are to be motivated to act in response to these demands. A sense of purpose and meaning provides the

energy that drives the group forward towards the achievement of organisational goals. Viewed from this perspective, it is clear that the followers are willing to invest more effort in their tasks; they are encouraged and are optimistic about the future and they believe in their abilities to carry out the task they are confronted with.

Idealised Influence:

This component of transformational leadership provides a role model for high ethical behaviour and it instils pride among the members and they gain respect and trust in the leader and in themselves as well. There are other dimensions to understanding transformational leadership. For instance, Boss (1985) introduced a model of leadership that juxtaposed transformation and transaction. Viewing transformational leadership this way prescribed that both notions are to be considered simultaneously and in also in some sort of balance. In this way, organisations need to remain stable while at the same time, they need to change. Therefore, transactional and transformational leaderships for organisational stability and transformational respectively become important and inevitable. Boss and Alive (1996) expanded this model, and defined the aspects of transactional and transformational leadership and called Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (QLM). In this model, the aspects of transformational leadership include idealised influence, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation and individualised considerations. Transformational leadership is a process in which the leader determines the followers' needs and demands, as well as meeting such needs through a comprehensive effort in achieving determined aims. Transactional process addresses the needs and demands to perform the tasks (Boss & Alive, 1993). Burns (1985) believes that transformational leadership is mainly superior to transactional leadership. He believes that transformational leadership is motivational, supreme and ethical in which human behaviour and leaders and/or followers' ethical tendencies will grow up.

Educational leaders who are transformational have a way of communicating with others; getting the masses on board in a unified vision and helping people see the benefits of outcomes through change. In the context of the study that is reported in this dissertation, these ideas are very important because the study sought to understand how school principals managed to transform their school to PLCs. Therefore, ideas that assist us understand how to get the best out of the people with whom we work are invaluable. Employees need to be able to think creatively, solve problems, and make decisions as a team. Therefore, the

development and enhancement of critical-thinking skills thorough collaborative learning is one of the primary goals in education. Leadership is the main ingredient for successful schools as the notion of professional learning communities provides an environment for continuous learning as group and form a community dedicated to learning (Stoll &Bollam, 2009).

Transformational leadership in the context of South Africa has a special meaning which is linked to the need to convert the previous education system into a new framework which emphasise issues of transformation, democracy, equity and redress. Real transformation will depend on the nature and quality of internal management. Transformational leadership theory can play a vital role for the school effectiveness and school improvement in South Africa (Bush, 2007). According to Northouse (2001), in the simplest terms, transformational leadership is the ability to get people to want to change, improve, and be led. Hallinger (2003) puts that transformational leadership models conceptualise leadership as an organisational entity rather than the task of a single individual.

According to Moolenaar,Daly and Sleegers (2010), transformational leadership is positively associated with schools' innovative climate and it motivates followers to do more than they are expected in terms of extra effort and greater productivity. Transformational leadership has three basic functions. First, transformational leaders sincerely serve the needs of others, empower them and inspire followers to achieve great success. Secondly, they charismatically lead, set a vision, and instil trust, confidence and pride in working with them. Finally, with the intellectual stimulation they offer followers of the same calibre as the leader (Castanheira& Costa, 2011). In line with the views expressed by Moolenaar,Daly andSleegers (2010), transformational leadership includes charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration. Unlike the previously cited scholars, Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) assert that transformational leadership has seven dimensions at schools. These are, building school vision and establishing school goals, providing intellectual stimulation, providing individualised support, modelling best practices and organisational values, setting high academic standard expectations, creating a productive school culture and fostering participation in decisions. Gronn (2000) and Ntuzela (2008) share the similar sentiments that leadership should be shared and should allow for shared decision-making processes by all in the school regardless of whether they are holding formal positions or not.

It is my view that principals must transform their schools into professional learning communities and provides time for teachers to meet for their professional development.

According to Bass (1985), the leader transforms and motivates followers by (1) making them more aware of the importance of task outcomes, (2) inducing them to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the organisation or team, and (3) activating their higher-order needs. Furthermore, for Bass (1985), transformational leadership increases follower motivation and performance. Transformational leaders probably do more things that will empower followers and make them less dependent on the leader, such as delegating significant authority to individuals, developing follower skills and self-confidence, creating self-managed teams, providing direct access to sensitive information, eliminating unnecessary control, and building a strong culture to support empowerment (Bass, 1996, 1997).

Transformational leaders are referred to those ones who try to show the organisation a new route for improvement and progress by generating new ideas and perspectives. They also mobilise the organisation by motivating managers, employees and members of the organisations to radical changes, transforming organisational pillars to achieve necessary readiness and capability to move in this new route, as well as achieving higher levels of idealised performance (Sanjaghi, 2001). Transformational leaders are facing with values, ethics, standards and long-term aims and focus on their followers' performance and development in order to increase their capabilities. Often, transformational leaders have strong internal ideas and values (Northhouse, 2001). This theory is relevant in this study as the study will view school principals who transform the schools into professional learning communities as transformational leaders. These school principals will be expected to motivate employees to change normal routes and the ways in which they used to do things (Sanjaghi, 2001).

2.3.2 Instructional leadership

This section presents a move from talking about how leaders can influence those who work under them to describing the kind of leadership that focuses on improving instruction in the classroom. It was mentioned in Chapter One that this study is framed by two theories, namely, transformational leadership and instructional leadership. The previous section

provided a detailed description of transformational leadership and this one focuses on instructional leadership. My contention in this study is that principals need to work collaboratively with the teachers and other classroom related factors to influence teaching and learning practices in order to achieve improved learner outcomes. The theoretical framework guiding this study advocates that principals, as instructional leaders, should work collaboratively with their SMTs and the teachers to protect instructional time from various interruptions and effectively use the time allocated for instruction. This view is also supported by Blase and Kirby (2000, p.75) who assert that "effective principals understand that the key to improving their schools' effectiveness lies not with persons skilled in compliance with bureaucratic rules and procedures or in discussions about those rules, but in effective use of time allocated for instruction."

The importance of school principals is also supported by Spillane (2006) who asserts that interaction among teaching professionals working collaboratively is central to attaining optimal leadership that improves learning. It remains the role of the school principal to influence the environment within which such interactions occur. The theory is depicted from a model which involves active collaboration of the school principal and the teachers on curriculum, instruction and assessment. The school principal and the teachers share responsibility for staff development, curricular development and supervision of instructional tasks. Mitchell and Castle (2005) support the view that the educational role of the principal is more appropriately configured as a facilitator of the teaching and learning process. In the context of deprived and challenging contexts in South Africa, Chikoko, Naicker and Mthiyane (2013) emphasise the role that is to be played by school principal in influencing effective instructional climate. Instructional leadership focuses on leadership functions that are directly related to teaching and learning (Murphy, 1998). In addition, Glickman (1989) asserts that the school principal is not the sole instructional leader but the leader of instructional leaders. This implies that other staff members in the school are considered as leaders as well.

The notion of other members in the schools, such as teachers, as leaders, other than the principal is currently receiving attention from various educational leadership scholars. For instance, Spillane (2006) asserts that instructional leadership becomes stretched over multiple individuals and tools through the collective interactions among leaders, followers, and their situations. These collective interactions among school members, and taking on leadership

responsibilities, are viewed as distributed leadership, also referred to as shared leadership (Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006; Grant, 2010; Lee, Hallinger& Walker, 2012). In this way a connection between shared leadership and instructional leadership has been established. The main aim is to make sure that learners' academic outcomes are improved. According to Supovitz and Poglinco (2001), instructional leaders take every opportunity to support teachers in their work and enhance teachers' skills to improve students learning.

Robinson, LIoyd and Rowe (2008) support the view that school principals as instructional leaders work with other stakeholders to analyse discuss result and strategies on practices that would help improve performance of the learners. Sim (2011) indicates that school principals as instructional leaders perform two roles excellently, namely, identifying outstanding learners who excel in academics by awarding incentives or certificates and also by making use of the assembly time to motivate them in their studies. Mitchell and Castle (2005) posit that the focus should not be whether a school principal is doing instructional leadership correctly, effectively, or efficiently, but rather, it should be on how aware the school principal is of what he or she is doing as an instructional leader. According to Sim (2011), instructional leadership is the premeditated process to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Furthermore, Sim's (2011) perspective of the school principals as instructional leaders is that they are to provide guidance to teachers on curriculum matters. This view seems to be supported by Bush and Glover (2003) and Mafuwane (2011) in their description of instructional leadership. These scholars argue that instructional leadership stresses the direction of the influence process; it focuses on teaching and learning and on the behaviour of the teachers in working with the learners.

2.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided a landscape of discourses in the field of educational leadership, particularly in the area of collaborative and shared learning. The main focus area was professional learning communities. As part of my agenda to provide literature review, I have discussed the different conceptions of professional learning communities. Furthermore, I have discussed the essential characteristics of professional learning communities. In addition, I have discussed the factors that promote professional learning communities in schools. Two theoretical frameworks underpinning my study were discussed. Lastly, I have explored the

factors that can help or hinder the creation of professional learning communities. In the next chapter I present the research design and methodology used in the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, literature review on instructional leadership and transformational leadership was presented. Chapter Three presents and explains the methodological processes that were followed in generating and analysing the generated qualitative data. Numerous researchers refer to methodology as a description and analysis of methods chosen to generate data. Henning, van Rensburg and Smit (2004, p. 36) for instance, refer to methodology as a coherent group of methods that complement one another and that have the "goodness of fit" to deliver the data and the findings that reflect the research question and also that suit the research purposes. In the same vein, Naidoo (2006) mentions that research methods are a range of approaches and techniques that are used to generate data. Naidoo (2006) further states that the generated data has to be used as a basis for describing, interpreting, drawing inferences and providing explanations, and in sometimes, even making predictions where appropriate.

In outlining the methodological issues that were considered in carrying out this study, this chapter begins by providing a description and theorisation of the design and methodology. As part of the description of research design, a research paradigm that underpinned the study is discussed. This is followed by a discussion of all relevant processes that were followed in conducting the study. These include a discussion of sampling and data analysis procedures, issues of trustworthiness as well as ethical considerations that were followed during the process of carrying out the study.

3.2 Research paradigm

This study is located within the interpretive research paradigm. Interpretive research sets out to understand human behaviours from their own perspectives (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). An interpretive paradigms are prevalent in qualitative research such as case studies as these strive towards a comprehensive (holistic) understanding of how participants relate and interact with each other in a specific situation and how they make meaning of a phenomenon under the study (Cohen, Manion& Morrison, 2011). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011)

assert that the strength of the interpretive paradigm lies in the fact that it gives the research participants voices to articulate their own experiences. In other words, the researcher has the responsibility of depicting the encountered reality from the perspectives of the research participants. Because of this and other factors, this paradigm is directly associated with qualitative research approaches. This paradigm was deemed appropriate for this study as it required the researcher to gain an in-depth knowledge and greater understanding of the school principals' experiences of how they established PLCs in their schools from their own perspectives.

Interpretive paradigms are also known to be naturalistic and this is based on three set of assumptions (Cohen, Manion& Morrison, 2011). These assumptions include ontological assumptions which are concerned with the nature of the phenomena that the researcher investigates. The second is the epistemological assumptions which emphasises the relationship between nature and forms of knowledge or what is to be known and the knower or the researcher. The third assumption is methodological and relates to the manner in which such knowledge is acquired and communicated to others. These three assumptions are closely intertwined in the sense that different ontologies, epistemologies and human nature demands in different methodologies.

The naturalistic nature of interpretive paradigm is described slightly differently by different scholars. For instance, Mertens (2009) refers to interpretive paradigm as a way of looking at the world where the researcher and the participants are interlocked in an interactive process. This view is based on the fact that qualitative researchers do not alter the research settings in order to try and understand it. Furthermore, Henning,*et al*. (2004) assert that an interpretive research paradigm is primarily concerned with meanings and seeks to understand social members' definitions and understanding of the situations from their own perspectives. Expressing similar sentiments, Davey (2006) maintains that this paradigm describes meaningful social action interpretations of how people create and maintain their social world. Interpretive research paradigm therefore, assumes that there are multiple realities and that reality is socially constructed. Clearly, this indicates that each research participant has a legitimate right to his or her own view and reality, and in this study, views and experiences of primary school principals are viewed with absolute importance.

3.3 Research design and methodology

The study adopted a case study design which is located within the qualitative research approach as described in the previous section. Cohen, Morrison and Manion (2011) assert that qualitative research provides an in-depth, intricate and detailed understanding of meanings, actions, non-observable as well as observable phenomena, attitudes, intentions and behaviours. Furthermore, case study is defined by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) as a specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle. These scholars summarise case studies by characterising them as of instance inaction. Scholars such as Mouton (2001), Bertram and Christiansen (2014) highlight that case studies are usually qualitative in nature and that they aim at providing in-depth description of small number of participants. Similarly, Maree (2007) argues that case studies offer multi-perspectives analyses in which the researcher considers not just the perspectives of one or two participants in a situation but also the views of other relevant groups of factors and the interaction between them.

The case study design was deemed relevant for this research study because case studies are the most preferred approach within qualitative researches (Mertens, 1998). This case study design consisted of two primary schools principals and the aim of the study was to understand their realities of how they established professional learning communities in their schools. This is done in clear acknowledgement of their own uniqueness (Yin, 2003). Intrinsic nature of case study research is being acknowledged and emphasised. On this aspect, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) assert that an intrinsic case study is where the researcher wants to understand a certain case better. In the context of this study, it attempted to uncover real life settings and to understand the infinite complexity of leading and managing teaching and learning in schools through PLCs.

3.4 Selection of participants

This section provides a detailed description of the processes that were followed in selecting the participants and research sites for participation in the study. It is always important that the method of selecting the research participants is consistent with the research paradigm and the methodological orientation of the study.

3.4.1 Selection of research participants

A combination of purposive and convenient methods of selecting schools and research participants was done. Purposive selection or sampling entails the researchers making specific choices about which people to include in the sample (Christiansen,*et al.,* 2010). The researcher targets this group, in full knowledge that it does not represent the wider population and therefore, there is no attempt to generalise the findings (Cohen, Manion& Morrison, 2011). According to Niewenhuis(2007), purposive sampling means that the context and the participants were selected because of certain defining characteristics that made them the holders of data that was needed for the study. In the context of this study, particular schools were chosen on the basis that they belong to the Mafukuzela-Gandhi Circuit in the Pinetown District.

The participants were selected from the UKZN data-base of principals who completed the ACE (school leadership) programme. The participating schools were selected from two different contexts, namely township and informal settlement. The main reason for that was that I wanted to obtain a comprehensive picture from the two contexts regarding how principals transfer their schools into PLCs. The schools that were chosen were located in the township and informal settlement respectively. This choice was informed by my desire to elicit primary school principals from different contexts, namely, the township and informal settlement respectively. The participants were also chosen according to the role they played in the school. They had to be school principals for them to qualify for selection due to the study focus. The participants were asked of preferable times to be used for the interviews so that they would not disturb their teaching and learning times.

The selection was convenient and cost effective in the sense that all schools that were selected were closer to me in terms of their location. One school was located in the township while the other one was located in the informal settlement in the Mafukuzela-Gandhi Circuit. In addition, my choice was also informed by the fact that I worked in the same vicinity and thus could gain access to them.

The sample comprised two primary school principals from the two schools because they were the people who had completed ACE: School Leadership programme. As part of that programme, students were expected to have obtained skills that would enable them to

transform their schools into professional learning communities. The study had six participants in total. These were made up of two principals from the two primary schools, two heads of departments and two teachers. According to Niewenhuis (2007), qualitative research needs a smaller sample than quantitative research studies. Since this was a qualitative research, the size of sample was acceptable. According to Cohen *et al.*, (2011), sample size is determined by the style of the research and in qualitative research it is more likely that the sample size is small. The purpose of the study was not to generalise but to get a greater depth of how principals transformed their schools into PLCs.

3.5 Profiling the two schools

The data that is presented and discussed in this chapter was generated in each of the two schools and these are sometimes referred as research sites. The profile of each school is outlined below.

3.5.1 School- A

School-A is one of the oldest schools in the Mafukuzela-Gandhi Circuit. It is a public school on private property and is owned by the Roman Catholic Church. It was built by the Roman Catholic Church in the 1960s and it is situated in an informal settlement. It is surrounded by a mix of houses, comprising what is usually called rural houses, congested urban-design houses, and also by government low income subsidy houses. Learners come from these areas and there are quite a number of other learners who come from other areas by buses and taxis. The school is about 40 kilometres away from Durban.

The school has 1134 learners and 33 teachers. There are 4 HODs, a principal and 1 deputy principal. The principal is a male with 12 years of experience as a principal in this school. School-A is characterised by dramatic changes since the arrival of the principal. Before he came, the school was virtually dysfunctional. It is reported that the school had no starting time and finishing time, late coming of both the teachers and the learners was the major problem and people did whatever they wanted to do. Learners' academic achievement was poor in all grades. The school operated under the very trying conditions with bad infrastructure characterised by the lack of windows, doors and toilets. At that time, enrolment stood at around 600 learners, and had the post-provisioning norms (PPN) of 19 teachers.

That bleak picture changed with the arrival of the new principal. He worked very hard to bring back the culture of teaching and learning in this school. The following year, there was a remarkable improvement in learner academic achievement from 68% to 80% in 2005. To address infrastructural problems, the principal secured sponsorship with which he renovated the school and built 6 new classrooms and 24 new toilets. The school is also well fenced. With improvement of the physical conditions in the school, including teaching and learning, the average pass percentage in all grades in the past three years has been around 98%. Learner's enrolment and staff establishment has escalated to the current levels of 1134 learners and 33 teachers respectively.

The school had a well-defined and visible vision and mission statement that is displayed in the foyer, offices and in all classrooms. The vision statement highlighted open access to the school, and also indicated that the school is a public school on a private property; addressing the needs of all learners; giving equal opportunities to all the learners and being accountable to all the stakeholders. The school's stated aims were to provide the best possible education for all learners and according to their needs and abilities, regardless of their race, religion, language or gender. The mission statement expresses the need to develop skills, attitudes, and values of the learners that are conducive to their personal, academic and social development. The aims were to develop in their learner's self-discipline, respect for others, critical thinking and resourcefulness. The school Governing Body and the school community aimed at achieving this by establishing a supportive and stimulating environment for the staff, with the aim of fostering their personal and professional development.

3.5.2 School- B

School- B is one of the new schools that have been built by the provincial Department of Education in the Mafukuzela-Gandhi Circuit and is located in the township. The school is approximately 25 kilometres from Durban. The school was built around 1996 and it serves learners from the township and adjoining semi-rural communities.

The school has 825 learners and 25 teachers and a male principal. School had 4 HODs and 1 vacant post for a deputy principal. According to the principal, the vacancy occurred due to the increase in learner enrolment. The principal also indicated that, since the school was

established there has been in-fighting in the school about the management posts. The first principal had to go through a number of hearings and court cases which dragged for over 2 years regarding her post. When the enrolment increased, the post for the principal was upgraded to a higher level and the post was advertised. The new principal was appointed in the presence of the previous principal. This was not accepted and it was challenged by the first principal through teacher trade unions. That dispute continued for a while and there was no harmony in the school. The newly appointed principal found it difficult to stay and ultimately left the school.

The school became dysfunctional and was characterised by poor learner academic achievement. The current school principal came in as a displaced principal from another school. It was only after the first principal resigned after three years ago that the post was advertised and the current principal got in. The school has since improved drastically in terms of human relations and the culture of teaching and learning. The average results in the past three years were 58% and have recently increased to around 80%.

The vision and mission statement of the school was displayed in the foyer in a big banner. The mission statement emphasises the commitment to academic excellence; the promotion of respect for human dignity; the ability to interact with different cultures with dignity and a positive self-image and confidence. The stated aim of the school was to develop self-discipline thereby empowering their learners to take their rightful place in the South African society which affords equal opportunities to all. The school aims to achieve this by placing teaching and learning at the core of its activities; giving their teachers opportunities to develop and improve their teaching skills; preparing learners to become responsible and active members of a democratic society and working hard to support and gain commitment from the local community.

3.6 Profiling the participants

This section summarises the profiles of all the participants from the two schools. These profiles show the gender, age, qualifications, teaching experience, experience as principals, as well as, experience as principals in their current schools. Profiles of the two principals is presented in a Table 1 below, while Post level 1, and HODs, respectively, are presented in Table 2.

	Principal-A	Principal-B
Gender	Male	Male
Age category	>40	>50
Qualification	Senior degree	Senior degree
Teaching experience	15-20 years	20-25 years
Experience as a principal	10-15 years	10-20 years
Experience as a principal in the current school	10-15 years	5-10 years

Table 1: Principals' profile

The profile of the principals from Table 1 above shows that the two participating principals were males. The two of them are in different age categories with Principal- A being above 40 years while Principal-B is above 50 years. The table also shows that the principals had a wealth of academic expertise as they both have senior degrees. The principals had many years of teaching experience too, ranging from 15 years to 25 years. Principal-A had more 10 years of experience as a principal while Principal-B had more than 15 years of experience as a school principal. Principal-A was promoted to be a principal in the same school that he was teaching and had experience as a principal only in the current school. Principal-B had fewer years of experience as the principal in the current school but had experience as principal in the other school as well.

	Teacher-A	Teacher-B	HOD-A	HOD-B
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Male
Age category	40-50	30-40	40-50	30-40
Qualifications	Diploma	Diploma	Degree	Diploma
Teaching experience	10-20	5-10	5-10	10-15
Years in the current school	5-10	5-10	20-30	10-15
Current position	Post Level-1	Post level-1	HOD	HOD

Table 2: Teachers and HODs profile

The profiles of the two Post Level-1 educators, (referred to in this report as teachers) show that the two teachers were females. Both of them are in different age categories ranging from 30 years to 50 years as shown in Table 2 above. They both had professional teachers' diplomas. Their teaching experience which range between 10 years and 20 years. However, they both have similar years teaching experience in the current schools. The profiles of HODs are also shown in the above Table 2 and HOD-A is a female whilst HOD-B is a male. Both HODs are in different age group ranging from 40 years to 50 years. HOD-A had a degree whilst HOD-B has a professional teachers' diploma. Their teaching experience ranged from 5 years and 15 years respectively. HOD-A has more teaching experience in the current school. HOD-B had 10 years to 15 years teaching experience in the current school.

3.7 Venue for interviews and atmosphere

The venues and times for the interviews were initially discussed and chosen by the participants. One participant chose the school library whereas the other one chose the public library which is very close to the school. This was done in order to allow privacy and confidentiality. From the participants' perspectives, these venues were considered to be comfortable environments and allowed principals to operate in their natural setting which formed part of their daily lives and work context. The interviews were conducted after school hours. This was meant to minimise disruption of teaching and learning in the school as principals are the leaders of curriculum and instructional leaders. The atmosphere was relaxed.

3.8 Methods of data generation

Qualitative research has a variety of methods that can be used to generate data. These include observation, interviews, documents, life story, questionnaires and many others Creswell (2008). However, to generate data in this study I used semi-structured interviews and documentary review. The two methods have helped me achieve my research goals. These goals are captured in the next two sentences; namely, to explore the experiences of principals who have been professionally trained in leadership to transform their schools into professional learning communities and to obtain an understanding about how school principals established professional learning communities in their schools. The data generation methods are described in the next section.

3.8.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used as an instrument to generate data. According to Cohen, *et al.* (2011), semi-structured interview can be regarded as a guide that is prepared, and it is sufficiently open-ended in order to enable researchers to make expansions, follow-ups and probes where appropriate. Similarly, Henning, van Ransburg and Smit (2004) recommend the use of semi-structured interviews in qualitative research because they provide the researcher with flexibility to probe for details during the interview.

In the context of this study, semi-structured interviews were preferred because they enable me to get deeper insights about the lived-experiences of the two primary school principals. In addition, this method suits research that is framed within interpretive paradigms. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews provided sufficient space to understand the participants' points of view rather than trying to make generalisations about their behaviour. Cohen, *et al.* (2011, p. 349) define semi-structured interviews as "an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, which sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production". It is the same rationale that influenced the choice of this method; it would provide a platform where I could obtain greater in-depth into the participants' professional lives where they could freely share their experiences with me.

There are other advantages of semi-structured interviews besides probing and clarification of issues that has been alluded to in the previous paragraph. Semi-structured interviews have the ability to gather descriptive data from a few participants who have knowledge of the phenomenon (Cohen, *et al.,* 2007). One of the main aims of choosing semi-structured interviews was to obtain rich descriptive data that would facilitate an understanding of the participants' construction of their experiences and social reality (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). As previously mentioned, these interviews were conducted after school hours and in different venues. These venues were chosen by the participants because they viewed them as comfortable and appropriate. The semi-structured interviews took a face-to-face format and lasted for approximately 45 minutes to one hour, depending on how the quick the participants responded to the questions posed. Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) assert that an hour can be considered a standard unit of time for individual interviews.

3.8.2 Documentary review

This section discusses documents review which is the second method that was used to generate data to complement semi-structured interviews. Documentary review is used in qualitative research as a strategy that focuses on all written communications that may share light on the phenomena being examined (Henning, Van Rensburg&Smit, 2004). This method is very useful in evaluating the authenticity and accuracy of data generated using other instruments such as interviews. The documents that were reviewed were minutes of meetings, communication books, strategic plan, mission statement, vision statement and policy documents.

3.9 Recoding of data

Semi-structured interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder. The use of a tape recorder or similar mechanisms such a digital voice recorders are useful in capturing accurately the content of what was said during a conversation between the researcher and the interviewee (Lodico, Spaulding &Voegtle, 2010). Furthermore, these authors indicate that using digital voice recorder assists in ensuring that I focus on the conversation rather than being distracted by focusing on notes taking**.**

Before I could use the recorder, I asked for permission from my participants to use it. Furthermore, I explained to the participants that recording the discussions was only means to ensure accuracy of the content of our discussions and that it was not for any other purpose, and also that no other person would have access to the recorded information. Invariably, they all acceded to my request to record our conversation recorded. Therefore all the interviews were recorded with a digital audio recorder because when conducting interview, an interviewee is faced with multiple situations to pay attention to. The digital recorder afforded me time to listen to the interviewee attentively and empathetically so as to be able to probe their responses. Moreover it enabled me to engage fully with interviewee because I did not have to write down everything during the interview. Furthermore, interview on audio recorder may also be replayed as soon as necessary for complete and objective analysis at a later stage.

Digital voice recorder allows a fuller record than notes taken during the interview (Cohen, Manion& Morrison, 2000). Another important factor is that the tone of voice and emotional impact of the response are preserved by the recorder instrument. Furthermore, using the recorder allow for a complete and accurate recording of the participants exact words. Audio recording also provided time for important aspects in an interview like the non-verbal behaviours, for example, facial expressions and gestures observed to be noted. The interviews were audio taped for purposes of ensuring accuracy of the content of the conversations with the research participants. Moreover, I also took notes whilst interviews were in progress. Recording interviews was easy because I was able to focus on the discussions. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) also emphasise that another way of generating data of personal experience is to have recorded conversations. Transcriptions were taken from digital voice recorder, and in this study, transcriptions were needed for repeated readings in the discourse analysis.

3.10 Data analysis

Cohen,*et al.* (2011) describe data analysis as a process consisting of organising, accounting for and explaining the data. Maree (2007) elaborates on the analysis that it means a close or systematic study or separation of a whole unit's part for the study. Moreover, Cohen,*et al.,* (2011) also elaborate that this data is then reduced and organised into a more accessible and compact form in order to be able to draw clear conclusions in relation to the data. The process of converting raw data to final patterns of meaning began by transferring all the data generated from the interviews

This study used guided analysis because units of analysis will emerge from both data and the theory. According to Samuel (2009), guided analysis is flexible in terms of allowing researchers to modify principles of theories to accommodate important issues that emerge from the data. The data in the current investigation consisted of transcripts and notes taken during the interviews conducted for the purposes of the study. Related concepts were then grouped together and categorised (Rice &Ezzy, 2000). Themes that emerge from data and theory were then identified and decontextualised, for example by referring back to the literature (Anderson, 1993).

Theoretical framework was used as a guide during the process of data analysis (Cohen,*et al.*, 2000). I used inductive data analysis to analyse the data after verifications of transcripts. When transcribing data, exact words uttered by the participants during the interviews were used. I read the data to check if it makes sense. I also transcribed the data *verbatim* and also generated data through the documents that were reviewed for example minutes of professional learning communities that formed in schools. The analysis of data was arranged in categories and themes that emerged from data generation. Finally, conclusions were drawn from this analysis with the aim of clearly communicating the findings in relation to the original research questions.

3.11 Issues of trustworthiness of the study

According to Lincoln and Guba (1988), Wolcott (1994), Creswell (2008) validity is not always clearly measurable in a qualitative research instead trustworthiness is preferred.These scholars suggest the use of concepts such as credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability instead of the term validity. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) the effect of the threats to validity and reliability can be weakened but can never be completely removed. Furthermore, Yin (2004) emphasises that it is important that the researcher ensures trustworthiness in a study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose four criteria to be considered by qualitative researchers in pursuit of a trustworthy study: credibility, dependability, confirm ability and transferability and these criteria were utilised in this study to ensure trustworthiness of the findings. These criteria are discussed in the section below.

3.11.1 Credibility

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility refers to the ability of the researcher to produce findings that are convincing and believable. Furthermore, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness where the researcher ensures that what has been reported is truthful and correct. In applying this criterion, I first telephoned the school principals to make an appointment for a preliminary visit to sampled schools to familiarise myself with the culture of the participating schools and to establish the trust with the school principals.

Secondly, before conducting the interviews, participants were encouraged to be frank and it was indicated that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions that were asked. Participants were also encouraged to contribute ideas and talk without fear of losing credibility. Moreover, I guaranteed the participants that what they told me in the interviews would remain with us. In that way, they talked freely without any fear of possible threats of for instance, victimisation (Mertens, 2009).

Thirdly, to ensure credibility in the study I went back to the sites with the transcripts, field notes, data analysis and findings to confirm if what has been written was what has been said by the participants. Mutch (2005) asserts that member-checking allows the participants to check that what they have said is true and accurate account, and allows them to change anything they deem to be incorrect in an effort to ensure the reader that the findings are credible and therefore, can be trusted. Furthermore, Mertens (2009) assert that trustworthiness can be ensured by using member-checking technique to ascertain whether the participants agree with the recorded version of the interviews. I have provided as much information on how school principals transform their schools into PLCs'.

3.11.2 Dependability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), there are close ties between credibility and dependability, arguing that, in practice, a demonstration of the former goes some distance in ensuring the latter. One of the ways in which I ensured dependability of what I was findings was to ensure that research participants' rights were respected and that they had full access to the data that was being produced. Participants were treated fairly and with great respect. Data generated was made available to the participants so that they check if it is reflected exactly what they wanted to say. After everyone was satisfied with the data generated, the data analysis commenced.

3.11.3 Confirmability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the concept of confirm ability is a qualitative investigator's comparable concern to objectivity. To that end, steps have to be taken to help and ensure that the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher (Bertram

&Christiansen, 2014). In addition, Bertram and Christiansen (2014) consider that a key criterion for confirmability is the extent to which the researcher admits his or her own predispositions. My main predispositions were that I knew the principals and their schools.

3.11.4 Transferability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability refers to the extent to which the results of the research can be applied in similar contexts. Furthermore, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that it is important that sufficient thick description of the phenomenon under investigation is provided to allow readers to have a proper understanding of it, thereby enabling them to compare the instances of the phenomenon described in the research report with those that have seen emerge in their situations. In this study, transferability was censured by giving detailed information regarding the number of schools taking part in this study and where they are based; the number of participants involved; the data generation methods employed and; the number and length of the data.

3.12 Ethical considerations

Cohen,*et al.* (2011) assert that, in conducting research, it is important to observe ethical principles in order to pre-empt problems that may arise during fieldwork and also to protect the rights and autonomy of the participant's. Therefore, Ethical standards such as the participants' rights, confidentiality, mutual respect and anonymity are imperative in the qualitative research method (Denzin& Lincoln, 1994). However, Cohen,*et al.,* (2011) warn that in a face-to-face interview, anonymity cannot always be fully guaranteed because the interviewer may identify and know the participants. Moreover, these authors maintain that it is the responsibility of the researcher to provide credible confidentiality measures and convince the participants that their participation will not compromise their safety and autonomy. Issues of confidentiality and anonymity were explained and guaranteed to participate through the letters of consent that declared that while participation in the research project would be highly appreciated however, they still had the right to withdraw from participating anytime they wish to do so.

Before conducting the study, I applied to the Ethics Department in the College of Humanities in the University of KwaZulu-Natal. This Committee ensure that students and staff members

who conduct research comply with the University's ethical standards. I further wrote a letter to the Department of Education seeking a permission to conduct the study in its schools. Furthermore, another letter was written to the participants seeking their consent to take part in the study. The participants were informed about the main aim of the study. The participants were also informed about the content of the questions to be posed, and that the recording during the interviews would be done; that it would be treated with strictest confidentiality and that their responses would be treated anonymously. It was important to ensure that participants took part in the study with confidence. Moreover, I informed the participants that the information they would share with me would be kept highly confidential.

3.13 Coding of schools and participants

In this research, it is important that identities of the participants are protected. One way of hiding the identities of participants is to use *pseudonyms* (Cohen, et *al.* 2011).The normal practice is the code of names of the institutions and participants. In this study I did not use *pseudonyms*, instead I used neutral labels such as 'School-A' for the first school and 'Principal-A' for the principal of the first school. Details of these codes are presented in the next section below.

3.13.1 Coding of schools

The names of schools were coded to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. The code **School-A** refers to the school that was located in the Township area in the Mafukuzela-Gandhi Circuit whereas **School-B** refers to the school that was located in the informal settlements area in the Mafukuzela-Gandhi Circuit.

3.13.2 Coding the participants

The participants for this research were two school principals, two Heads of Departments and two teachers from the two primary schools and the following codes were used.

Principal-A refers to the principal of School-A
Principal-B refers to the principal of School-B.
HOD-A refers to the HOD from School-A

HOD-B refers to the HOD from School-B

Teacher-A refers to the teacher from School-A

Teacher-B refers to the teacher from School-B

3.14 Chapter summary

This chapter has focused on the research design and methodology that was employed in the study. Research approach and paradigm adopted in this study were also discussed. Furthermore, other element of the research process such as sampling, trustworthiness of the study and ethical issues were observed during the study. Case study design was described and the reasons for adopting such a design were given. Data generation methods and data analysis were explained. Ethical issues and trustworthiness were discussed. The next chapter focuses on the data presentation and discussion.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the research design and methodology that was employed in this study. This chapter presents and discusses the data that was generated through semi-structured interviews. The data was generated from two schools which were drawn from two different contexts, that is, informal settlement and township contexts respectively. School-A was located in an informal settlement while School –B was located in a township within same education circuit, the Mafukuzela-Gandhi Circuit. This is based on my belief that before emerging issues from the data, it is also important that the readers are informed about the context of the research sites (Bhengu, 2013; Bhengu&Mkhize, 2013). After the presentation of the themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview transcripts. The profiles of the two schools are discussed below.

4.2 Themes that emerged from data generated

The data is presented under the nine themes that emerged from the data generated through semi-structured individual interviews. These themes are as follows (a) Ways in which school principals develop teachers in schools (b) Programmes introduced by principals in promoting collaboration among teachers (c) Challenges faced by school principals in managing teacher collaboration (d) Challenges faced by heads of departments (HODs) in managing teacher collaboration (e) Strategies implemented by school principals in overcoming challenges (f) Strategies implemented by HODs in overcoming challenges (g) Changes observed by principals after the transformation (h) Support received by school principals from circuit and district offices (i) Support received by HODs from their schools to improve teaching and learning. Each of the themes is discussed in the next section.

4.2.1   Ways in which school principals develop teachers in schools

It appears from the generated data that the participating school principals used different ways in developing teachers as professionals in their schools. The generated data revealed that one of the school principals relied on the formation of various functional committees to improve

teaching and learning in the school. Establishing such committees was one of the ways of forming communities of professionals in the school who learn together as professionals. The other school principal emphasised the use of a series of steps which include planning, implementation, monitoring, control and reviewing the changes that have been implemented. In addition, this school principal also made use of Learning Area Committees (LACs) as the way of developing teachers to improve teaching and learning. This is what these school principals had to say:

> *Functional committees have helped us in achieving this particular objective... The first committee that we have formed as a school is the curriculum committee... The other important committee that we have is the staff development team... The other committee that we also take into cognisance of is the institutional learner support team because we tend to ignore the learners' needs and only concentrate on our needs as educators and yet it is important that we also look from the side of the learner; to get into their shoes and try to identify the barriers to learning and ensure that the ground is level and that learners are ready to accept the information that we teach them* **(Principal-A)**.

While Principal-A emphasised the formation of functional committees in the school, Principal B outlined series of steps he used and this is what he had to say:

> *I develop the staff by making sure that we do proper planning... This includes duty loads, time tables, class roasters, and so on... Implementation involves monitoring and control so that whatever we planned is implemented properly... To check whether what we have done is improving or not, we have review sessions whereby we sit down as management and look at the progress and have a staff meeting to review areas that need improvement... After that, teachers sit down as Learning Area Committees to identify problems or areas for development* **(Principal-B)**.

Information was also elicited from the teachers and HODs from the two primary schools as a way of ensuring that there was a balanced view coming from the participating schools. From the generated data it appears that responses of the school principals, the HODs and the teachers were almost similar. For instance, it emerged from the interview with Principal-B that proper planning assisted them in developing teachers in the school. Planning was also found to be a common feature in my conversations with HOD-B, as well as Teacher-B, who also emphasised planning as being a way in which the teachers were developed in School-B. This is what HOD-B had to say in this regard:

The things that are discussed in these meetings include the planning such as the year plan looking at the programmes for the whole year – setting up dates for monitoring lesson plans, work schedules and report back to the principal who will then give us the time table **(HOD-B)**.

Similarly, Principal-A indicated that forming functional committees was helping them in developing teachers professionally. Again it appears that HOD-A and Teacher-A shared similar sentiments with their principal. The two participants from School-A concurred with what their principal said. On this issue, this is what the HOD from School-A had to say:

We have a committee that takes care of the curriculum related matters. The needs of different learning areas are provided for in the committee **(HOD-A)**.

With regards to documents review, the minutes of meeting from both schools revealed that principals are promoting committee meetings. This is evident in quotation of School-A's minute of the staff meeting:

*The principal requested all coordinators of committees to submit their reports on Friday. Furthermore, teachers were informed that coordinators will give their reports in the next meeting***(Minutes of the staff meeting at School-A – April 2013).**

School principals as instructional leaders and curriculum managers are expected to put more effort to improve teachers' ability to perform their duties efficiently and therefore, they provide professional development through acquiring more knowledge and skills from within the school and elsewhere. Supovitz and Poglinco (2001) argue that instructional leaders take every opportunity to support teachers in their work and enhance teachers' skills to improve student learning. In support of this view, Henly (2003) points out that the managers who views teachers as the most valuable asset will always provide all the necessary support for their professional development. Teacher development activities improve and enhance opportunities for quality teaching and effective learning.

4.2.2 Programmes introduced by principals in promoting collaboration among teachers

The generated data shows that there are different programmes and activities that the school principals that participated in this used in promoting collaboration among the teachers in their schools. These programmes include peer mentorship, induction, team teaching, workshops,

team building, briefing sessions, monthly work monitoring. Each principal has his own set of programmes. For instance, the principal of School-A had this to say in that regard:

> *We also provide peer mentorship where we use the slogan each one, teach one!… We also provide induction programme for new staff members. It is important that when we do the stuffing plan for the following year, changing teachers around, taking a teacher from grade one to grade three – it is important that the teacher be inducted… We also promote team teaching which is what we do at this school where a teacher who teaches grade four can go to teach grade six and teach a certain aspect of mathematics***(Principal-A)***.*

The views expressed by Principal-A above were corroborated by those of Principal-B, and this is what he had to say regarding the set of programmes that his school had:

> *The first programme that I have introduced is the staff development programme which takes into account the areas that have been identified in the school improvement plan. I then arrange workshops for the teachers on aspects that will enhance the capacity to work collaboratively. Another activity is the team building exercises whereby we go out as staff and organise a conference centre. I also have briefing sessions every Monday morning… I have also introduced monthly monitoring of work* **(Principal-B)**.

The generated data also shows that there are other programmes that were used by School-A in order to promote the capacity of the teachers to work collaboratively. However, the principal of this particular school did not mention these programmes but the teacher in the school did, and this is what this teacher had to say:

> *We also have team building where we come together as teachers whereby we invite an external advisor to come and develop us as educators within the school so that teaching and learning will happen smoothly. We also arrange workshops where teachers develop each other* **(Teacher-A)**.

The data generated from School-B revealed similarities between the principal and the teacher in the same school. Teacher-B has also mentioned networking programme and workshops as ways of improving capacity to work collaboratively. This is what this teacher had to say:

> *The principal introduced the networking programme where the schools that are near ours will come to our school to discuss the curriculum. The Romans also help us with training through workshops, where we gain information that will help us in assisting learners* **(Teacher-B)**.

The theoretical framework guiding this study advocates that instructional leaders like school principals should work collaboratively with their SMTs and teachers in order to promote the capacity to work collaboratively. This view is also supported by Matthews and Crow (2010) who assert that leadership in the school does not have to come from school principal only but that it needs to come from a number resources within the school community. Matthews and Crow (2010) have a strong belief that by encouraging leadership from a variety of resources enhances opportunities for leadership capacity in the school. Such a view is also shared by Hallinger (2008) who claims that instructional leadership should be held as the model for emulation by school leaders for its part in monitoring, mentoring, and modelling.

4.2.3 Challenges faced by school principals in managing teacher collaboration

The data generated revealed that while school principals and the teachers have wonderful vision and dreams about how they should improve the quality of education in the school, that does not happen easily as there are always obstacles on the way. The data indicates that a variety of challenges that school principals that participated in this study faced in managing teacher collaboration. Among these challenges are disruptions to the teaching programmes that occur from time to time; others include absenteeism of teachers, attrition of educators, lack of understanding of educational legislation and resistance to change. This is what the principal of School-A had to say on this matter:

> *There are disruptions that we always experience with regards to teacher trade union meetings. Most of our teachers in this school belong to a particular teacher union that will always call a meeting at any time and expect that the teachers should attend that meeting... Absenteeism; you find that teachers are getting sick more often these days; so they absent themselves which also creates a problem and results in some form of disruption in our teaching programmes... The department always calls for workshops and demands that teachers go to those workshops. Most of the time, it is done at a very short notice which disrupts our plans. Another challenge that we experience is the attrition of teachers; most teachers leave the system now for different reasons and that also disrupts the planning that we have set for ourselves.*

While agreeing with the principal of School-A, the principal of School-B added other perspective, adding another set of different challenges that they faced in their school. This is what this school principal had to say:

> *The first one, I can say that teachers don't know or don't understand the departmental prescripts or legislative mandates because they don't know the*

implications... The second challenge is that some of them are resistant to change, so when they are new policies such as the CAPS documents, some of them... not all resist change (**Principal-B**)*.*

It appears that these principals are challenged by different factors. On one hand, the challenges faced the Principal-A are related to disturbances that seem to undermine time devoted to teaching. He complained about teacher union meetings, absenteeism, and workshops that happen externally to the school. This challenge is supported by scholars such as De Villiers and Pretorius (2013) who identify inadequate time for collaboration, leading and learning, as well as lack of incentives or rewards for engaging in leadership activities and regard these as barriers to professional leaning communities.

It appears that the other principal is challenged more by the teacher's behaviour and attitudes as he indicated that they seemed to lack an understanding of various government policies relating to education and the teachers' work. For instance, some of them seemed to be unwilling to change their old practices. This is in line with the study conducted by Muijs and Harris (2007) as they also found that unwillingness of the teachers to take leadership roles was a barrier to the teacher development. A lack of experience and confidence of teachers was also identified as a potential barrier (Muijs& Harris, 2007). Additionally, Ntuzela (2008) also found that teachers themselves blocked teacher development, either by refusing to lead or by refusing to accept leadership from other teachers or through a lack of understanding of policies.

4.2.4 Challenges faced by heads of departments (HODs) in managing teacher collaboration

It also appears from the generated data that the heads of departments faced different challenges in managing teacher collaboration. These challenges include too many curriculum changes that keep on coming to the schools; lack of interest by the teachers; too much paperwork; absenteeism and late submission of work. The heads of departments had the following in answering the question on challenges:

> *One of the challenges that I am facing is this ever changing curriculum because as it is we are now using CAPS so you find that the older teachers are no longer interested. Another challenge is that teachers complain about too much paper work; they don't like writing* (**HOD-A**)*.*

The second HOD mentioned other challenges, and this is what he had to say:

> *When we hold meetings you find that not all the educators will be present for that particular meeting. We face a problem of late submissions as some teachers do not submit on time and you find that the programme is delayed by those late submissions and they don't meet the deadlines set for them* **(HOD-B)**.

Documents also confirmed that HODs are faced with a challenge of teacher absenteeism which hampers their consistency of collaborative learning. The minutes and attendance register collected from HOD–B revealed that teachers were not always present during meetings. The above data suggest that teacher in the studied primary schools were demotivated and were not keen to participate in collaborative learning communities. The HODs were faced with the challenges of the teachers who were not interested in the new programmes and also those who were not submitting their work on time. This is in line the study conducted by Ntuzela (2008) where he found teachers' demotivation as one the barriers that emerged from the data and that hampered the promotion of professional learning communities.

4.2.5 Strategies implemented by school principals in overcoming challenges

It is always important that challenges that hinder the achievement of goals in organisations are overcome if organisations are to succeed in achieving their goals. Similarly, it appears that principals in this study had tried to address the challenges they faced by utilising different strategies. While the one principal believed that collective planning with stakeholders such as teacher unions and the provincial Department of Education would be a solution, the other did not seem to share similar views. The other principal believed that information sessions where they shared important legislative mandate could be a solution. This is what the principal of School-A had to say:

> *It is easy to overcome those if we can come together and teacher unions realise the importance of our plan. If we do our planning and the teacher unions know what we are doing and at what time of the year, so that their own planning will not clash with ours. The department also knows the plans that we as school have, so when they plan their workshops they ensure that these workshops don't disrupt our own planning as a school* **(Principal-A)**.

The principal of School-B believed in using different strategies and this is what he had to say about this issue:

> *I have identified that in January 2014, we will have some sort of information session with the focus of understanding legislative mandates through analysis and interpretation* (**Principal-B**).

As principals in the study are confronted by different challenges, again they respond differently to the challenges they face. For instance, Principal-A thought that collaborative planning among stakeholders could be a solution to time loses. This corroborates the views expressed Watson and Fullan (1992) as they claim that schools require new structures, activities and rethinking of the way each institution operates, as well as, how they might work as part of this partnership. On the other hand, Principal-B planned information sessions through which he hoped to build capacity among the teachers. This is one of the qualities of a transformational leader as advocated by Bass and Avolio (1994) who assert that transformational leaders focus on capacity building for the purpose of organisational change.

4.2.6   Strategies implemented by HODs in overcoming challenges

The generated data shows that one of the HODs had strategies in place which this HOD could utilise to overcome the challenges, while the other HOD appeared not to have an idea about what to do. The HOD from School-A had this to say regarding the strategies to use to overcome the challenges faced in the school:

> *It is easy to overcome them if you have good relationship with the teaching staff and other key stakeholders. You have to make sure that you do your work as an HOD so that it makes them see that it is important to do your work perfectly. You must make sure that when you do work you delegate to teacher and don't make it as though you know everything* (**HOD-A**).

While the HOD from School-A seemed to have a plan, the HOD from School-B appeared to be confused as he suggested a year plan as a strategy to overcome the challenges of managing teacher collaboration. This is what he had to say:

> *I think a year plan will be a directive for us to know and to follow about how this should be finished and at what time so we should follow the programme* (**HOD-B**).

The data generated from HOD – B corroborated with the minutes of the staff meeting as I had the opportunity to view minutes of the year plan crafting meeting. Few aspects of the meeting are quoted below:

- *Mrs Y suggested that the SMT should meet twice a month, preferably fourth nightly.*
- *Miss S also suggested phase meetings to take place fourth nightly*
- *Mr X proposed that we have at least one soccer and netball friendly matches per term* **(School-B minutes of the staff meeting).**

The HOD from School-A identified good relations and delegation of duties among teachers as strategies that they used to overcome the challenges faced. Harris and Muijs (2007) indicate that a culture of trust and collaboration is essential as it constitutes a shared vision of where the school needs to go. In addition, Bass (1997) points out that a transformational leader tends to do more things that will empower the followers and make them less dependent on the leader. Some of these strategies include delegating significant authority to individuals; developing follower skills and self-confidence; creating self-managing teams; providing direct access to sensitive information; eliminating unnecessary control and building a strong culture to support empowerment.

4.2.7 Changes observed by principals after the transformation

With regards to the changes that were observed by the school principals after the transformation process, it appears that both school principals have observed similar changes in their schools. These changes involve a remarkable decrease in teacher absenteeism and improvement in teachers' confidence. I found it interesting to listen to the principals when they were discussing these changes.

> *Yes there is a change. I am going to tie this question with your previous one. On the day of these meetings we no longer experience absenteeism because everyone is looking forward to being personally there because each person knows that if they are not there, they have missed a lot. This helps us to encourage and serves as an intrinsic motivator educators to present themselves in those meetings* **(Principal-A)**.

Similarly the other principal also raised the issue of decreasing in teacher absenteeism and improvement in confidence. This therefore indicates that these principals are sharing the same sentiments. On the same issue this is what the principal of School-B had to say:

Of course I have observed changes; firstly teachers are motivated to come to school daily and avoid absenteeism. Secondly, I have also observed that results are improving. As a result, teachers' confidence is also boosted (**Principal-B**).

The data suggests that school principals have observed motivation and improvement of performance from the teachers who were participating in collaborative learning cultures. Steyn and Van Niekerk (2007) attest that motivated teachers will frequently search for the best ways for accomplishing tasks and responsibilities assigned to them. In support of this view, Strahan (2003) concludes that as a part of the process of change teachers needed to work in a collaborative manner, and that they also need to develop a shared school vision and mission which will ultimately provide guiding values such as integrity, respect, discipline. All these changes are important if schools have to move towards a community of professionals who learn together. Therefore, a professional learning community is likely to be different from a bunch of teachers who work in silos.

4.2.8   Support received by school principals from circuit and district offices

The data reveal that there was agreement between the principals of the two schools that the officials of the Department of Education assisted them in their quest to establish a professional learning community within their schools. They believed that by encouraging a collaborative working culture, such a community can be established. The two school principals agreed that the district office provided support to the school principals in promoting collaborative leaning among the teachers in schools. Support from subject advisors was common from the participating school principals. The school principals also mentioned other different forms of support that they received from the district office. These included the delivery to the schools of relevant policy documents and circulars; the provision of workshops; the promotion of cluster meetings and the provision of monitoring guidelines. On this issue the principal of School-A had this to say:

They provide us with the relevant and up to date policies in terms of subject policies, assessment policies and curriculum policies within the range of the curriculum delivery. They also give us guidance through the circulars that they constantly send to our schools. The visits by different subject advisors play a pivotal role in ensuring that we as educators improve. The district provides workshops for educators in different learning areas which help educators improve on shared learning. They also encourage cluster meetings where schools that are in close proximity meet to discuss

their common challenges and ensure that each school is carried along to meet the common objectives of the cluster **(Principal-A)**.

From the other perspective the principal of School-B also indicated other forms of support that he received from the district office, and this is what he had to say:

> *I am also getting support from the district as in 2013 I was visited by four subject advisors who came to my school and capacitated my teachers in their respective subjects. Another support from the district is school functionality monitoring… that is where they identify the things that we need to improve so their support helps me to improve shared learning in my staff as I report everything that has been identified back to the staff* **(Principal-B)**.

The district offices are providing school principals with reasonable support as the school principals claimed that they received support in terms of curriculum and assessment policies and other policy documents. Moreover, both school principal mentioned that they also received specialised support from subject advisors. According to Seo and Han (2012) the amount of quality of external support for any serious improvement effort is critical to support change. In addition, Hargreaves (2003) emphasises the need to strengthen networks, arguing for the need to have a bigger pool of ideas from which one draw best practice. Drawing from lessons learnt from these networks, one can make adjustments to one's plans and programmes.

4.2.9   Support received by HODs from their schools to improve teaching and learning

The interviews revealed that the HODs received support from their schools in promoting shared learning among teachers. This support came in the form of resources such as availability of policy documents and textbooks. This is supported by their responses of the HOD from School-B who said:

> *Educators can't teach without a policy so we give them the policy document and provide them with teaching aids, textbooks and stationery as the educator cannot teach without textbooks and can't teach a learner who does not have sufficient stationery* **(HOD-B)**.

Both heads of departments appeared to be sharing the same sentiments expressed by HOD-B. The HOD from School-A also emphasised the importance of having government policy documents to guide them in their teaching. This is what this HOD had to say:

There is a good support system from my school. At the beginning of each year we ask the principal for policy documents and to assist us in drafting the template that we will need to monitor the work of teachers (**HOD-A**).

The views expressed by the HODs were confirmed by the teachers that participated in this study. These extract below is taken from the interview with the teachers from School-A, and this is what this teacher had to say:

We also have workshops within the staff to share information that is important. During these workshops we share problems in the school; sometimes the principal consults subject advisors who can give us more information (**Teacher-A**).

The teacher from School-B had similar views and confirmed the views that support within the school was provided in the form of capacity building workshops and in the promotion of the notion of team work among the teachers.

The principal capacitates us as educators, for example, we work as a team... The principal insists on us helping one another for teaching to be effective. The principal gave us curriculum documents and we are in line with them – we use them as our tool in doing preparations and everything (**Teacher-B**).

The above extracts show that the two HODs and the two teachers that participated in this study all agreed that they received support from their schools to improve teaching and learning. School principals need to provide resources to support the teachers. Kruger (2003) acknowledges that the primary role of the school principal is to make sure that all the resources needed in the school are made available and that the resources that are available in the school are effectively utilised. In addition, the school principal has to make sure that the educative function is carried out to the desired level. On this matter, Sindhvad (2009) affirm that the provision of instructional material is one of the most ways of supporting the teacher and enhancing student achievement.

4.3 Chapter summary

In Chapter Four, the data that was generated through semi-structured interviews was presented and discussed. The data was organised into nine themes. In the next chapter, the presentation of findings and recommendations is done.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter dealt with the data presentation and discussion. The generated data was analytically interpreted through the lens of the adopted theoretical framework and related literature in order to seek answers to the key research questions. This chapter focuses on three aspects, namely a summary of the study, the presentation of the findings and then the recommendations drawn from the findings. A chapter summary concludes the chapter.

5.2 Summary of the study

This study has explored the experiences of two primary school principals in transforming their schools into professional learning communities. This was a case study of two primary school principals who have attended an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE: SL) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. In Chapter One, I provided the background and orientation to the study and also provided the justification for the study. The specific objectives of the study as well as the key research questions are presented in that chapter. In Chapter Two, I present the review of the related literature as well as the theoretical framework underpinning the study. In Chapter Three, I provide a description and a discussion of the research design and methodology that was used in the study. In Chapter Four, a detailed presentation and discussion of the data made. The data is presented and discussed under nine themes that emerged after the data analysis. In Chapter Five, I present the summary of the study, the presentation of the findings as well as recommendations drawn from the findings of the study. The key research questions are used to present the findings. As part of the findings, I also indicate the extent to which the data generated was able to address all the research questions.

5.3 Presentation of the research findings

The findings are presented using the key research questions as they appear in Chapter One. This is done to show the extent to which the generated data has responded to the key research

questions. As a result, the extent to which each research question has been answered is discussed in details.

5.3.1 What are the experiences of principals who have been professionally trained in leadership to transform their schools into professional learning communities?

The discussion below details the findings regarding the primary school principals' experiences in transforming their schools into professional learning communities. After discussing nine themes that emerged from the data, it appears that principals had diverse experiences with regard to transforming schools into professional learning communities. These experiences include the challenges they have faced, the strategies they have devised, the changes they have observed in their schools and the support they have been receiving from the district office.

The data reveals that principals are confronted with number of challenges in transforming schools into PLCs. When principal A outlined challenges such as disruptions, absenteeism and attrition of educators. And principal B pointed out that there is a lack of understanding of educational legislation and resistance to change as his challenges; these challenges are regarded as their experiences; this is discussed in detail in **Section 4.2.3 Chapter 4**. It was also found that both principals were doing something about the challenges they were faced with; when they both devised different strategies to respond to their challenge, again this is also perceived as an experience. On one hand, Principal one suggested collective planning among stakeholder as a solution to disruptions. On the other hand, Principal Two proposes information sessions as a solution to lack of understanding of legislative mandates by teachers. More details on this issue are provided in **Section4.2.5 in Chapter 4.**

The changes observed by the principals from teachers after the implementation of PLCs also form part of their experiences. It appears as a positive experience when schools principals mention that the absenteeism is decreasing, learner results are improving and teachers' confidence is boosted. To display this positive change, principal two indicated that *"firstly teachers are motivated to come to school daily and avoid absenteeism. Secondly, I have also observed that results are improving. As a result, teachers' confidence is also boosted"*. Principal-One also displayed this positive change as he also claims that *"on the day for these meetings we no longer experience absenteeism because everyone is looking forward to being*

personally there... this helps us encourage and serves as an intrinsic motivator for educators to present themselves...". These positive experiences by the principals display that they value the impact of professional learning communities in their schools.

Adding to positive experiences, school principals were found benefiting from the support offered by the district office. The documents that the office supplies to the schools which come in a form of policies and circular were acclaimed by principals. Moreover, the support they receive through subject advisors is also praised by the principals. Principal-One conveyed this well when he said *"they provide us with relevant and up to date policies in terms of subject policies, assessment policies and curriculum policies with the range of curriculum delivery...".*

5.3.2 How do principals establish professional learning communities at their schools?

The data has shown that different principals used different ways to establish professional learning communities in schools. These ways include the use of various functional committees and the introduction of various programmes. Functional committees such as curriculum committee, staff development committee, institutional learner support team, as well as Learning Area committees were identified by school principals as contributory factors towards the establishment of PLCs in his school. More details on this issue are provided in **Section 4.2.1 of Chapter 4.** The two school principals displayed qualities of instructional leaders as articulated by scholars such as Supovitz and Poglinco (2001) who point out that instructional leaders take every opportunity to support the teachers in their work and to enhance teachers' skills to improve student learning.

The data also revealed that principals made use of different programmes to establish the professional learning communities. These programmes include mentorship, induction, team teaching, workshops, team building, staff development programme and briefing sessions. This displays that there is no just one way in which school principals can establish PLCs, but they relied on different programmes. More details on this aspect are presented in **Section 4.2.2 of Chapter 4.**

5.3.3 What are the challenges faced and opportunities obtained by school principals who completed ACE: School leadership programme?

The data has shown that the school principals and the HODs from the participating schools faced a number of challenges in trying to transform their schools into a professional learning community. Similarly, there were opportunities for the schools to transform them into sites where professional teachers learned from one another. Such opportunities presented themselves in the form of support that the provincial Department of Education at circuit level. I need to point out though that there should be nothing surprising in this finding. I am saying this because it is the duty of the Department of Education to supply learning materials and other resources to the schools. Similarly, as much as the participants in this study acknowledged and appreciated the fact that officials of the Department of Education supplied to the schools government policy documents, which is part of their duties.

5.4 Recommendations

First, I acknowledge that the Department of Education (DoE) has formulated policies to be implemented on democratisation of leadership and the implementation of professional learning communities to develop teachers in schools. However, I recommend that the DoE must also allocate funds to capacitate principals on aspects of professional learning communities. I suggest that the DoE embraces the development of principals through workshops and seminars. These workshops should not only be directed at school principals but to all teachers so as to awaken the' sleeping giants' in schools such as those who are demotivated (Katzenmeyer& Moller, 2001). The District officials should assist schools to formulate structures and plans for staff development programmes to facilitate professional learning communities. Lack of time is also highlighted as one of the factors that hinder the enactment of professional learning communities (Harris &Muijs, 2006). The DoE must provide time in order to allow teachers to form professional learning communities and this will help schools to drift away autocratic forms of leadership towards more distributed forms of leadership (Grant, 2010). School principals need to use a direct approach rather than an indirect way of supervising and monitoring the work in order to promote professional learning communities in their schools.

Furthermore, research should be conducted on the roles played by the district officials and the SMTs on the enactment of professional learning communities beyond the classroom. Perhaps, this research may help us to understand the extent to which the partnership of district officials and SMTs in transforming schools into professional learning communities.

Lastly, I recommend that the DoE should build professional learning community centres that are easily accessible to teachers. Some schools are located in areas with a better-developed professional learning infrastructure whereas schools in rural areas do not have these resources. The nature and quality of professional development opportunities and external support available to staff can have an impact on a PLCs development.

5.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have presented the summary of the entire study, the findings, as well as, the recommendations that are directed at two categories of stakeholders, namely; the department of education and also to the research community. The chapter begins by proving a summary of the entire research study. In addition, it provides the presentation of findings and finally makes recommendations which are in contemplation to research findings.

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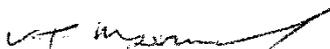For more information and any questions about this study, you may contact me at:
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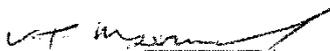For more information and any questions about this study, you may contact me at:

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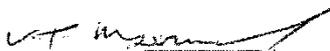For more information and any questions about this study, you may contact me at:
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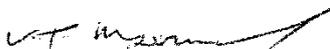For more information and any questions about this study, you may contact me at:

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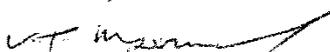For more information and any questions about this study, you may contact me at:

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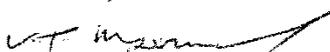Cell: 073 608 5247 or Tel: (031) 518 0059 or Email: vt.msomi@gmail.com
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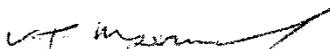For more information and any questions about this study, you may contact me at:

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