

**TRANSFORMING SCHOOLS INTO PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES
(PLCS): PERSPECTIVES FROM 5 PRIMARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS WHO
COMPLETED ACE IN UTHUNGULU DISTRICT**

By

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**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment for the Degree of Master of Education in the
School of Education in the discipline Educational Leadership, Management and Policy**

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December 2014

ABSTRACT

This study explores the perspectives of rural primary school principals that completed the Advanced Certificate in Education: School Leadership (ACE: SL) in their efforts of transforming schools to professional learning communities (PLCs) in order to improve learner achievement. The coming of the democratic dispensation in South Africa in 1994 has generated the idea that transformation in education, within the backdrop of demands for school effectiveness and learner achievement must be driven by school principals. Policies and pieces of legislation issued by the Department of Education (DoE) are some of the initiatives that were put in place in order to transform schools into effective learning organisations. One of these policies is the South African Schools Act (1996) which states explicitly how public schools should run and be governed. School principals were then identified by the DoE as drivers and agents of transformation who have to translate these written policies into practice. The study was conducted with five rural primary schools whose principals completed ACE: SL and a qualitative approach was employed to generate data. The case study methodology was utilised to conduct research. The case of the study was the five school principals that completed ACE: SL. The methods used to generate data were semi-structured interviews, documents review and records of notes from my unintended informal observations. This study was underpinned by the collaborative and distributed conceptual frameworks and by Steyn's dynamic theoretical frameworks.

The findings revealed that after completing the ACE: SL, change started with the principals. Their leadership and management styles were then informed by distributive and collaborative leadership. They further revealed that while principals claim to have shifted from the old style some are still conservative. They regard the principal as the only figure to be listened to. The findings also indicated that poor transport determines the ways in which schools are run in terms of time since teachers and learners rely much on public transport to travel to and from schools. Furthermore, principals consider the provision of support by the DoE in schools as inadequate such that schools are under resourced in terms of physical buildings and finances which hinders the implementation of PLCs. It is recommended that the DoE should ensure that principals should not only receive training in leadership and management skills only but also in the creation of PLCs in schools through ACE: SL. The implication of the study is, principals that completed ACE: SL were equipped by the programme and as a result their mode of running schools has changed.

Therefore if the DoE can make this a policy, all principals can easily transform their schools to PLCs.

DECLARATION

I Samukelisiwe Maureen Mtshali 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 in 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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Samukelisiwe M. Mtshali

Date

As supervisor, I agree to the submission of the dissertation.

Dr T. T. Bhengu

Date

DEDICATION

I thank God Almighty for being so gracious by making it possible for me to reach this far. It is for this cause that I humbly dedicate this study to all Mtshali and Mthiyane family for being so understanding when not getting hold of me when they needed me most. A special dedication goes to my caring and very supportive husband, the Head of the house who has been with me all the time doing a lot of sacrifice for this study to be a success.

With these words I say may our creator bless you abundantly.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to acknowledge these people who by the grace of God made it possible for me to start and finish this dissertation.

- ❖ To Dr T. T. Bhengu who played a huge role of being a committed, patient, dedicated, caring mentor, father and supervisor from the beginning to the end of this study.
- ❖ To Mr B. Mkhize the co-supervisor for his unchanging patience and guidance.
- ❖ To all supervisors of the cohort Dr I. Naicker, Dr S. E. Mthiyane, Dr P. Myende and Mr S. Bayeni.
- ❖ To my colleagues at work and my fellow students who have been very supportive in every step of the way.
- ❖ To the five school principals who participated in this study.

May our God Almighty richly bless you.

ABBREVIATIONS

DoE- Department of Education

ACE: SL- Advance Certificate in Education: School Leadership

PLC- Professional Learning Communities

ANA- Annual National Assessment

SMT- School Management Team

CRG- Collaborative Research Grant

CPD- Continuing Professional Development

CCII- Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement

CPTD- Continuing Professional Teacher Development

CFG- Critical Friends Group

LO- Learning Organisation

ISPFTED- Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development

NPFTED- National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development

PD- Professional Development

USA- United States of America

UNISA- University of South Africa

SADC- Southern African Development Community

SARUA- Southern Africa Regional Universities Association

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

	Page No
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background to the study	2
1.3 Rationale of the study	4
1.4 Statement of the problem	4
1.5 Research questions	5
1.6 Significance of the study	5
1.7 Why Professional Learning Communities are important?	6
1.8 Literature review	7
1.9 Research design and methodology	7
1.10 Demarcation of the problem	7
1.11 Structure of the study	8
1.12 Chapter summary	9

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW, THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1 Introduction	10
2.2 How school principals transform schools to PLCs?	10
2.3 The benefits of PLCs in schools	11
2.4 Features of PLCs	12
2.5 Perceptions about school principals and their role in making schools PLCs	

or LO	15
2. 5. 1 Modelling flexibility	16
2. 5. 2 Articulating beliefs	16
2. 5. 3 Knowing curriculum, instruction and assessment	17
2. 5. 4 Optimising conditions	17
2. 5. 5 Finding the time	18
2. 5. 6 Developing trust	18
2. 5. 7 Stimulating intellectual curiosity and conversation	19
2. 5. 8 Monitoring and evaluating impact	20
2. 5. 9 Networking with other schools	20
2. 6 Factors that hinder promoting transforming schools through PLCs	20
2. 7 Factors promoting the creation of PLCs	20
2. 8 Barriers to the creation of PLCs	22
2.9 Empirical studies from international community	25
2.10 African context study	26
2.11 South African context study	27
2.12 Conceptual framework	28
2.13 Distributed leadership	28
2.14 Collaborative leadership	29
2.15 Steyn's theory	31
2.16 Chapter summary	34

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction	35
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3.2 Research design and methodology	35
3.3 Sampling	37
3.3.1 Venues for interviews and atmosphere	37
3.3.2 Profiling the case studies	38
3.4 Methods of data generation	39
3.5 Data generation	40
3.6 Issues of Trustworthiness of the findings	41
3.7 Ethical Issues	41
3.8 Limitations of the study	42
3.9 Chapter summary	42

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction	43
4.2 Discussion of the themes that emerged from the data	43
4.2.1 Leadership styles that facilitate schools to become Professional Learning Communities	44
4.2.2 Tools for optimising transition to PLCs	48
4.2.2.1 Time	48
4.2.2.2 Space	50
4.2.2.3 Trust	51
4.3 Barriers to the process of transforming schools to PLCs	52
4.3.1 Time as a barrier in transforming schools to PLCs	53
4.3.3.2 Attitudes as barriers	54
4.3.4 How teachers respond to the principals' PLC initiatives	56
4.3.5 The perceived Department of Education's support for the creation of PLCs	59

4.3.6 The need for schools to become Professional Learning Communities	61
4.3.7 Principals' perceptions about their schools achieving PLC status	64
4.4 Chapter summary	66

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction	67
5.2 Study Summary	67
5.3 Presentation of findings	68
5.3.1 What are the experiences of rural primary school principals who completed ACE: School Leadership (ACE: SL) in transforming their schools into PLCs?	68
5.3.2 What do rural primary school principals who completed ACE: SL regard as barriers in transforming their schools to PLCs?	69
5.3.3 Why do principals that completed ACE School Leadership transform their schools to become professional learning communities the way they do?	70
5.4 Recommendations	70
5.5 Chapter summary	71
6. References	72
7. Appendices	81

CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The coming of a democratic dispensation in South Africa in 1994 has generated the idea that transformation in education, within the backdrop of demands for school effectiveness and learner achievement, must be driven by school principals (Thurlow, 2003). Policies and pieces of legislation issued by the Department of Education (DoE) are some of the initiatives that were put in place in order to transform schools into effective learning organisations. One of these policies is the South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996c) which states explicitly how public schools should be run and governed (Republic of South Africa, 1996c). School principals were then identified by the DoE as drivers and agents of transformation who have to translate these written policies into practice. This view is aptly captured by Bhengu (2012) when he states:

“On assuming power in South Africa in 1994, the government identified school principals as agents and drivers of the social transformation process in all South African communities”(Bhengu, 2012, p. 145).

Le Roux (2012) and Bhengu (2012) assert that school principals have powers vested in them to positively influence practices in their schools in order to promote quality education. However, these scholars further argue that, as a result of skills deficit in some school principals, they are not able to perform their duties as expected. The challenge they have is the lack of understanding, knowledge and skills to utilise these powers effectively. They appear reluctant to exercise these powers. The external factors that normally hinder them from exercising their powers are poor socio-economic background of learners, illness and HIV related diseases and high level of societal illiteracy (Le Roux, 2012; Bhengu, 2012). The internal circumstances which prevent them from exercising their powers effectively mostly are uncertainties about how to exercise discipline, fear, tension with teacher unions, stress and depression, fear of conflict, lack of self-belief and limitations in their competency levels; lack of resources and infrastructure such as libraries and sport facilities, not being allowed to do class visits; teacher qualifications and work ethics (Le Roux, 2012).

With the same spirit of change stated above Mestry and Singh (2007) assert that the DoE the introduced Advanced Certificate in Education: School Leadership Programme (ACE: SL) for

principals, deputy principal and Heads of Departments. With this programme which is a form of continuing professional development for principals, the DoE hoped to equip principals for the positions they occupy; to provide management and leadership support through a variety of interactive programmes that improve the learner practice, professional growth, and ethos of leadership; to make school leadership and management aware of what is expected of them through documents like Norms and Standards for Educators, White Paper 5 and 6 (Naidoo, 2005).

The study that is reported in this dissertation explored the perspectives of five rural primary schools principals that completed ACE: SL in transforming their schools to professional learning communities (PLCs). The study not only focused on these experiences of school principals in changing schools to PLCs but also on the barriers that impeded them from achieving what they needed in order to transform their school into PLCs. This chapter provides the background and rationale for the study. Research questions driving the study are also presented. An overview of the theoretical framework is discussed as well as the design and methodology. At the end of the chapter, a summary is presented.

1.2 Background to the study

Since 1994 when the democratic government came into power, the primary aim of the Department of Education (DoE) had been focused on achieving effective teaching and learning in schools (Moloi, 2009). Principals were identified as the vehicle for achieving that envisaged aim of achieving effective teaching and learning in schools (Nicholus & Knipe, 2008). Besides them being instruments of achieving effective teaching and learning, principals were expected to lead and manage schools differently, and had to assume the role of being agents of transformation (Bhengu, 2012). This means that as transformational leaders, principals are expected to motivate their subordinates to perform beyond expectations (Nicholus & Knipe, 2008). In trying to address the situation principals, as agents of transformation in schools, are entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring that effective teaching and learning take place in schools (Bhengu, 2012). Somehow, learner achievement seems to be a hard goal to achieve given the context of rural areas where there are too many pressing needs that school principals have to attend to. Principals in rural areas face additional challenges that their counterparts in urban areas do not face (Spaull, 2012). Bhengu (2012) and Le Roux (2012), as well as other scholars highlight some of the challenges, for example, the study conducted by Spaull (2012)

confirmed that schools in towns performed well in Annual National Assessment (ANA), other international tests and in the National Senior Certificate (NSC) results when compared to schools in a rural context. In his study (Spaull, 2012), indicated that socio-economic background of schools in rural communities was the cause of poor learner achievement as opposed to schools in affluent communities. Therefore, in their attempt to transform schools, principals face numerous challenges. Some of them are teachers who are professionally unqualified, lacking knowledge and skills for teaching and commitment to their work, inadequate human and physical resources, high rate of learner and teacher absenteeism, as well as late coming (Spaull, 2012). In spite of all these challenges, schools are expected to perform in terms of learner achievement (Spaull, 2012).

To turn the situation around various initiatives to promote effective teaching and learning were introduced by the DoE. For example, Acts of parliament like the South African Schools Act (1996), National Education Policy Act (1996) and Employment of Educators Act (1998) were issued to communicate to principals how schools should run to achieve effective teaching and learning. Advance Certificate in Education School Leadership was also introduced as yet another initiative of the DoE for principals to engage themselves in continuing professional development (CPD) which has the purpose of equipping them for the positions they occupy (Bhengu, 2012). Central to the ACE: SL, according to Naicker (2011), are the following themes: distributive and collaborative leadership styles; opportunities for personal and professional growth and improved relationships with relevant stakeholders. The concept of ACE: SL parallels that of professional learning communities in that, according to Huffman and Jacobson (2010) in professional learning communities, teachers must regularly interact about teaching and learning through involving all stakeholders. Since principals are in the driving seat of every action at school level, they are therefore strategically positioned to facilitate interactions about teaching and learning. My assumption is that since principals, that completed ACE: SL, had been exposed to rigorous knowledge of this programme (ACE: SL) and were strategically positioned in their schools to translate the acquired skills into practice, they were able to transform their schools into professional learning communities.

Despite all the initiatives of the DoE which primarily aim at promoting effective teaching and learning, there seemed to be difficulties in realising that aim of effective teaching and learning. Acts and policies were issued so that principals use more than just common sense to run schools. ACE: SL for principals and deputy principals was introduced in 2007 to 2009 as an initiative for continued professional

development (CPD) capacitating deputy principals and principals with the necessary skills to run schools properly and effectively (Naicker, 2011). This suggests that in properly and effectively running their schools, principals had turned them to Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). PLC is defined by Hord (2007) as a group of professionals coming together to learn in order to enhance learner achievement.

According to Spaul (2012), many ex-black schools which were entirely dysfunctional under apartheid remain largely dysfunctional even today. What had been observed was that in line with Resolution 8 of 2003, teacher unions (social partners) had an input on education issues including effective teaching and learning. This partnership between teacher unions and DoE tended to be misinterpreted by teacher unions in that they dictated to school principals on how to run schools. Teachers were, as a result, called to participate in union activities at anytime and were encouraged to challenge management. Learner interest was not at heart. Class visits were refused. Quality teaching and learning were not a priority. Service delivery was compromised. Teacher unions wanted things to happen their way. The intriguing questions regarding this persistent dysfunctionality of most ex-black schools were, was it the theory that was not well translated into practice? or was it because policies and acts were not properly implemented?

1.3 Rationale of the study

My personal and informal observation suggests that some principals in rural context that completed ACE: SL managed to transform their schools into PLCs and some are still struggling. This is the case because some primary schools in rural context are performing very well while others are still underperforming in terms of ANA and other measurements. The underlying assumption was that such principals with good performance in ANA had successfully translated the concept of PLCs into practice. As a teacher with more than 20 years of service, this occurrence had caused me to develop a renewed interest on issues of education, especially on this topic of transforming schools into professional learning communities. Firstly, it capacitated me as a senior member of School Management Team (SMT) to approach managing the school in a way that involves all the stakeholders in decision making. Secondly, the topic (transforming schools to PLCs) empowered me regarding the

transformation of schools as organisations, for the better. I believe that the findings from this study could be useful to school principals that desire to have change in their schools. It could benefit teachers as professionals that are interested in working and sharing ideas to improve learner achievement. It could furthermore be utilised by national and provincial officials to address challenges experienced by schools regarding transformation.

1.4 Statement of the problem

According to Vithal and Jansen (2010) the statement of the problem is the focus of the study. This study explored primary school principals who participated and completed the ACE: SL with the aim of using PLCs in transforming their schools.

1.5 Research Questions

Transforming schools to PLCs: Perspectives of five rural primary school principals that completed ACE: SL. The study used these three research questions:

- What are the experiences of rural primary school principals who completed ACE: SL in transforming their schools into PLCs?
- What do rural primary school principals who completed ACE: SL regard as barriers in transforming their schools into PLCs?
- Why must school principals that completed ACE: SL transform their schools to professional learning communities?

1.6 Significance of the study

In line with PLCs transformation initiative, this study sought to explore the perspectives of principals that completed ACE: SL in their attempts of transforming schools to PLCs in order to improve learner achievement. Such features were ideally expected to be found in all schools but this is not the case. Schools run by principals that completed ACE: SL are assumed to have displayed these features. In line with PLCs transformation initiative, this study sought not only to explore the perspectives of

principals that completed ACE: SL in their attempts of transforming schools to PLCs in order to improve learner achievement but also to contribute to school leadership in general. It is therefore believed that through this study, principals as drivers and agents of change developed deep insight about transforming schools to PLCs particularly those that completed ACE: SL. Hopefully the insight gained through this study boosted principals' work morale as implementers of transformation and teachers as learners; thus improving learner achievement.

1.7 Why Professional Learning Communities are important?

According to Hord (2007), the term 'professional learning communities' (PLCs) refers to responsible and accountable individual professionals coming together as a group to enhance their knowledge and skills in order to enhance effective learning. Hord (2007) further asserts that transforming schools to PLCs is one strategy for continuously improving students' achievement through increasing the learning capacity of teaching staff. Austin Independent School District, (2008) affirming Hord's statements assert that the term PLCs refer to teachers and their principals continuously seeking and sharing learning and putting it into practice to benefit learners. They call this practice the communities of continuous inquiry and improvement (CCII) (Austuto, 2008). All these definitions emphasise the necessity of collaborative learning of all professionals within the school. Its major aim is to improve teacher practices for learner achievement to be improved. Coe, Carl and Frick (2010) in their definition refer to PLCs as continuing professional teacher development (CPTD). It is a lesson study model which was first introduced in England where teachers became hands-on in the subject they taught with an aim of improving instruction in the classroom to improve learner attainment.

The deep insight about PLCs is developed in the light of collaborative and distributed leadership. Success in transforming schools to PLC would be generated by creating collaborative working environment, where school leaders would transform schools by fostering a healthy atmosphere of collegiality and collaboration in which teachers communicate and share experiences and workload (Bush, 2004). It is the type of transformation which frequently unites professionals together for collaborative planning, curriculum study and learning assessment. In collaborative learning, strengths of all individual teachers are diagnosed and enhanced. As they learn together, shared leadership

becomes a core activity leading towards realising a common purpose in an environment which brings a feeling of self-worth (Bush, 2004; Servage, 2008).

The distribution of powers within groups or teams and their leaders promotes collective or collaborative engagement in performing organisational activities. This collaborative leadership is defined by Preedy, Bennet and Wise (2012) as leadership that uses talents and resources of all members to bring change and solution in the organisation. It is the kind of leadership which promotes collaborative professional learning and also the kind of professional development (PD) which ensures a maximum degree of teaching and learning daily (Spillane, 2006 ; Harris, 2010).

1.8 Literature review

The review of literature was focused on professional development and specifically about professional learning communities: issues around leadership and how it can help turn schools into communities where professionals learn. Distributed, collaborative leadership theories and Steyn continuing professional teacher development theory are discussed in Chapter Two as the frameworks for the study.

1.9 Research design and methodology

The study reported here adopted a qualitative approach and was located in the interpretivist paradigm. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2009) claim that the qualitative approach utilises case study designs which study a single case in depth. A case study according to Kelly (2004) is a detailed study of individuals, groups, institutions or other social units in their different settings. The case in my study of transforming schools to PLCs was five principals who completed ACE: SL.

1.10 Demarcation of the problem

Demarcation of the problem refers to the establishment of boundaries of the problem area being studied, for example boundaries between science and non-scientific research areas. Making boundaries for the problem makes it more manageable and focused (Kid, 2006). With regard to this study, it was confined to just five primary school principals in the Uthungulu District. In addition, the study was

limited to those principals who had completed ACE: SL and were assumed to have been exposed to knowledge and skills relevant for transforming schools to PLCs.

1.11 Structure of the study

This section provided a brief outline of the study: transforming schools to PLCs which was reported and summarised below into five chapters.

Chapter One

This chapter is an overview of the study which provides the background and the purpose of the study. It also provided three research questions and the significance of the study. Chapter One did not only provide an explanation about how transforming schools to PLCs can be understood but it also outlined key literature to be reviewed. An overview of the theoretical framework underpinning the study was also presented. This chapter concludes by providing a brief overview of research design and methodology as well as the demarcation of the study.

Chapter Two

Chapter Two entails a detailed discussion of the literature review and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks underpinning the study. As part of reviewing literature, relevant international and local scholarly works were studied to seek a variety of views of scholars pertaining to transforming schools into PLCs.

Chapter Three

In this chapter the research methodology was dealt with. This chapter presented a detailed explanation of data generation methods and research instruments that were used when the study was conducted. In addition, I was able to share my personal and philosophical position in relation to research, ontology and epistemology as well as the relationship between these issues and the problem studied.

Chapter Four

In this chapter the presentation and discussion of data is done. The data was elicited from five rural primary school principals who had completed ACE: SL at the University of KwaZulu-Natal between 2007 and 2010. Themes that emerged when generated data was analysed are also presented and discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Five

In this chapter the synthesis of the key research findings is done and recommendations presented.

1.12 Chapter summary

This chapter provided the introduction of the study namely transforming schools into PLCs; the background and the rationale of the study; research questions and the significance of the study; conceptualisation of PLCs; a brief literature review; research design and methodology and the demarcation of the study. The next chapter provides a review of literature and discusses the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW, THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced and provided the background and orientation to the study. This chapter reviews literature on issues of transforming schools to PLC and also discusses theoretical frameworks of the study. Chapter two begins by presenting the discussion of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks underpinning the study: transforming schools to PLCs by principals who completed ACE: SL. It is then followed by the outlined context of South Africa in transforming schools to PLCs. It finally presents a detailed literature review on perceptions about how school principals transform schools to PLCs in the light of Steyn's (2013) theory as well as distributive and collaborative concepts respectively. The reason behind this is to reinforce and strengthen the argument of transforming schools to PLCs by school principals that completed ACE: SL. In addition, not only was the discussion of different aspects of PLCs, like the benefits of PLCs for the schools and key features of PLCs presented, but some empirical studies that were conducted locally and internationally also. Finally, the chapter concludes with a chapter summary.

2.2 How school principals transform schools to PLCs?

The DoE introduced ACE: SL for principals, deputy principals and heads of departments so that change could take place in schools utilising principals as change agents. School principals as drivers of change, in their service delivery need to ensure that democratic values as they are enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996) are observed and honoured (Mestry & Singh, 2007; Killion, 2013) by everybody in schools. PLC is one of the concepts that it was hoped would be implemented through the ACE: SL programme.

2.3 The benefits of PLCs in schools

Today's buzz word that is realised in schools where the PLC concept is being implemented is the notion of collaboration generally and collaborative learning in particular (Printy, 2011). Studies conducted by different scholars indicate that collaborative work in PLCs does not only benefit the teachers as learners but also their learners (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006). Developing PLCs enables members to develop a sense of responsibility as opposed to accountability for their actions. Stoll *et al.* (2006) maintain that it is not only learners that benefit from PLCs but also schools. Schools exist for the children; therefore, if the responsibility for their learning and growth places schools in a realm shared by other few cultural institutions, it becomes a gain to the school. It is a gain because when PLCs are effective in terms of their operations; teachers who used to work in isolation begin to work collaboratively to achieve a common goal of the PLCs. Teachers in schools with PLCs are actively working together for the benefit of the learners.

The literature reviewed reveals that studies conducted in different parts of the world show that PLCs do not only benefit developed countries such as the United States of America but even the developing countries reap some benefits (Timperley, 2008). These studies report that almost throughout the world, high performing schools with successful structures are the ones that operate through PLCs providing teacher collaboration which is a very powerful tool for professional development and for improving teaching and responding to the needs of the learners (Timperley, 2008;). Studies conducted report that schools with educators that embrace PLCs take collective responsibility for learners' learning; they assist the learners achieve at higher levels (Louis, Dretzke & Wahlstrom, 2010). They learn to share teaching practices and shared leadership is promoted. They also make results transparent. Furthermore, they engage in dialogue about improving teaching and learning, which then leads to continuous school improvement (Louis, Dretzke & Wahlstrom, 2010).

Studies conducted in Southern African Development Community (SADC) by Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA) (2010) reported that professional learning communities as viewed in the light of collaboration, improve opportunities for knowledge exchange, opportunities and capacity for research, increased knowledge, experience and capacity particularly, to the teaching staff and the learners, improve funding opportunities, increase capacity for teaching the learners knowledge and skills development and also to deal with common challenges collectively.

The findings from Hord's (2007) study reveal that studies conducted by various authors world-wide reveal that PLCs have commonalities that are of benefit to the staff and the learners respectively. These benefits include reduction of isolated teachers; increased commitment to the mission and goals of the school and increased working relationships to strengthen the mission of the school (Hord, 2007). They develop a shared responsibility for the total development of the learners' success. They obtain powerful learning which defines good teaching and classroom practice that creates new knowledge and beliefs about teaching and learning. Teachers develop increased meaning and understanding of the content that teachers teach and the roles they play in helping all the learners to achieve expectations (Hord, 2007). In addition, Hord (2007) maintains in PLCs that there is a high likelihood that teachers are well informed professionally, renewed and inspired to inspire learners. They experience more satisfaction, higher morale and lower rate of absenteeism. They experience significant advances in making teaching adaptations for the learners. Teachers develop a commitment to make significant changes and to undertake fundamental systematic change (Hord, 2007).

As added benefits of PLCs Steyn (2013), mentions a number of DoE's initiatives which aimed to improve teacher performance, thereby enhancing learner performance. In line with other international countries, the DoE in South Africa also introduced policies like National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development (NPFTEd) and the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development (ISPFTED) to ensure professional teacher development and to enhance learner achievement. Steyn (2013) indicates how PLCs can be effectively implemented in South African schools to benefit principals and teachers using a dynamic model of PLCs called continuing professional teacher development (CPTD). This model is discussed in detail later in the theoretical framework section.

2.4 Features of PLCs

In this section, features of PLCs in developed and developing countries are discussed and the discussion is based on reviewed literature on schools as learning organisations (LO) as argued by Senge (2004) the initiator of the learning organisation concept. It is through five disciplines that change is addressed in schools as LO and these disciplines are personal mastery, shared vision, mental modes, team learning and systems thinking (Senge, 2004). Regarding PLCs, Senge (2004) claims that

teachers in PLCs are systematically knitted to each other. They are engaged in learning (principals, school management teams, and teachers) for improved learner achievement (Senge, 2004). They are interested in growing, learning and mastering things that personally matter to them as individuals in the community of practice to improve learner achievement. Teachers as learners are encouraged to be lifelong learners that is, the culture of learning is promoted (Senge, 2004); hence the introduction of continued professional teacher development (Mestry, 2009).

Their mental models or attitude (Senge, 2004) determine the success and failure of principals in transforming schools to learning organisations since it all rests with the willingness of the teachers (Steyn, 2013). A broad consensus reached by various scholars drawn from Hord's five dimensions of PLCs is that they promote supportive and shared leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and the application of that learning, shared practice, supportive conditions for the maintenance of the learning community (Maloney & Konza, 2011).

As learners, teachers come together and share their personal visions and come up with broad shared vision; achieve goals and values of the organisation which result in team learning being promoted. The five disciplines prepare a fertile ground for change in the organisation to happen (Senge, 2004). The logical assumption is, if school principals can successfully attend to and address these disciplines, their schools may become learning organisations which would be a favourable environment for PLCs to flourish. In addition to the features highlighted above, Stollé *et al.*, (2006), Temperley (2008) identify mutual trust and inclusive school-wide membership; networks and partnerships that look beyond the school for sources of learning; reflective dialogue; de-privatisation of practice; professional growth; mutual support and mutual obligation as themes for developing PLCs focusing on school improvement as characteristics of PLCs. In support of these arguments, DuFour (2007) came up with three big ideas emphasising that PLCs should focus on learning, culture of collaboration and on results. It is further noted that a powerful PLC is based on the routine practices of the school when teachers are organised into teams, are provided with time to meet during the school day at least once a week, and are given specific guidelines for engaging in activities that focus on student achievement (DuFour, 2007).

In strong support of Hord (2007), the National School Reform Faculty an organisation devoted to developing collegial relationships and reflective practice among teachers came up with the study called

the Critical Friends Group (CFG) noted that CFG is strong because it bears openness to improvement; trust and respect; a foundation in the knowledge and skills of teaching; supportive leadership on the side of the school management team; socialisation and school structures that extend the school's mission (NSRF, 2008). Having read the convergent ideas of various authors on the features of PLCs, the conclusion that I could draw is that although schools principals may not create viable PLCs overnight since it is a process, they must be visible and show that they are agents of change entrusted with the responsibility of transforming schools into PLCs.

The Japanese educational system also developed Japanese professional development practice of lesson study as an initiative to capacitate teachers (Fernandez, 2013). In the lesson study, teachers collaborate, work as teams and plan their lessons together. The support they need from school leadership is time, resources and an environment conducive for learning together. But the contrasting situation is prevailing in Nigeria (Steyn, 2010). Because of the responsibility entrusted to school principals by the DoE, school principals are in a position of being major human resources for schools to transform to PLCs (Steyn, 2010).

Various studies conducted by different scholars report that high performing schools with successful structures are the ones that operate through PLCs. They provide teacher collaboration which is a powerful tool for professional development and for improving teaching and responding to the needs of the learners (Timperley, 2008; Mestry, 2009). Studies conducted report that schools with educators that embrace PLCs take collective responsibility for student learning; and they assist learners achieve at higher levels (Louis, Dretzke & Wahlstrom, 2011). They learn to share teaching practices and shared leadership is promoted. They make results transparent. They engage in dialogue about improving teaching and learning, which leads to continuous school improvement (Louis, Dretzke & Wahlstrom, 2010).

Similarly in the context of South Africa, a developing country, Steyn (2013) and Perumal (2010) claim that PLCs focus on shared vision for learning; shared responsibility for learner performance; teaching and learning; continuous teacher improvement and learner achievement; collective investigation of teaching practice; reliance on reflection; experimentation and dialogue in practice; scheduled opportunities for collaboration; and is also characterised by sincere commitment to effective learning

for all. In addition to Steyn (2013) and Perumal's (2011) statements, Katz and Earl (2010) assert that PLC is a place where new knowledge and conceptual change operate to change how teachers, head teachers and principals think and act to improve learner performance.

2. 5 Perceptions about school principals and their role in making schools PLCs or LO

In this section I want to find out and understand different arguments about what the researchers perceive as the role of school principals in making schools learning communities or learning organisation. Different scholars world-wide argue much about principals being the most trusted by DoE and organisations with interest in education for being change agents responsible for implementing and supporting PLCs in schools (Maistry, 2008; Mestry, 2009, Bhengu, 2012; Steyn, 2013).

Many researchers perceive that creating and promoting social school climate, appropriate school structures in promoting collaboration, shared leadership, mutual support for continuing professional development and cultural factors such as the beliefs of staff and leadership in schools by school principals have positive impact on PLC and learner achievement (Senge, 2004; Hord, 2007; Mestry & Singh, 2007; Sigurðardóttir, 2010). DuFour (2007) is not only supporting the views about the role of school principals in transforming schools to PLCs, but is also cautioning school and district leaders by emphasising the condition that if principals of schools advocate learning communities approach then they are obliged to form structures that make meaningful teacher collaboration possible. Further, DuFour (2007) emphasises the view that school principals should ensure that teachers have time available to meet during the contractual day; clear priorities are drawn for teacher collaboration; teams have the appropriate knowledge base available to make decisions; training is provided and differentiated for teams; teams have access to templates and models to inform their work and clear expectations laid out for teams to use to assess the quality of their work (DuFour, 2007).

According to Nicholus and Knipe (2008) their success in carrying this responsibility relies much on the well-conditioned attitude of the teachers as major role players and as people who do most of the spade work in making PLCs successful. Most studies confirm that the efficient use of human and social resources (principals and teachers) in creating, promoting and sustaining PLCs is a key to this new human business adventure in the education sector and also to various initiatives and strategies

which are in place to motivate teachers as learners to keep PLCs alive (Stoll *et al.*, 2006). My concern is that both teachers and the employer know that the success of PLCs greatly depends on teachers' attitude, but the literature is silent about what should become of the teachers who do not meet the expectations of PLCs even after everything has been done to support them.

On the other hand Killion and Roy (2009) maintain that school principals as change agents need to understand that people experience and respond to change in various ways. Adapting to change, making teachers to work collaboratively especially when they are used to work independently and as silos becomes a very tough exercise for the principal to handle. They need to understand that within the same school normally successful teachers accept change but also get frustrated by those who resist it. Therefore, they need to understand that it is not uncommon that cliques and conflicts among teachers are part of the change process and are natural (Killion & Roy, 2009). Killion and Roy (2009) further maintain that principals need to realise that too many changes can delay any form of developments and improvements effected in schools.

2. 5. 1 Modelling flexibility

Marzano, Waters & McNulty, (2005) maintain that school principals need to demonstrate a certain degree of flexibility when anticipating concerns and should also be ready to adjust plans as required by the situation. It is the responsibility that is fulfilled by adopting flexible leadership style based on situational and collaborative leadership. This flexibility is displayed when principals need to provide information about the research on PLCs and student achievement. Principals find it being one of their responsibilities to encourage other colleagues to take risks and to guarantee them the support if things do not turn out as expected. They sometimes allow teachers to work things out on their own in the most effective manner (Marzano *et al.*, 2005).

2. 5. 2 Articulating beliefs

School principals fulfil this responsibility when they make teachers in their faculty and the whole staff understand that the work of PLCs is consistent with the belief that learning for all students is the purpose of schooling (Marzano *et al.*, 2005). They do this by consistently communicating the belief such that reflective discussion around student data by faculty and staff result in increased achievement. They also use both formal and informal channels to speak about how PLCs improve learning and build

leadership capacity in school. It is also the responsible of the principal to point out instances when practices and behaviours are not in line with the ideas and beliefs that guide PLC activity. If school principals meet this responsibility, ideas and beliefs will effectively help with the development of a shared vision (Marzano *et al.*, 2005). The conclusion that can be drawn is that the principals will be more likely to arouse the conscience among the whole staff even though the onus of making them work depends on teacher attitude.

2. 5. 3 Knowing curriculum, instruction and assessment

This is the kind of leadership responsibility which refers to a school principal's knowledge of how the establishment of a PLC is likely to affect current practice. As instructional leaders, principals and teachers need to be knowledgeable about their subjects and all the issues around it (Forde &Chikoko, 2012). By promoting collaborative work, the curriculum would become more standardised as teachers work in teams and determine what learners should know and be able to do in each content area. The development of common assessments and instructional innovation would also be the liked outcomes of PLC activity over time (Marzano *et al.*, 2005).

One way in which leading instruction is looked at is through the use of instructional leadership. The ultimate goal of instructional leadership is quality teaching and learning which leads towards improved learner achievement (Luneburg, 2010). Being an instructional leader involves monitoring of work which informs the school principal not only about the effectiveness of teacher leadership but also about teacher dedication as they work in teams. It ensures that there is teaching and learning at all levels (Luneburg, 2010) for the teachers and the learners. As teachers reflect on their practice, school principal would know what changes in practice would be likely to occur. This would allow principals to anticipate needs, concerns or problems and devise strategies to respond (Marzano, *et al.*, 2005; Forde & Chikoko, 2012).

2. 5. 4 Optimising conditions

The study conducted by Nicholus and Knipe (2008) revealed that optimising the conditions of creating PLCs in schools, principals are expected to fulfil the responsibility of becoming the driving force behind the creation of PLCs. They need to do everything in their power to ensure successful

implementation (Nicholus, 2008). This includes actions such as inspiring others to participate actively in the work of collaborative teams and the establishment of the supportive conditions required to make them successful. The provision of time and developing of trust among colleagues are the main basic conditions in creating PLCs (Forde & Chikoko, 2012). According to Armour and Makopoulou(2012)teachers in the same school should share problems, knowledge and skills during interactive continuing professional development opportunities within a safe, supportive environment.It is assumed that PLCs cannot survive without the involvement of school principals as change agents playing a very supportive role of supporting teachers they work with in order to enhance collaboration in PLCs (Nelson, 2010). Such openness impacts greatly on teachers' practices in the classrooms. School principals are expected to play a leading role in this venture (Opfer&Pedder, 2011).They are also expected to provide opportunities for activities that cause teachers to experiment with changed classroom practice; to act on feedback from colleagues and learners; mentoring; site workshops; self-evaluation; collaborative working and participating in teacher networking (Printy, 2010).

2. 5. 5 Finding the time

Provision of time to kick start PLCs is regarded by Killion (2013) as a huge determining factor for its sustainability or whether teachers can work collaboratively or in isolation. To address this challenge, Killion (2013) has developed seven steps for the establishment of time for the sustenance of PLCs. These seven steps are forming a time study team; examining assumptions about time;understanding existing time;studying time options; forming and adopting recommendations about time;establishing a plan to implement, evaluate and reviewing time use and results (Killion, 2013). Time management is taken as a key responsibility of the principal to create PLCs and to hold meetings which can be very challenging but through networking with other principals can find out how they deal with the issue of time (Marzano, Waters &McNulty, 2005; Perumal, 2011).

2. 5. 6 Developing trust

Nicholus (2008) notes a high degree of mutual trust and respect among teachers. In the same vein Steyn (2008) conducted an investigation which showed that in the Nigerian context, there was lack of commitment and trust on the side of school principals in providing school infrastructure. As a result, teachers work under unsafe conditions. They lack trust in their leaders and as a consequence that teacher morale is lowered and learner achievement is poor (Steyn, 2008). School principals are not

fulfilling the responsibility of creating a conducive environment of reciprocal trust (Forde & Chikoko, 2012).

As a teacher I know from experience that learners need to know that they are trusted by their teachers; the same goes with the teachers as learners; they need to be trusted by their leaders that they can voluntarily and successfully perform activities which can lead to improving learner attainment. The logical assumption that could be drawn is that the level of support provided by schools in implementing PLCs signals the degree of trust that the schools have in teachers and the value of PLCs in schools (Melony & Konza, 2011). Meanwhile the level of teacher commitment and their attitude toward PLCs signifies the success or failure of PLCs regardless of the support they receive, meaning that if the teachers' attitudes are positive, the PLCs concept can work (Melony & Konza, 2011). Confirming this assumption is the report of the study conducted by Melony and Konza (2011). These two scholars state that in Australia, resources from collaborative research grant (CRG) were allocated for the release of staff to attend out-of-school professional development sessions and for substitute teachers during school hours. The resource allocation was an indication of the importance that the school executive placed on the notion of professional learning for school staff.

Killion (2013) claims that teachers in their schools receive support by working together with organisations which have interest in the education of the child as well as resources development. This would result in learners receiving standardised content and assessment. Such collaboration would assist teachers improve their practice and learner attainment. On the same point, Hoy and Miskel (2005) assert that without trust, it becomes very difficult for learners to open up and confide in their lead teachers or principals.

2. 5. 7 Stimulating intellectual curiosity and conversation

Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) claim that stimulating intellectual curiosity of teachers in a particular field is one of the responsibilities that school principals have to fulfil concerning implementation and functionality of PLCs. They support teachers by encouraging them to explore researched information in the field they specialise in through reading and discussions in their group meetings (Nicholus, 2008). Apart from principals encouraging teachers to engage in research enquiry, they too need opportunities to ensure that they have plans to improve their own learning and

understanding in that particular field. They are of the opinion that both novices and veterans alike can benefit from inviting other principals who have PLCs in their schools. By so doing their horizon of networking expands as they form study or action research groups (Marzano et al., 2005).

2. 5. 8 Monitoring and evaluating impact

Principals as key agents of transformation in their schools have the responsibility of monitoring closely the effects of PLCs in their schools (Marzano *et al.*, 2005). Since teachers are engaged in continuous inquiry process, time for the team to examine the collected data and the evaluation of the outcomes is very crucial. Supporting this claim West (2010) maintained that each faculty has to be given a chance to evaluate the impact of its PLC while principals prepare plans and various strategies to obtain and evaluate feedback from different faculties which is to be shared regularly.

2. 5. 9 Networking with other schools

Opfer, Pedder and Lavicza (2011) claim that if teachers can be offered an opportunity to network with teachers of different schools, there is a potential to widen the scope for teachers to engage and have access to diverse teaching practices. It also enhances the opportunities for teachers to be involved in problem-solving and to create the transfer of knowledge. In addition to the claim above, Ainscow (2010) maintains that as teachers interact with other teachers through PLCs, teachers develop new relationships and thinking at school level. It is a relationship which allows staff to work together in a way that exceeds individual accomplishment (Katz & Earl, 2010). It enables teachers to grow a sense of shared responsibility and to have proper channels of communication open (Supovitz, 2010). Such collaboration among teachers results in effective professional learning and school improvement. It also provides necessary follow-up as well as feedback to promote change in teachers' practice (Chapman, Lindsay, Muijis, Harris, Arweck & Goodall, 2010).

2. 6 Factors that hinder promoting transforming schools through PLCs

The reviewed body of literature reveals that there are different factors that promote the goodness of PLCs to improving school performance. However, there are also negative factors operating in parallel hindering the transforming of schools to PLCs (Sigurðardóttir, 2010). In other words, the change that is expected in schools can either be positive or negative. It is for this reason that Hord (2007) stresses the point that it is all about change and change is personal; it begins with an individual. Without the

change of the individuals within the organisation, there is no change in the organisation as a whole. If school principals and teachers in their faculties are well oriented about change benefits and challenges of PLCs prior to implementation, positive response and attitude are ensured (Stoll et al., 2007). This is the reason why they should learn to understand the outcome and the impact of the implementation of PLCs on their own individual practices, to school performance and learner achievement (Stoll et al., 2007).

2.7 Factors promoting the creation of PLCs

The South African literature reports about the initiatives and developmental programmes that the DoE have introduced to assist principals as change agents to transform as leaders and professionals to change schools to PLCs. As a result ACE: SL, CPTD, NPFTED, and ISPFTED were introduced by the DoE to support professional teacher development and to enhance learner achievement (Mestry & Singh, 2007; Le Roux, 2012; Bhengu, 2012; Steyn, 2013; Mthiyane, 2013). The implication of this is that school principals will be enabled to understand the authority vested in them and the responsibility attached to it in terms of creating PLCs in schools. I believe that this can enable school principals to run schools with transformed minds, employing newly acquired leadership styles. When leadership and power are shared and distributed to all role players (Hord, 2007) teacher morale is boosted because they understand that they are trusted by the school principal and SMT. It is for this reason that Bush (2004) and Spillane (2006) in their studies recommend distributed and collaborative leadership for the success of PLCs.

Although creating PLCs may be very taxing on school principals, it leaves them skilled and knowledgeable because extending professional learning among teachers in schools to network with other schools requires a kind of special managerial skills, when selecting schools to network with and to develop a staff development strategy which promotes collaboration among teachers of these schools (Steyn, 2013). According to Chapman et al. (2010), networking among these schools usually succeed in developing firm interdependent relationships among teachers who learn from one another and who work on a common task such as developing the curriculum and planning timetables (Ainscow, 2010).

2. 8 Barriers to the creation of PLCs

In this section barriers hindering school principals in creating PLCs in schools are discussed. This literature review reveals what different scholars perceive as barriers that hinder school principals in transforming schools to PLCs. Over-emphasising the necessity of PLCs, Steyn (2013) asserts that despite the challenges, learning opportunities with colleagues is an indispensable requirement to improve the quality of education not only in South Africa, but also beyond its borders. Agreeing with Steyn views, Stoll *et al.*, (2006) seem to channel the thinking of teachers towards understanding their importance in transforming schools to PLCs and that school context can also be a barrier if it is located in a rural context where transport problems pose limitations of its own. To teachers as learners it suggests that, networking with other professionals outside the school under such conditions seems insurmountable. These scholars further point out that the school size determines the success or failure of PLCs in the sense that if the school size is small and is understaffed, and teachers are teaching multi-grade classes, chances of collaborating for lesson planning are very slim and working in isolation becomes the order of the day. In such environment chances to reflect on one's own practice are slim (Stoll *et al.*, 2006).

Reporting about their findings Marzano *et al.*, (2005) maintain that secondary schools teachers stand better chances of meeting as PLCs of different faculties because they have heads of departments and subject heads with specialised knowledge in particular faculties compared to primary schools where lead teachers are selected on the basis of experience. According to Nelson (2010) if school principals fail to create conditions that allow PLCs to prosper such as inadequate physical resources, lack of time, moral support and trust, teacher morale is lowered. To them it is the kind of commitment and leadership adopted by school principals that determine the success of PLC implementation. While other studies prefer coercion of principals as a remedy for failure in contrast to them, DuFour (2007) believes that top-down coercive approach in leading schools may results in adrop in commitment of teachers.

Even the policies, pieces of legislation and developmental programmes that the DoE introduces to have schools transformed to PLCs, their successful implementation rests on school principals as change agents because of the powers vested in them (Le Roux, 2012). All they need is support. It is therefore assumed that failure by the school principals to understand their roles and responsibilities

encompassed by the authority vested on them as change agents (Le Roux, 2012) may result in poor implementation of PLCs. Empowered as they are, however, it is also noted that powers vested in them seem to be handcuffed by the interference of teacher unions in education (Mthiyane, 2013) which seem to have an upper hand over the DoE by not only demanding their members during teaching time but also by total shutdown of black community schools during strikes (Pattillo, 2012). These practices do not only lead to dysfunctionality in most black South African schools in townships and in rural areas (Pattillo, 2012) but also impact negatively on the creation of PLCs in schools and on learner achievement.

Working under such conditions makes school principals to find it very challenging to create favourable conditions for PLCs while others fail even to realise the need to provide for such learning conditions (Pedder & Opfer, 2011). I think that is the reason that has triggered Pedder and Opfer (2011) to believe that applying coercion in creating such environments can be the only solution. However, negating this statement Katz and Earl (2010) and Mestry *et al.* (2009) claim that there is no guarantee that compelling school principals to provide good conditions for PLCs can make a difference because it is through teachers' intensive involvement in PLCs that significant and positive change in school practices occurs which leads to improved learner performance.

It is important to note that it depends on teacher's sincere commitment and willingness to participate and learn in PLCs (Mestry *et al.*, 2009; Ntampo, 2009; Comprehensive Centre for Teacher Quality, 2011). Similarly Hord (2007), Katz and Earl (2010) believe that change is personal and therefore, it begins with the individual. I think that is the reason why these scholars esteem individual change in the hearts and minds of teachers very high before actual change in their learning and learner achievement occurs. For instance, Perumal (2011) also states that sometimes even skilled and knowledgeable teachers fail to maintain standards and give off their best because of undisciplined learners, heavy workloads, violence at school, lack of parental and management support and reduced chances of promotion. There are many factors that have led to the decline of teacher morale which are very demanding for school principals to attend to which also result in the loss of interest in work by both the school principals and the teachers and start developing a negative attitude towards the profession (Perumal, 2011).

Deducing from the arguments, it is assumed that failure by school principals to create expected conditions that promote the creation of PLCs, leads to lowered teacher morale, negative school culture and poor learner academic performance (Killion & Roy, 2009). Regardless of inabilities school principals are expected to create PLCs in schools and provide conditions that support collaborative learning and promote a strong collaborative culture that values continuous improvement despite teacher unwillingness (Killion & Roy, 2009). This has become an issue of concern for some school principals who find it difficult to develop professional learning opportunities (Killion & Roy, 2009). To me this signifies that the degree to which professional learning communities operate in schools varies depending on schools contexts, school principals' commitment, teacher competence and their willingness to participate. My assumption regarding this situation is that it is for this cause that Steyn (2013) suggests that school principals ought to be assisted in providing proper conditions for PLCs and developing appropriate collaborative structures in schools for the sake of improved teacher learning and classroom performance.

In support of Steyn's idea, various studies have offered ways on how school principals can be assisted to provide supporting conditions and to make collaborative continuing professional learning successful despite challenging situations that hinder their progress. This includes engaging poor-performing schools in collaborative and networking approaches. Challenging situations for principals to deal with may crop up including tension, fear, suspicion or a history of isolation between staff members (Chapman *et al.*, 2010; West, 2010). Negotiating about appropriate strategies for collaborating and networking between schools can be very taxing on school principals in terms of time and energy which can be a futile exercise because the success of the collaboration depends on the mutual trust between staff members and their willingness to work together (West, 2010). Karl *et al.*, (2010) open another page when stating that some individual educators in their PLCs can be 'connectors' of their schools to network and *vice versa*. I think that it is for this cause that Pedder and Opfer (2011) argue that creating conditions as above can be difficult for some schools. This is because not all the schools acknowledge the necessity to create such learning environments unless they are compelled to do so. In addition to the above, the study conducted by Steyn (2013) suggests that extending professional learning among teachers in schools to network with other schools requires particular management skills, which include carefully selecting schools in networks and also developing a staff development strategy that will enhance collaboration among staff in these schools. In a nutshell, even though networking and

collaborative work involves much of the teachers' willingness, the onus of selecting the networking schools rests on the school principal. This leaves them with no choice but to transform their schools.

2.9 Empirical studies from international community

Maloney and Konza (2011) conducted a study in Australia, which is a developed country. A study was conducted at a metropolitan primary school known as Berrivale. They undertook a Professional Learning Project (PLP) in collaboration with a local university. The aim of the study was to establish the processes that were undertaken by Berrivale Metropolitan Primary School staff to look back at their practices of early childhood practices. It also focused on school's response towards teachers' project designed to critically assist in the image of formation of teachers based on their beliefs or assumptions about their practices.

With PLP these researchers aimed to facilitate Kindergarten to Year 3 teachers' exploration of their perceptions, knowledge and understanding of early childhood pedagogy, the extent to which these matched national policies and agendas; and the development of a shared view amongst staff of effective early childhood practice. The framework that underpinned their study was collaborative and collegial conceptual framework. Hord's (2007) framework was used for examining the way the teaching staff at Berrivale Primary School participated in and created a professional learning community (PLCs). They used supportive and shared leadership; sharing of values and vision, collective learning and its application and provision of supporting conditions for the maintenance of PLCs were drawn from Hord's (2007) framework.

Through this study, Melony and Konza (2011) were able to establish that a culture of working together was introduced to the staff. It was found that financial support was made available by the school. Staff members were involved in the planning and in decision making. Ongoing challenges were dealt with. Goals of the teachers were reached. Teachers adopted the project. Tension and differences caused mainly by differing philosophical perspectives were settled. Time and job demands exerted pressure on the teachers. The school had to find the way to involve the whole staff in a comfortable way. The presence of the university teachers made the staff uncomfortable. The conclusions that were reached were that PLP project provided teachers of Berrivale Primary School with a forum where they

collaboratively developed a shared vision for early childhood education. Discussion became the foundation for teacher action research but it was problematic to teachers.

Melony and Konza's (2011) study is similar to this study because it sought to explore the processes used to develop PLCs and the factors that impacted on the development of effective PLCs. It thus extended the understanding of the experiences of school principals in creating PLCs and barriers hindering the process of creating PLCs. Both studies focus on their experiences of transforming schools to PLCs and on factors hindering the process and its benefits. However, they differ in the sense that Melony and Konza's (2011) study focused on the processes undertaken by teachers and their experiences in the creation of PLCs, while the focus in my study is on school principals that completed ACE: SL.

2.10 African context study

Steyn conducted a study in Nigeria, a developing country like South Africa. The study was conducted in 2010. The focus of the study was on the philosophical views of Nigerian representatives from private schools who had attended training programmes of effectiveness which were administered by the University of South Africa (UNISA). The researcher used andragogy and constructivist learning theories to frame the study. These theories were used to illuminate the questions about why, how, when and where should professional development (PD) phenomenon occur. Professional Development (PD) and decentralisation of education was used in the study to bring to light the importance of teachers receiving learning within the context of their schools.

The findings revealed that poor financial resources were the major cause of schools failing to provide for teaching and learning. Teachers who were not qualified lacked some basic skills and knowledge. There was poor communication among various stakeholders. Information was not effectively communicated to the teachers. There is lack of time management skills among teachers. There is too much stress on teachers caused by teaching large classes. The recommendations that were made are as follows: there should be more time provided for workshops. It was recommended that all teachers in Nigeria should receive training because of unsafe conditions under which Nigerian teachers worked; they needed to be motivated so that they could produce good results.

Steyn (2008) conducted a similar study which sought to understand the experiences of Nigerian private school teachers who attended training programmes of effectiveness; to also understand the challenges faced by these teachers in the process of creating PLCs by their schools principals. Steyn's study focused on the philosophical views of the private school teachers. This stands in stark contrast to the current study which focuses on school principals who completed ACE: SL.

2.11 South African context study

Steyn (2013) conducted a study about the building of professional learning communities to enhance continuing professional teacher development (CPTD) in South African Schools. Steyn's study sought to answer the question, how can professional learning communities in schools be implemented effectively to enhance the continuing professional development of teachers in South African schools? Based on this study, Steyn developed what is referred to in this dissertation as a dynamic model of PLCs. This model shows how individual learning, professional development communities, networking and school an environment conducive to effective learning, lead to transformational change in teachers. Steyn (2013) drew from adult and constructive learning theories which explain how adults can be assisted when engaging in their own continuing professional development.

The main findings were that continuing professional development was a dynamic, job-embedded, classroom focused, supportive, collaborative and ongoing process that actively involves teachers in learning and development opportunities. One-day workshops where teachers are provided with information that they need to apply in practice, have been criticised. Educational systems are developing collaborative approaches through formal professional learning networks to improve the quality of schooling.

Steyn (2013) concluded by stating that schools are the places where new knowledge and conceptual change operate to transform how teachers and school principals think and act, thus improving student performance. The social school climate, appropriate school structures to promote collaboration, shared leadership, mutual support for continuing professional development and cultural factors such as the beliefs of staff and leadership in schools may impact professional learning. Steyn's (2013) study is similar to this study in the sense that it sought to understand how school principals effectively implement PLCs to enhance CPTD in South African schools. This study seeks to understand the

experiences of school principals as change agents in the process of implementing PLCs to enhance professional development of teachers. However, there are differences as well between the two studies with regard to data generating methods. In her study Steyn interacted with literature on continued professional development and official documents whilst the current study in addition to literature and document review also used semi-structured interviews.

2.12 Theoretical and Conceptual frameworks

The literature on transforming schools to professional learning communities utilises a number of concepts to describe how school principals involve teachers in the process of transforming schools to PLCs. This section presents a discussion about two concepts and theory that are used as frameworks that underpin the study. These concepts are distributed leadership as espoused by Spillane and Harris (2008); collaborative leadership as advanced by Hallinger (2010) and continued professional teacher development as detailed by Steyn (2013). The three concepts are discussed in the following section below.

2.13 Distributed leadership

Bush (2005) defines distributed leadership as a dispersed leadership which requires the most powerful influence of the principal to clarify and articulate the purposes of the school. Bush (2005) further states further that leaders in their sectors spell out their vision; set clear goals for the departments they lead, and develop a sense of shared mission. This is also supported by the study conducted by Spillane and Harris (2008) that revealed that there is a strong connection between distributed leadership and positive change in the organisation in terms of organisational outcomes and learner achievement. Moreover, distributive leadership does not only support top leadership but also leadership at all levels in the institution (Spillane & Harris, 2008) thus promoting the mentality that all people in the organisation can lead. In this form of leadership, teachers interact with one another in groups using power vested in them; leadership becomes flatter and shared among leaders and colleagues (Yukl, 2006; Preedy, Bennet & Wise, 2012).

The conclusion that I can draw from the views expressed by these authors is that leadership is spread among all members in the organisation. It makes all members feel important as they interact and influence one another. They develop the feeling of trust and self-confidence and self-worth about themselves and their organisation. It is therefore assumed that in such an environment, PLCs are in a better position to prosper and to have learner achievement improve.

2.14 Collaborative leadership

The word collaboration derives from the Latin word “colaborare” which means to work together (Maio, 2008). Collaboration is a process by which people, organisations, and organisms work together to accomplish a common goal of the organisation. It uses talents and resources of all members to bring change and solution in the organisation (Hallinger, 2010). It is the kind of leadership which promotes collaborative professional learning and also the kind of professional development (PD) which ensures a maximum degree of teaching and learning daily (Maio, 2008). It also involves collaborative teams. It engages professionals in collective inquiry into best practice and current reality because it is action oriented (Preedy, Barnett & Wise, 2012). It promotes commitment to continuous improvement wherein members collectively gather evidence of current levels of learners’ understanding. They develop together strategies and ideas to build on the strengths and weaknesses in that learning area and they implement those strategies and ideas (Preedy, Barnett & Wise, 2012).

The most commonly used concepts in collaborative learning to describe professional learning among teachers are networked learning communities and collaborative practices (Chapman & Allen 2006; Katz & Earl, 2010). Steyn’s (2013) study reveals that many authors advocate a learning team model of professional development to enhance deeper, ongoing teacher-directed learning which removes teacher isolation as a barrier to effective professional development and quality teaching. It further shows the power of professional communities in schools (Steyn, 2013). Many studies have pointed out that professional collaborative learning in schools is a crucial requirement for effective professional learning and school improvement (Desimone, 2009; Ntupo, 2009; Chapman et al., 2010; Republic of South Africa, 2011; Pedder & Opfer, 2011).

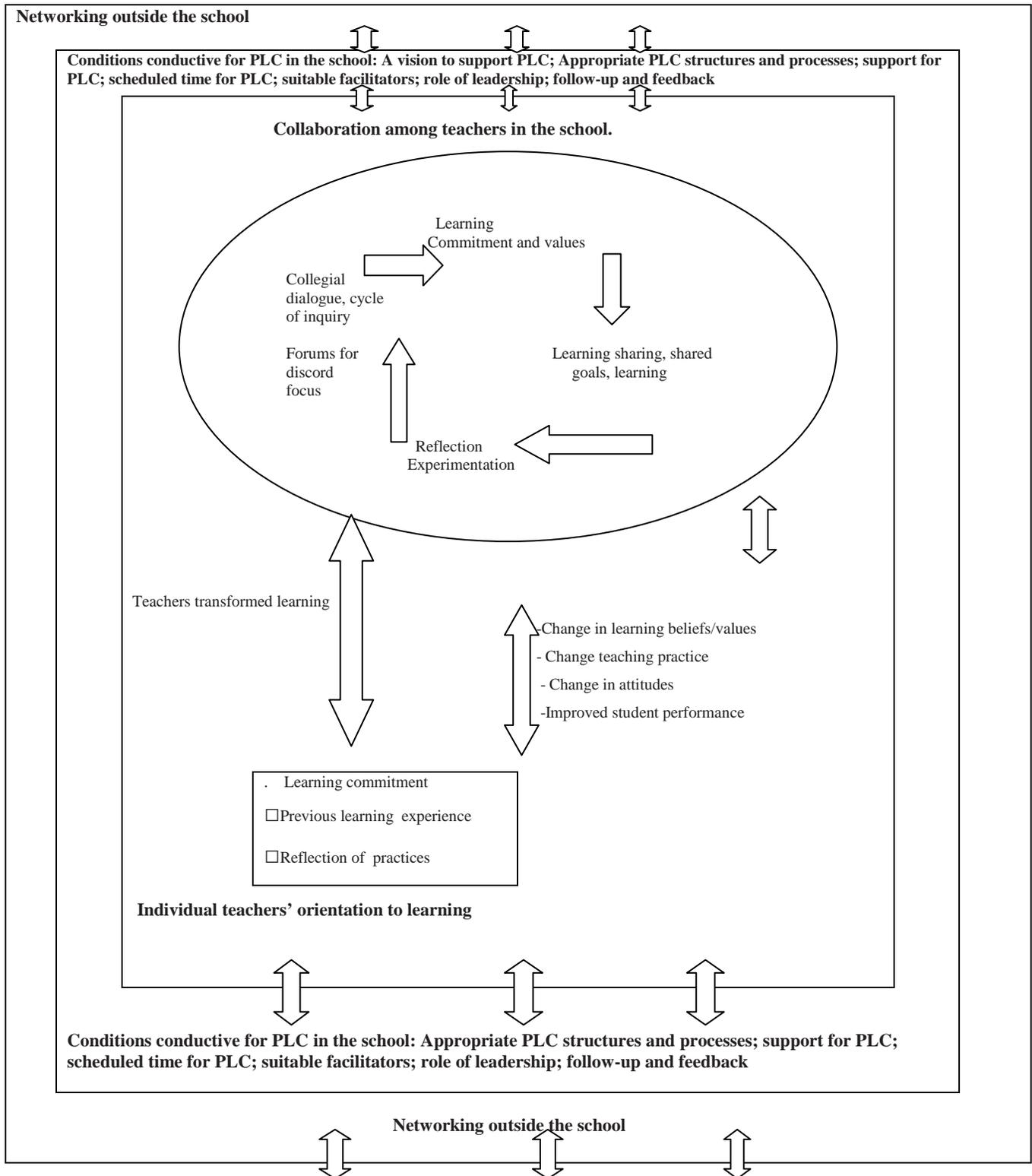
According to Steyn (2013), collaboration among teachers in schools provides exposure to new ideas and opportunities to learn together and enhance their professional development. Steyn (2013) further

asserts that studies confirm the important role that teacher collaboration plays in increasing school and students' performance; however, there are barriers to achieving this as well. Steyn (2013) maintains that isolation between teachers may hinder the development of such practices and therefore limit the opportunities for teachers to develop their professional knowledge and skills. It is through this that Steyn (2013) argues that such teacher isolation needs to be addressed for the sake of professional learning opportunities among staff members.

Many studies affirm that concepts of collective or collaborative learning focus mostly on deeper, continually, collaborative, teacher-directed learning which is required for teachers' effective growth (Chappius&Stiggins, 2009). Concurring with them, Katz and Earl (2010) state that professional learning through collaboration is regarded as an intensive interaction that engages educators in opening up their beliefs and practices to investigation and debate. It also provides exposure to new ideas and opportunities to learn together and enhance their professional development. In addition, Katz and Earl (2010) assert that explicit, conscious, and intentional strategies to support teachers in examining, understanding, and sharing practice within schools and across networks must be undertaken in order to help networks contribute to the cultivation of innovative knowledge communities (Katz *et al.*, 2008; Steyn, 2013). These discussions are important in making sense of what primary school principals do in promoting collaboration among the teachers in their schools.

2.15 Steyn's theory: Continuing professional teacher development model

Fig. 1 Steyn's dynamic model (theory) of professional learning communities



With this model Steyn (2013) presents clarity by illustrating how professional learning communities operate to benefit school principals, teachers and learners. It indicates how they benefit through individual learning, professional development, networking and a school environment conducive to effective teaching. It brings to light how teachers who are inspired by their principals perform through provision of well nurturing conditions for PLCs (Steyn, 2013). Teachers in such schools develop a change in learning beliefs or values; change teaching practice, change in attitude and improved learner performance. Through this model Steyn (2013) reveals that teachers who are engaged in this model develop learning commitment and values; reflection; commitment; experimentation; learning discord; collegial dialogue; cycle of enquiry; forums for sharing; shared goals and learning focus.

Steyn's (2013) CPTD model which is in line with international professional developmental programmes aims at enhancing the sharing of effective practices between teachers, and to improved student performance. It is this CPTD model that Steyn (2013) proclaims to be mandatory for all registered South African teachers and is aiming at acknowledging and encouraging individual teachers' endeavours to improve their own learning and to develop themselves professionally. It acknowledges teachers' participation in collective development of themselves and improving learning within their schools. It encourages teachers' participation in professional development programmes offered by employers, unions and others to improve their learning and self-development (Steyn, 2013).

In South Africa, like other developing countries such as Nigeria, teachers desire to have an environment which is safe when engaged in PLCs: meeting as equals, engaging in collegial dialogue where power is not an issue, they all have the same goal to improve their own practices and learner achievement (Steyn, 2010). Why safe environment? It is because they interact in their faculties and share the experiences of their learners or teachers in the classrooms as well as the resources. They also interact with school principals where they expect to get honest feedback with respect. This would enable them to confidently reflect and view their own teaching practices and beliefs using different lenses. They expect to be continuously developed within the safe and supportive environment that school principals should provide (Steyn, 2013).

The support for school principals, deputy principals (DP) and heads of department to create PLCs is made available from the level of the state to district offices and down to school level; hence the introduction of ACE: SL and CPTD to develop principals, deputy principals and HODs (Mestry, 2009; Killion, 2013). With ACE: SL, the Department of Education (DoE) trains school principals, DP and HODs as agents of transformation in schools with the aim to improve teacher performance, thereby enhancing learner achievement.

The Department of Basic Education (DoE) is focusing on improving the output of the education system and the continuous professional development to capacitate principals is also prioritised (Mthiyane, 2013). In pursuit of the vision expressed in the above paragraph, various policies were issued to monitor the continued professional development of teachers in schools. These include the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development (NPFTED) in South Africa; the 'Action Plan to 2014, Towards the realisation of Schooling 2025' and in 2011, the 'Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development (ISPFTED) in South Africa, 2011-2025 (Mthiyane, 2013; Steyn, 2013). This drives me as a researcher to think that, for PLCs to flourish in schools, individual principals as change agents need to swing with the tide, change and adopt leadership styles which are informed by the values of democracy as enshrined in the constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Bhengu, 2012).

While many countries of the world strive for transforming schools into PLCs, the contrasting situation prevails in Uganda. According to Ofoegbu (2006), in Uganda PLCs have not been started because Uganda as developing country is still organising herself after the wars that put everything in shambles regarding education. More time and focus is spent on bringing the system of education in place. Apparently school principals in Uganda as agents of social change face a hard time of making teachers collaborate and to plan teaching activities together (Ofoegbu, 2006). Similarly, the same is experienced in Nigeria. According to the study conducted by Steyn (2010), in Nigeria teachers desire to have viable PLCs but they are locked up by the lack of commitment and trust from school principals that cannot provide school infrastructure. As a result teachers are working under unsafe conditions in Nigeria and against their will (Steyn, 2010).

2.16 Chapter summary

Chapter Two presented the discussion of literature review that relates to transforming schools PLCs with reference to the perspectives of principals in transforming school to PLCs. The literature review also indicated the essential of power distribution among staff at all levels in the school and collaborative working among the staff for the betterment of the staff performance and learner achievement. This reviewed literature reveals global benefits of PLCs and the conditions that promote or hinder the transforming of schools to PLCs. The two theories that frame the study have been discussed. The next chapter presents a detailed discussion of the design and methodology that was used in carrying out this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter literature review on transforming schools to professional learning communities (PLCs) was presented. This chapter focuses on the research design and methodological processes employed to generate and analyse data on transforming schools to PLCs by rural school principals that completed ACE: SL Programme. The chapter begins with a detailed discussion of the research design and methodology used in the study. This is followed by the detailed explanation of instruments used to generate data which was meant to elicit the perspectives of principals regarding the manner in which they transformed their schools to PLCs. It further presents the sampling and data generating methods showing how they were utilised in the study. Finally, it presents data analysis procedures, ethical issues and issues of trustworthiness that were observed and concludes with a chapter summary.

3.2 Research design and methodology

Various studies conducted indicate that many researchers (Kumar, 2005; Trochim, 2006; Creswell, 2012 & Cohen, Morrison & Manion, 2009) refer to research design as the whole process and a plan for generating data to the end of the process. They further describe it as glue that holds the research project together (Creswell, 2012). It is further described as a structured process for conducting research which can either be qualitative or quantitative (Kumar, 2005; Trochim, 2006; Creswell, 2012 & Cohen, Manion & Morrison., 2009). In addition to the explanations provided by authors above, Vithal and Jansen (2010) assert that research design is created by the researcher. It is shaped and informed by the methodology that is used. It responds to the context and the participants in the study conducted. It is the location of research methodology that determines the spacing of processes and strategies to be used with the focus of the whole project in mind (Vithal and Jansen, 2010). The above conceptualisations suggest that a well-designed plan for a research project: transforming schools to PLCs had to be in place before embarking on the research project.

Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2009) maintain that Qualitative approach is an approach that utilises among others, a case study design which studies a single case in depth. This study adopted a qualitative research approach which is located in the interpretivist paradigm. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2009) further maintain that knowledge in the interpretivist paradigm about the phenomenon being studied is socially constructed. In the case of this study, transforming schools to PLCs, the real life situation was investigated where five rural primary school principals as participants that completed ACE: SL were interviewed in order to find out how they transformed their schools to PLCs. The reason for selecting these principals is twofold: firstly primary school education is the foundation of all later education and secondly, I assumed that they are armed with the necessary skills and expertise of transforming their schools where resources are mostly inadequate (in rural context).

(Cohen *et al.*, 2009) further assert that a paradigm utilises subjective information to describe the context or natural settings with the intention of understanding the whole situation. Agreeing with Cohen *et al.*, Richard (2005) asserts that qualitative research is interested in life events as they are lived in real situations (Kelly, 2005). A paradigm is defined by Creswell (2012) as a perspective in which the researcher views the world which is grounded on a particular set of values or beliefs which are epistemology, ontology and methodology.

In the interpretivist paradigm participants construct meaning about the event being researched by basing it on their life history and personal experiences (Creswell, 2012). In terms of epistemology knowledge in the interpretivist paradigm about the phenomenon being studied is socially constructed (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2009). Through epistemological positioning, I was able to understand the perspectives of five principals that completed ACE: SL from their own perspectives. Ontology refers to the nature of reality and in the context of interpretive paradigm, there is no one single reality but there are multiple realities or truths which are socially constructed (Coleman & Briggs, 2002). In this study I searched for multiple realities of the five principals in terms of how they had managed or not managed to transform their schools into PLCs.

Studies conducted revealed that there are some disagreements on the scholars' viewpoints on how and why qualitative research should be conducted; how it should be analysed and in what form it should be presented (Sarvag, 2008). A common feature of qualitative projects is creating understanding from data as the analysis proceeds. This means that the research design of a qualitative project is not pre-

emptive like in quantitative research where the hypothesis dictates the form, quantity, and scope of required data (Richards, 2005). This study adopted a qualitative approach utilising a case study which studies a single case in depth and is located in the interpretivist paradigm (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2009). A case study according to Kelly (2005) is a detailed study of individuals, groups, institutions or other social units in their different settings

3.3 Sampling

According to Webster (2001), sampling is selecting a set of research participants from a large population. Sampling that was used in this study was purposive. Creswell (2012) defines purposive sampling as a technique of selecting cases which are rich in information for in-depth study of the phenomenon. Sampling was purposive in the sense that it targeted five school principals that completed ACE: SL between the years 2007 and 2010. The schools selected had to be primary schools and had to be located in rural areas and also, should not be too far away from where I live in order to reduce travel costs. In that way there was an element of convenience although that was not a major consideration. Similarly, official documents like records of the minutes between years 2007 and 2013 were also sampled because they would provide relevant information about the leadership of school principals before and after they have completed ACE: SL.

3.3.1 Venues for interviews and atmosphere

The most convenient venues to conduct interviews were principals' offices. These venues were selected because they provided natural school setting and the environment they are acquainted with to perform their routine tasks. The time selected for interviews was after school, that is, after all the hassles of the day were over. All parties were comfortable about time and place because principals' routine tasks were not to be disturbed instead, it assisted principals to recall and bring back all the good and/or bad experiences about their effort in transforming schools to PLCs. All my participants were comfortable with the use of English as language of communication when data was generated since it was their business language.

3.3.2 Profiling the case studies

I found it crucial to present briefly the context of the rural schools from where the participants came and the conditions of service they faced almost daily. Data in this study was generated from five primary school principals that completed ACE: SL in the rural context of Kwambonambi Circuit in the Uthungulu district. Their schools operated under very challenging and virtually desperate conditions which they described as a barrier to normal schooling. To hide the identity of the schools and their principals I decided to use *pseudonyms* as follows: There is Mrs Nceku, the principal of Kuyasa Primary School; Ms Bond, the principal of Nqobizitha Primary School; Mrs Green, the principal of Khanyeza Primary School; Mrs Peach, the principal of Bayabonga Primary School; and Mrs Banana, the principal of Khumbula Primary School.

The schools were categorised into Section 20 and Section 21 in terms of receiving their financial allocation from the DoE. Four of the schools were Section 20 with the exception of Khanyeza Primary School which belonged to Section 21 category. Its whole financial allocation was transferred straight into the school's bank account by the provincial Department of Education and its SGB enjoyed the privilege of managing the funds to perform certain functions. With regards to the other four schools their allocation was only reflected on paper due to the fact that they belonged to Section 20 category. They forwarded their financial needs to the DoE and service providers thereafter were assigned to render services. It was only the small portion of their allocation that went to the school's bank account. Principals and SGBs of these schools found themselves in a precarious situation in terms of providing proper conditions for the sustenance of PLCs in their schools.

All five schools had two major common features. They were all 'NO Fee' paying schools, which was also a very stressful condition under which these principal operated. They were all under National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), which indicated high poverty rate in the surrounding communities hence they were ranked Quintile 1 and Quintile 2 respectively. It was not only the learners that experienced the problem of ill health but also the teachers and principals as well. The rate of absenteeism and late coming was rife which did not only affect the learners, but also the teachers for they relied much on public transport to travel long distances on foot due to a lack of transport. The SMTs were faced with problems of dealing with novice and under qualified teachers, re-deployment of

teachers from schools based on decreased learner enrolments and teachers leaving the system because of financial reasons. House breaking was the order of the day. School property was left at the mercy of the criminals. The SGBs bore the burden of buying same resources year after year to replace the stolen and damaged ones which hindered school progress. In a nutshell, it was clear that in such an environment quality teaching and learning were compromised. The factors mentioned above gave rise to mixed experiences among participants as expressed below during interview discussions with interviewees.

3.4 Methods of data generation

Qualitative research involves various methods of data generation and analysis that are not quantitative (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative study utilises a variety of data generation methods such as interviews, observation, documentary review, questionnaires, life stories and many more (Cohen *et al.*, 2009). Due to the nature of this study, it utilised semi-structured interviews and documents review. According to Cohen *et al.*, (2009), interviews are a tool for generating data used during the exchange of ideas between two or more people on a topic of interest being discussed. Pratt, (2006) in accord with Cohen and Crabtree (2006) maintain that qualitative interviews use semi-structured and open ended questions. This provides the interviewee with individual variations to express his or her feelings freely and the interviewer can vary the order of the questions but using the same list to all participants (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Pratt, 2006). In my study, semi-structured interviews were used, probe questions were used to dig deeper, asking questions to get the perspectives of five primary school principals that completed ACE: SL about transforming schools to PLCs.

Research instruments, according to Leigh (2013), are instruments which are used in investigative qualitative research where the researcher is a large part of the process and is considered as one of the qualitative instruments. According to Leigh (2013), this happens when the researcher conducts the research that he or she is affecting by becoming involved in the situation. The research instruments that were used to generate data in this research study were interviews guide and the content of the discussion was captured using the voice recorder. During documents review, such as minutes of the SMT, the SGB and the teaching staff, log books and time books were also used to triangulate data that

had been produced through semi-structured interviews Leigh (2013) contends that the interview guide is an instrument for the researcher to ensure that none of the important issues to be discussed is left out of the conversation.

Interview schedule in this study was constructed using three critical research questions namely, what the experiences of rural primary school principals are in transforming their schools to PLCs? What do rural primary school principals regard as barriers in transforming their schools to PLCs? And why must rural primary school principals transform their schools to PLCs? Each research question had three sub research questions. The interview schedule was used consistently across all the participants to maintain uniformity. The voice recorder was purchased to record the voices of participants verbatim for capturing every word spoken by the participants. Documents were collected from the participants to verify the trustworthiness of the data generated during interviews. A note book was bought which I used as reflective journal to record all unintended informal observations during school visits to inform me of the things that were happening in the schools which did not come out during interviews.

3.5 Data analysis

According to Creswell (2012) data analysis (also called content analysis) is a technique or procedure which is used for coding and analysing data. The kind of data analysis used in this study was thematic. Data was categorised and coded into themes, in the form of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, or ideas (Creswell, 2012). According Lincoln and Guba (2005), coding of data includes writing down important ideas, words and phrases from participants, categorisation and interpretation of data with an aim of providing explanations to phenomenon being investigated. Lincoln and Guba (2005) further assert that there are seven steps that need to be followed when analysing data. These steps are; establishing units of analysis of data, creating domain analysis, establishing relationships and linkages between the domains, making speculative inferences, summarising, seeking negative and discrepant cases and lastly theory generation. After having generated data on the perspectives of five principals who completed ACE: SL and on what they regard as barriers in transforming their schools to PLCs, interview transcripts were developed using the voices in the voice recorder. Data was then analysed following the seven steps mentioned above by Lincoln and Guba (2005) relating it to the research questions.

3.6 Issues of Trustworthiness of the findings

According to Creswell (2012), the reliability of the study comes from its validity. If the study is not valid, it is also not credible, and therefore generally not trustworthy. In qualitative research, the concept of validity and reliability are not used, instead, trustworthiness is preferred. According to Lincoln and Guba (2005) as well as Creswell (2012), to address the issue of trustworthiness in qualitative research, a set of criteria are used. These criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Lincoln and Guba (2005), state that member checking and keeping raw data to be used by others contributes to the credibility and trustworthiness of the study. In the case of my study, member checking was done through document analysis to validate the data generated from the principals.

To ensure transferability, I ensured that I explained in minute details about the processes that I followed in conducting the study. This would ensure that a person who wants to replicate this study can do so. To ensure confirmability, a number of strategies were followed. As indicated in the above paragraph, I did member-checking which is a method whereby the researcher checks with the participants the extent to which his or her interpretation of what the participant is saying, is accurate. After transcribing the interview transcripts, I sent them back to the participants to check if what I had written down was the true reflection of the content of our discussion. I would also ensure that my study is as credible as possible by using concrete resources such as the voice recorder, school documents and my informal observation to enhance the data from rural primary school principals that had completed ACE: SL.

3.7 Ethical Issues

The researcher is expected to observe many ethical issues during the course of the study including data generation, data analysis and reporting the findings (Creswell, 2012). Vithal and Jansen (2010) categorise ethical issues into informed consent procedures, avoidance of deception in research and confidentiality towards participants, benefits of research to participants over risk and participants requests that go beyond social norms. According to Coleman *et al.*, (2009) and Creswell (2012), researchers must obtain informed consent from gatekeepers and participants before the study is conducted. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants for them to decide whether to

continue or not to participate in the study. Deception about the nature of the study has to be guarded against (Creswell, 2012).

As a researcher I went through a number of steps which involved getting the ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I also applied for and got permission to conduct the study from the school principals who acted as gate keepers and also as participants in the study. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were ensured. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the schools and school principals. This was further ensured by hiding the names, physical addresses of the schools and stamps in the appendixes. In addition to that was explained to participants that interviews were going to be recorded and they had a right to withdraw at any time they wanted to. They agreed to participate and also to have the interviews audio recorded.

3.8 Limitations of the study

The limitations concerning interviews and documents analysis were the delays from the side of the participants because of the random meetings and workshops of the DoE which for many times coincided with the dates set for data generation in the sampled schools. Unavoidable circumstances such as ill health and other personal and confidential reasons were also barriers. They caused a huge delay in the completion of the study. Language was also a barrier in the study, because I had to ensure that I asked the participants to use the business language English which is not their home language. With regards to the time factors, I ensured that I gave myself sufficient time to do fieldwork in such a way that the delays were accommodated.

3.9 Chapter summary

The focus of this study was on research design and methodology that was employed in conducting the study. It also discussed the research approach and paradigm adopted by the study. The case study methodology adopted for the study was explained and the reason why it was selected. Methods of data generation and analysis were discussed. Trustworthiness and ethical issues were discussed. The focus of the next chapter is on data presentation and discussion.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the research design and methodology of the study. This chapter presents and discusses the data generated through individual semi-structured interviews and documents review (Creswell, 2012). To minimise biasness and exclusive reliance on one method, methodological triangulation was used (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). In addition, I presented the data through themes and also infused the literature reviewed as well as the theoretical and conceptual frameworks as presented in Chapter Two.

In addition to semi-structured interviews, official school documents such as minute books, log books and time books were also reviewed for triangulation purposes. Moreover the reflective journal was also used to record incidents which were non-routine but very revealing, offering insights which were not available during the interview process (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). Firstly it presented and discussed the experiences of rural primary school principals that completed ACE: SL in transforming schools to PLCs. Secondly, it discusses what the rural school principals that completed ACE: SL regarded as barriers to transforming schools into Professional Learning Communities. It finally focuses on what the principals in the study regarded as the need for PLCs. Data was analysed following Creswell's (2012) framework which is discussed in detail in Chapter Two. Verbal expressions from interview discussions were used to highlight the views of the participants.

4.2 Discussion of the themes that emerged from the data

From interview transcriptions and documents review, the following themes emerged from perspectives of school principals: the leadership styles that facilitate schools becoming professional learning communities; tools optimising the transition to PLCs; barriers to the process of transforming schools to PLCs; how teachers respond to the principals' PLC initiatives; the perceived Department of Education's support for the creation of PLCs; the need for schools to become PLCs and principals' perceptions about schools achieving PLC status.

4.2.1 Leadership styles that facilitate schools to become Professional Learning Communities

This section presents and discusses the leadership styles that emerged from the interviews with five participating school principals. The school principals had completed ACE: SL programme and their leadership practices were assumed to have changed as a result of their exposure to the ACE: SL programme. Two dominant styles of leadership emerged from the analysis of data, and these are collaborative and distributed leadership styles. All the participants appeared to be subscribing to the two leadership styles because they believed that such styles encourage teamwork and distribution of power among the teacher. Besides teamwork and distribution of power, the principals that participated in the study believed that the styles of leadership that they had adopted were learnt from ACE: SL and also that they used such styles to facilitate the creation of professional learning communities. This is what Ms Bond had to say in this regard:

The leadership styles I have acquired through my study of ACE: SL with UKZN, are that I do not work in isolation from my HODs and my teachers. I do talk with my SMT to discuss some of the issues of which they go back and discuss with colleagues in their departments; and sometimes we do talk together as the SMT and educators discussing issues that will take learners from where they are and how to get to the end of what we want to achieve as our primary goal (Ms Bond).

The above view was also shared by Mrs Nceku who maintained that she acquired skills of working collaboratively with staff members from the ACE:SL programme. The notion of collaboration and learning as a team formed part of their learning experience in the ACE School leadership programme. To this end this is what she had to say:

The experience that I have gained when I studied ACE is that you cannot work on your own when trying to transform the school in PLC; so I have decided to use a collaborative leadership style; in other words we do things collaboratively and I have seen it working(Mrs Nceku).

The above extract indicates that school principals that completed ACE: SL programme gained some insights about the benefits of working with others instead of working alone as they were previously used to do. Therefore, the principals had started to collaborate with their HODs and also distributed work to all structures in the school. Some collaborated with teachers in the form of staff meetings, as SMT, as phases and some in the form of grade representation whereby various grades meet and elect

grade representatives who work closely with the principal who then discuss it further with teachers of their grades. In support of this view, Mrs Banana had to say:

*One of my leadership styles is delegation. I do not work on my own. I involve other teachers like SMT and senior educators(Mrs **Banana**).*

The views expressed in this extract were corroborated by the data from the minutes of the phase meetings where the Foundation Phase HOD was requesting one of the senior teachers to lead a discussion on promotion requirements in the Foundation Phase meeting. One extract from the minutes reflected Mrs Banana appreciating her staff for their commitment and taking initiative in planning work for the following year. The minutes were that of the staff meeting that was held at the end the fourth term in 2013. Mrs Banana shared her appreciation for the diligence showed by the HODs together with the whole staff for completing planning for 2014 before the end of 2013. That was something that had never happened previously.

The notion that principals worked with other staff members as a team is supported by authors such as Spillane and Harris (2010). These scholars emphasise the value of collaboration and distribution of duties and responsibilities among staff members. They base their beliefs on the perceived limitation of a singular leadership approach and saw their leadership role as being primarily concerned with empowering others to lead. This view was also corroborated by the content of the minutes. The minutes indicated that the SMT and the teachers came together and deliberated on various issues concerning teaching and learning. It is a recommended kind of learning which utilises talents and resources of all members to bring about change and solutions in the organisation (Hallinger, 2010).

The other closely related matter is about the manner in which the school principals promoted collaboration in their schools. There were two ways in which the school principals promoted collaboration in the schools. With regards to the first method, the principals utilised their HODs who in turn, worked closely with their staff within their respective departments. The second way entailed Heads of Department collaborating with their respective phases. Teachers from the same school met to share and discuss issues on teaching and learning such as assessment, researching about the topic and lesson planning. Teachers as learners collaborated with other teachers of other schools when attending workshops. Besides utilising the HODs, they also made use of other structures in the school. In other

words, teachers themselves met without the presence of their HODs and discussed issues of common interest and invariably, the issues under discussion related to teaching and learning situation in the classroom. In support of this view, Mrs Nceku had this to say:

We developed class representation; each grade elects the grade representative. We discuss with these particular people, even if they have something that they think it will take the school forward (Mrs Nceku).

The second strategy the principals used entailed setting aside time during which they as school principals could share ideas with their respective HODs. Time tables indicated that school management teams (SMT) met with teachers to provide them with support. They met with teachers during staff meetings and staff briefing sessions. Ms Bond for instance, emphasised that she held meetings with her HODs and staff and HODs also held their own meetings with their phases and teachers in their grades. The minutes revealed that the manner in which the meetings were held followed a certain pattern. According to Ms Bond they followed a programme that guided all their meetings. Explaining this further, Ms Bond stated that they used HRM No. 41 of 2012. She said that it is a document issued by the DoE from which they extracted most of the standing items for their meetings. With regards to setting aside time for various categories of staff to learn together, this is what Ms Bond had to say:

Every Wednesday we have a meeting where the SMT meets with teachers. When I'm not there they will meet with their heads of department and the Intermediate Phase with their staff, the Foundation Phase meet with their staff too, where they discuss issues on HRM circular number 41 (Ms Bond).

The notion of making time available for teachers at all levels to collaborate is supported by various scholars. For instance, Killion (2013) regards time as a huge determining factor for the sustainability of the PLCs. The same view is shared by other scholars such as DuFour (2007), Forde and Chikoko (2012) who assert that principals should provide time for teachers to collaborate as a basic condition for PLCs. In the same vein, Reyes and Wagstaff (2005) assert that school days can also be rearranged to allow school-secured time for teachers to collaborate by means of staff meetings, trainings, lesson planning, workshops or expert facilitators. Such interactions improve their self-esteem and their

confidence is boosted. Through such activities, teachers are pulled out of isolation (Coe, Carl & Frick, 2010), and everybody is concerned about improved learner performance.

Besides these ideas, there are various models of learning which suggest that such learning have benefits for the learners as well. Such learning is supported by Steyn's model of continuing professional teacher development (CPTD) which states that teachers expect to be continuously developed within a safe and supportive environment that school principals should provide (Steyn, 2013). In such an environment teachers are empowered and committed, they are not like wheelbarrows that wait to be pushed by the SMTs. Teachers know what to do even if the SMTs are not there. In addition, in continuing professional teacher development, teachers are expected to choose activities for their own professional development to improve their own professional practices (Steyn, 2013). These activities can include attending union and learning area meetings, doing research, assessing national examinations and attending workshops organised by the school or the district or even by teacher unions (Steyn, 2013). In other words teachers have no excuse for not attending workshops designed to develop them.

Overall, it has emerged from the data that participating school principals preferred democratic and collaborative ways of leading their schools. They have also expressed a belief and understanding that democratic and collaborative ways of doing things had many benefits including the improvement of learner outcomes, and providing environments where power and work are decentralised at all levels. However, some glimpses of autocratic leadership were also noticed. The discussion of this theme has also indicated that some principals still held on to the notion that a school principal is a superior figure that is supposed to issue orders while others carry them out. This was expressed in the comments made by Mrs Banana when she said:

If I give them instructions; they follow the instructions. I think we are doing well by so doing. We all know that in each and every community there must be a leader. We cannot run away from that. At home the father is leader. At school the principal is a leader; you must listen to his or her instruction. Even at church, even the country as a whole has got a state president, so there must be that person who is superior (Mrs Banana).

Besides the above extract, overall, the data has indicated that principals regarded teamwork as a necessity due to noticeable good learner results in schools. However, they have also considered their word as a final. Interestingly, some teachers seemed to understand that if the principal has spoken no one else can cross that line. This raises questions about the notion of teamwork and involvement of all structures which all participants seemed to embrace. Could it be that such teamwork and collaboration occurred under the environment of coercion? The answers to that question may not be readily available but the data suggests that authoritarianism from the school principals, which is prevalent in rural and conservative communities, still exists.

4.2.2 Tools for optimising transition to PLCs

In this section, I present a discussion about tools that can optimise opportunities for effective transition to PLCs and the role played by school principals in facilitating it. The main focus is on how principals that completed ACE: SL utilise their acquired knowledge and skills to optimise the conditions that are conducive for PLCs. It emerged from the data that all five principals regarded time, space and trust as the most crucial tools in the implementation of PLCs. The principals are assumed to have a clear understanding of the interconnection and interdependency between the three basic essentials (time, space and trust) for PLCs with time taking an overarching position. The three tools are discussed below.

4.2.2.1 Time

For PLCs to be successfully implemented, time is the most valuable resource which principals need to provide for teachers to collaborate. For example, teachers can use it in order to research about the topic and share information; plan lessons; discuss assessment procedures together and to network with each other and outside the school. What was noted in the data is that all five principals considered time as the indispensable tool for optimising the environment for creating PLCs. Its importance was noted when all principals ensured that teachers were provided with time to attend workshops, collaborate after school and some even meet before the school starts in order to share ideas about how they can improve their own practice to improve learner achievement. They also reflect it on the class time tables. This was confirmed by Ms Bond the principal of Qedumona Primary School who said:

Yes they do have the time to meet. The meetings are schedules for Wednesday at half past one when the learners have gone home. Yes they do have the time to meet(Mrs Bond).

Mrs Banana the principal of Khumbula Primary School who also shared similar sentiments emphasised that teachers are provided time:

Time for those activities of planning together, assessing learners properly, holding meetings weekly, and networking with other schools assist (Mrs Banana).

The view expressed in the above extract was corroborated by Mrs Nceku the principal of Qhakaza Primary School who also said:

Yes, even in our timetable it (time) is there; even the SMT is allowed to visit those teachers who are new in the field(Mrs Nceku). In addition to the views expressed above, Mrs Green also showed her unique understanding of PLCs. She stated how she taught her staff basic computer skills for them to pass on that knowledge to learners. That was evident when she said:

Ok, I will say so because since I have obtained some knowledge in a computer usage I introduced it to each and every one of them and they pass the same knowledge to the learners, our learners when they leave are literate even though we are in the rural areas(Mrs Green).

The first three views expressed in the abstract above were confirmed by the minutes of the phase meetings where for instance, teachers from Khumbula Primary School discussed activities such as planning and assessment of learners at their respective phase meetings. Minutes further indicated that meetings were held weekly and networking that with other schools occurred. The data further indicated that as much as exposing the teachers and the learners to technology is very crucial, that occurred in parallel with the principles of PLCs in Mrs Green's school because knowledge there was transferred and not shared. That was confirmed by the content of the minutes which indicated that the principal was going to be engaged in a project of teaching the staff basic computer skills so that they could also transfer such skills to the learners.

The views expressed above are in line with those of Killion (2013) who regards the availability of time as a huge determining factor for the sustainability of PLCs. Supporting Killion is Steyn's (2013) dynamic model of CPTD which explains that conditions for PLC in the school should include scheduled time for PLC. Corroborating this claim further is (Killion, 2013) who argues that school days can also be re-arranged to allow school-secured time for teachers to collaborate by means of, *inter alia*, staff meetings, training lesson planning, workshops or expert facilitators. However, the notion of principals regarding teachers as vessels into which they convey knowledge is refuted by Senge (2004)

who claims that we are all learners, therefore no one has to teach an infant to learn anything because they are intrinsically inquisitive, and the same can be said about learning schools. No one is a know all.

In a nutshell the data suggest that without principals providing time for teachers to collaborate for purposes of learning together; networking within and between schools in a way recommended by the literature to improve their practice and learner outcomes, experiencing professional growth would be hard to achieve.

4.2.2.2 Space

The word space can be used to mean physical building and also the opportunity or freedom granted but in this case, I am using it to refer to space as freedom that is granted. The data clearly indicates that PLCs in five schools were flourishing because the teachers there were provided space to exercise powers granted to them to collaborate. These principals were gradually making themselves redundant as the teachers seemed to understand and worked well in a pressure free environment with no undue direct interference of the principals. This was confirmed by the assertion made by Mrs Green who said:

It is like when I'm not in the school, for example, I was sick and teachers had to do everything because they are empowered they know what to do, they know where to go, they know what to fetch whether I'm there or not(Mrs Green).

The same sentiment was echoed by Mrs Nceku who maintained that:

I have got a deputy principal, responsible for the working committees, to orientate the new coming committee. She plans it (orientation) herself and does it by herself from the beginning of the year, she is entirely responsible on her own, and she makes meetings(Mrs Nceku).

The assertion above was further corroborated by Ms Bond who also emphasised the point of the freedom of choice granted to her staff:

Each educator is free to point at someone whom she thinks will mentor her in way that she thinks she will take her from somewhere to the level she want to be, like the educator won't be compared to use his or her HOD, he or she can point at anyone who she thinks is knowledgeable, mentoring we need to stick to that(Ms Bond).

The above comments were corroborated by the minutes of the staff meeting at Qhakaza Primary School when teachers, in the absence of the principal Mrs Nceku, held a meeting with the academic committee with the support of the deputy principal, brainstorming on the preparations for Grade R and Grade Seven's Graduation ceremony. The minutes also showed that the success of the meeting and the function was as a result of the inputs freely given by the teachers. The notion of teachers mentoring one another is supported by Louiset *al.*, (2010) who maintain that when supportive interactions in professional communities among teachers occur, such teachers may be able to assume roles such as mentor, mentee, expert and facilitator. Supporting the above view, Dube', Bourhis and Jacob (2006) assert that top management must strongly encourage intra-organisational collaboration which should take place at a pace and rhythm chosen by its members without pressure. The assertion above is also corroborated by West (2010) by claiming that the success of the collaboration will depend on the mutual trust between staff members and their willingness to work together. The impression drawn from the data indicates that all five principals have empowered and are confident about their staff in terms of willingness, self-motivation and autonomous in working together. They are not wheelbarrow teachers which stand idle and wait for their principals to push them.

4.2.2.3 Trust

One of the strategies utilised by the principals that completed ACE: SL when providing support in PLCs is building the relation of trust and respect between teachers and SMT and also among teachers themselves. With regards to the principals trusting their staff, three out five principals were very vocal about trusting their staffs by empowering them while the other two were silent. The extract below shows that principals had trust and confidence in their staff in terms of doing work without any close supervision and pressures from them. This was aptly captured when Ms Bond said:

When I'm not there they(deputy principals) will meet with their heads of department and the Intermediate Phase with their HOD, Foundation Phase meet with their HOD too, where they discuss issues on HRM circular number 41 (Ms Bond).

Concurring with the view expressed by Ms Bond above was Mrs Nceku who also asserted that:

As a principal I have got a deputy principal, I have got three HODs in the school and I've also got senior teachers in the school, so I make sure that I give them some task to do. I leave everything entirely in their hands to do and they do it (Mrs Nceku).

This was further corroborated by Mrs Green who also maintained that:

Everybody at school is empowered especially teachers. I make them feel at home, work at easy. I become impartial and create a very good atmosphere for them. So everybody in my school can be the principal but is just that the position is one (Mrs Green).

The inference that can be derived from the above extracts is that of the principals trusting their staff. That was confirmed by my informal observation which I noted in my reflective journal during some of my first visits to the principal of Qhakaza Primary School. The deputy principal was holding a staff meeting. The principal was at school but was not part of the meeting that was going on. That transpired when the principal requested the administration clerk to ask the deputy to report to Mrs Nceku' office. The aspect of principals trusting their teachers was also confirmed by Steyn's (2013) CPTD model which states that collegial dialogue assumes a level of personal confidence and trust which allows teachers to be willing, honest and transparent to review their own practices and beliefs. Also supporting the views above are scholars such as DuFour and Eaker (2006) who maintain that trust among members is essential for building a collaborative culture.

With regard to the tools that are required to optimise the conditions for smooth transition to PLCs the principals that completed ACE: SL regarded time, space and trust as the most relevant and crucial ingredients in the creation of PLCs. This requirement was observed by principals providing time for teachers to collaborate and to discuss other activities relating to planning, assessment and a host of activities. Teachers were given space and freedom to exercise their leadership. The data has also indicated that the availability of trust provided a fertile ground for effective PLCs to prosper.

4.3 Barriers to the process of transforming schools to PLCs

As much as time was viewed as a crucial tool for optimising transition to PLCs, it was also viewed as a barrier to the process of transforming schools to PLCs. In addition to time as a barrier, positive attitude and willingness shown by the teachers when participating in PLCs if well inspired can also be a barrier if it is not well managed. This section focuses on the barriers that were experienced by five principals that completed ACE: SL as they transformed schools to PLC. These barriers are discussed below.

4.3.1 Time as a barrier in transforming schools to PLCs

According to principals that completed ACE: SL; time is one of the major barriers which hindered their efforts of creating PLCs in their schools. The data indicates that as crucial as it is if it is not well managed it may constitute as a barrier. The contextual factors such as geographic location of the schools also contributed immensely in making time a barrier. The views expressed above were confirmed by Mrs Nceku who maintained that principals did not have time to discuss everything with the staff due to tight schedules. As a result she found it difficult to schedule standing meetings for the staff. Commenting about the situation Mrs Nceku had this to say:

Availability of time is a stumbling block because as principal there are so many things that you have to do, so you can't afford every time to meet with them and explain to them why this is needed (Nceku).

Similar sentiments about the inadequacy of time were also expressed by Mrs Banana who maintained that time is consumed when new and under qualified teachers were being inducted and developed. According to Mrs Banana, these teachers were absorbed by the education system lacking knowledge and a skill for teaching, and as a result, more time was spent supporting them. Expressing her concerns, this is what she said:

You will find that some educators are not qualified. So, that makes the school not to function well because you find that you must teach those teachers and that takes a lot of time when you deal with that unqualified educator (Mrs Banana).

The views expressed by Mrs Banana were further corroborated by Mrs Peach who also regarded time as huge challenge in terms of getting teachers to do collaborativework. Related to issues of time availability is the question of transport which is problematic in rural areas of South Africa; it contributes to teachers always arriving late for work and leaving early. That is what Mrs Peach said about the situation in her school:

They(teachers) come late. We have the problem of time. Teachers are always rushing transport. Transport is not available around the area. Means of transports are always linked to inflexible time lines (Mrs Peach).

The views expressed by the principals above were also corroborated by the minutes of the school governing body (SGB) of Khumbula Primary School where Mrs Banana was reporting to the SGB about two under qualified teachers who obtained a status of a permanent appointment by the DoE

while still upgrading their qualifications. Another incident reflected in the minutes in the same school revealed that two senior educators from Foundation and Intermediate Phases respectively, were assigned with the responsibility of mentoring the two under-qualified teachers who were granted a status of being permanent. This was further corroborated by my own informal observation at Khanyeza Primary School where the teachers had to cease lessons early in order to accommodate time for planning and to allow the learners to go for sports unsupervised. This used to happen every Wednesday. What I also noted was that such a practice did not only compromise the safety of learners but also the quality of teaching and learning.

Supporting the views expressed above, West (2011) asserts that time management is taken as the key responsibility for the principal. He or she has to create PLCs and hold meetings and this can be a big challenge. Concurring with Hilty (2011) are Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace and Thomas (2006) who maintain that rural teachers have particular difficulties in collaborating with others because of costs and time of travel. The same view by Hilty (2011) was strongly refuted by scholars such as Sparks (2002) who argues that schools do excel using the little time which is also allocated to other schools in the same geographic area. This suggests that without the principals providing time for the teachers to collaborate, the creation of PLCs is not feasible.

4.3.3 Attitudes as barriers

Attitudes are not only tools for optimising conditions for PLCs, but also a barrier hindering the creation of PLCs. In this section is a discussion about the role of negative attitudes shown by the teachers toward principals in transforming schools to PLCs. Principals that completed ACE: SL regarded negative attitudes shown by the teachers in the process of creation of PLCs as a barrier. According to the principals, some teachers had a tendency of comparing what they did in their school with what was being done in other schools. If it was found not to be the same, they would complain and regard themselves being mistreated. That view was supported by Mrs Nceku who asserted that:

The attitudes of teachers and schools not being on a same level are a stumbling block. because you have your neighbouring schools, and teachers are just like children they watch what other schools are doing and then when they see that in our school we are doing this which is not being done in other schools you know they develop that attitude such that if you want to

implement a change they think you are suppressing them or you are fighting them(Mrs Nceku).

That was corroborated by Mrs Banana who claimed that negative attitudes were as a result of ill-health which proved to be a barrier toward the creation of PLCs. As a principal she faces challenges when teachers reported for duty with different personal problems. According to her, teachers come to work with issues which result in them lacking commitment and displaying poor performance. In most cases such situations eventually make teachers demonstrate negative attitudes toward work. They do not receive proper support from their colleagues during meetings because time to collaborate with others was proven to be unpredictable due to their erratic attendance. They eventually developed negative attitudes toward PLCs in particular and work in general. This is what Mrs Banana said to support the comments above:

Another stumbling block is the negative attitudes of teachers toward teaching and learning. Some of the educators come to school with problems and some teachers with problems of their relatives who are sick. You find that the teacher is not performing well so all these things are disturbing(Mrs Banana).

The views expressed in the above extract were further shared by Mrs Green who also emphasised that health conditions suffered by the teachers themselves or by their close relatives made them become less productive and lost interest in their work. Sharing this feeling Mrs Green said:

Because some people have situations, some are sick and some have sick families you got to understand but at the same time making sure that they are productive(Mrs Green).

It is evident from the data that PLCs may not be what the principals expected them to be because of challenging situations faced by teachers which results in the loss of interest in their work and developed negative attitudes. Mrs Green regarded ill-health for both the teachers and their families as factors that contributed to poor implementation of PLCs which eventually led to poor performance and poor learner achievement. The notion that ill-health contributes to poor performance was strongly corroborated by the entries made in the time book and also by the contents of the log book at Qhakaza Primary School which indicated that Mrs Green was away from school due to ill-health. The log book entry showed that this happened from the beginning of the second term up to the end of the fourth term in 2012. The minutes further revealed that in the following year 2013, the school enrolment dropped.

The notion of negative attitude as a barrier was also corroborated by the contents of the minutes of Bayabonga Primary School which revealed that meetings were not properly concluded which explained why some items of the agenda of the previous meetings were often repeated in the next meeting. Entries in the time book also indicated that the majority of the staff members arrived around quarter past seven after the PLC meeting had started and departed at any time before half past two when the PLC meeting for the afternoon session had begun. That was further corroborated by the content of the minutes of the staff meeting where Mrs Banana, the principal of Khumbula Primary School was discouraging the behaviour of some teachers who did not attend workshops organised by the DoE during holidays because they claimed that they did not have money for transport yet the school reimburses them. According to Mrs Banana that was a question of being less committed.

The different views about negative attitudes as a barrier in the creation of PLCs were supported by Bălan and Țîțu(2009) who maintain that the success of organisational change depends on certain attitude of the members of the organisation towards change. This view is further supported by scholars like Maloney and Konza (2011) when they assert that the level of teacher commitment and their attitude towards PLCs signifies the success or failure of PLCs regardless of the support they receive. Further agreeing with Maloney Konza, DuFour (2007) maintains that negative attitudes can be done away with if principals attend to the needs of the teacher leaders; provide support; supply the material needed; be reachable and approachable; acknowledge the success and provide feedback on each team's performance and on how teams interact.

However, the same is refuted by Steyn's (2013) dynamic model for continuing professional teacher development (CPTD) which is mandatory for all registered South African teachers. Steyn (2013) asserts that CPTD is a model that promotes teachers' participation in collectively developing themselves in their PLCs and improving learning within their schools. According to Steyn (2013), this collaborative learning promotes commitment within teachers, change in attitude and improved learner performance. It is clear from the data that negative attitudes and ill-health complemented each other and were considered as the barriers hindering the creation of PLCs in schools which principals must find a way of dealing with them for the success of the schools and improved learner achievement.

4.3.4 How teachers respond to the principals' PLC initiatives

Principals are regarded as agents for bringing transformation in schools (Bhengu, 2012). Principals that completed ACE: SL programme were expected to have the ability of creating professional learning communities (PLCs) in their schools. However this greatly depends on how teachers respond to the initiatives of school principals of transforming schools to PLCs. From the data it emerged that teachers of all the five primary schools responded positively toward principals' initiative of transforming schools to PLCs. However, this does not erase the point that sometimes teachers do resist change if it is not properly communicated. The data revealed that this is the kind of response that Mrs Nceku experienced with her staff. That was noted when she said:

In a way yes they are positive because I have not had a problem that they completely refuse to do something we need to do. If only that you can see sometimes that when they don't understand why, you will see by the way they do it but when they fully understand they flow with whatever that needs to be done, so I will say they respond positively(Mrs Nceku).

Also sharing similar sentiments was Ms Bond the principal of Nqobizitha Primary School who maintained that her staff positively received the idea of implementing PLCs in the school. The data also reveals that Ms Bond had a special inspirational ability which seemed to make teachers appreciate her initiative of implementing PLCs. That was noted when her staff engaged in various PLC related activities such as networking, sharing ideas and experiences, researching on various topics while the principal only provided oversight, support and guidelines. This is what Ms Bond had to say:

I think that they appreciate it and have accommodated it; they ask questions it becomes a discussion that anyone can love to be involved in; they ask questions and the questions will be based on the floor not to me, but at the end I have to give them the direction(Ms Bond).

The views expressed by Ms Bond reveal that teachers in her school appreciated and owned her initiatives of transforming the school to PLCs. That was noted in their active involvement in discussions that were held in PLC meetings. Teachers collaborated with their principal; interacted with one another in collegial fashion, sharing ideas and experiences and the principal provided support and guidance on issues of discussion. This was further corroborated by Mrs Green whose staff also responded positively to the PLCs concept. That can be witnessed in her comment when she said:

We cope; we have learnt to know that as a teacher if you don't like something that is required of you; when you were learning to be a teacher you were told that you comply with what you do, if you have a complaint bring the complaint later but we comply, we do everything as it should be done at our utmost strength (Mrs Green).

The idea of school principals encouraging their staff to positively support the implementation of PLCs was corroborated by the minutes of the staff meeting when Ms Bond the principal of Nqobizitha Primary School was distributing the work load to the staff. She started by appreciating the strengths of all the teachers, assuring every one of them about the availability of the SMT to support the staff which was beginning to put forward some excuses. This was further supported by the minutes of the Foundation Phase meeting at Khanyeza Primary School where the HOD was giving the report about the performance of each and every teacher in the second term. Mrs Nceku was appreciating the good performance and also encouraging those who did not perform very well to put more effort. Also supporting this is what I observed at Qhakaza Primary School which I recorded in my reflective journal. That was an initiative of the English teachers to promote spoken English in the school. All monitors would carry and issue cards to all those who did not try to speak English outside the classrooms. Those who did not comply with that requirement would serve their punishment at the end of the day.

The views expressed in the above extracts were supported by a number of scholars such as Katz, Earl and Jaafar (2009) who claim that learning in PLCs is promoted by supportive leadership which enhances shared and clear learning focus that guides activities. These scholars further maintain that this is the kind of learning which promotes cross examination of other learners' assumptions about teaching and learning; open discussion of new ideas which question existing knowledge; disagreements to agree on points of discussion; treatment of other learners' ideas as objects of inquiry Katz *et al.*, (2009). Also agreeing with above scholars is Nelson, (2010) who maintains that PLCs cannot survive without the involvement of school principals as change agents; playing a role of supporting teachers they work with in order to enhance collaboration in PLCs. Steyn (2013) in her dynamic model of CPTD also upholds the value of PLCs as principals' initiative which is appreciated by their staffs by asserting that teachers also interact with school principals and they expect to get honest feedback with

respect. Such interactions enable them to confidently reflect and review their own teaching practices and beliefs using different lenses.

In short, the data has indicated that PLCs are in place and are appreciated by the teachers. Principals that completed ACE: SL appear to have special inspirational abilities which make teachers appreciate their initiative of implementing PLCs in schools. It is also clear from the data that teachers wanted to be involved and be part of decision-making on matters concerning them for the smooth creation of PLCs to avoid resistance.

4.3.5 The perceived department of education's support for the creation of PLCs

Principals of schools that completed ACE: SL shared similar views about the support they required from the Department of Education (DoE) for the creation of PLCs. Their expressed views are presented and discussed below. According to the participants of this study the district is not doing enough to support schools in the creation of PLCs. It was revealed from the data that the district officials visit schools with a negative attitude not to assisting school principals but to find faults on things that had not been done well. Expressing her dissatisfaction Mrs Nceku said:

The Department needs to give support to the schools. They need to visit the schools; they need to come with an attitude that seeks to assist the schools. Normally, when they visit in that particular time, they just come to check or do monitoring, but if they can come for support, then things will flow in a right way(Mrs Nceku).

The views expressed in the above extract indicate that the understanding of the principals that completed ACE: SL programme is that the DoE ought to come down to the schools and support them with the implementation of PLCs. According to Mrs Nceku the district officials should not come with the attitude of inspection and finding mistakes and to accuse them. Also sharing the similar view about the support that the DoE must provide was Mrs Banana who had this to say:

The Department can give support by for instance, organising workshops for the teachers; set questions papers like that of ANA like that set by clusters. Other things, the department must reward teachers by increasing salaries because you may find that the educator is not performing well because he or she is getting a meagre salary.(Mrs Banana).

The views in the extract above suggest that there was inadequate support from the DoE in terms of providing workshops to assist the teachers and the principals with PLCs within the school context. According to Mrs Banana, schools fail to provide services properly because they lack financial resources. They cannot buy resources that teachers identify in their PLCs neither can they provide teachers with money for transport to attend workshops. Also sharing similar sentiments about the support that the DoE needed to provide was Ms Bond who had this to say:

As the Department has started giving the principals bursaries for this ACE School Leadership programme, I think it will be better if all the principals can be exposed to this programme. It has helped me a lot (Ms Bond).

From the views expressed above, it emerged that ACE: SL was like an eye-opener to the school principals that completed this programme in terms of running their schools. According to Ms Bond, principals could lead and manage their schools better than before they completed ACE: SL. The implication from the data is that by offering principals with bursaries to enrol in ACE: SL programme, it would be a huge investment in schools by the DoE in terms of improved performance and learner outcomes.

The above extracts were also corroborated by the information in the log book at Khanyeza Primary School where the district official reported about the findings during a school visit. The official noted some administrative activities which were not properly done in her school. One of the things that was noted was the unavailability of minutes for the phases and subject meetings. In the report Mrs Nceku was advised to correct the situation by holding these meetings without any guidance from the district official. These views were further corroborated by the content of the minutes where the finance committee of Khumbula Primary School made recommendation to the SGB to urgently consider purchasing a new duplicating machine.

Emphasising the need for the districts to support schools, Killion and Roy (2013) maintain that it is the role of the districts to build capacity of school staff to implement professional learning communities in schools. They make sure that schools understand what high-quality professional learning is and train teacher leaders and principals in implementing PLCs and monitor implementation. The same views

were further supported by Mestry (2009) when stating that the support for school principals, deputy principals (DP) and heads of department (HOD) to create PLCs is made available from the level of the state to district offices and down to school level; hence, the introduction of ACE: SL (Mestry, 2009).

According to Maloney and Konza (2011), in Australia the provision of resources is made by the state. They claim that resources from collaborative research grant (CRG) are allocated for the release of staff to attend out-of-school professional development sessions and for substitute teachers during school hours. This suggests that schools need to be provided with funds to transport teachers to and from workshops. The notion of providing schools with resources is also supported by Killion (2013) who states that the DoE should allocate schools with resources, primarily financial resources and structures to support this kind of adult learning. Furthermore, principals should be allowed flexibility in their decisions about budgets and schedules; conducting ongoing walk-throughs and coaching in the process of implementing PLCs (Killion, 2013).

These views expressed above are further supported by one of the initiatives of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Department of Education called *JikaiMfundo*, a programme to improve learner outcomes (PILO) in Uthungulu and Pinetown districts as pilot districts. It is through this programme that district directors and their staff members express their commitment to meet the needs of school principals with positive attitude, skills, tools and information to improve their work relationships in schools. They assert that they commit themselves to visit the schools with the approach that says “*How can we help you*”? They will assist schools in terms of curriculum coverage as well as in ensuring that they will work as teams not as separate silos. This suggests the need for the DoE to supply resources to the schools for improved teaching and learning for the learning outcomes to improve. The views presented by principals indicate that the support provided by the DoE was not adequate. More than that, the attitude displayed by district officials when they visit schools was questionable. School principals expected the DoE to do more in terms providing schools with resources with special attention paid to flexibility and the utilisation of funds by SGBs.

4.3.6 The need for schools to become Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

Different views about why school principals that completed ACE: SL wanted their schools become PLCs are presented and discussed here. The data elicited various reasons why principals thought their schools should become PLCs. All five principals gave the following as reasons for their schools to become PLCs: confidence of teachers in their work is boosted; teachers become lifelong learners; they attend workshops to enrich themselves on the subjects they teach; they engage in networking; involvement of parents in the learning of their children. Concurring with comments above Mrs Nceku had this to say:

It brings confidence to the people because it requires teachers to learn; as people learn they become confident of what they are doing; they love what they are doing it becomes interesting to them; when they are learning they are not fearful; they are able to share information, to ask for assistance in what they do not know because they are confident that they are learning (Mrs Nceku).

It was clear from the data that teachers at Khanyeza Primary School had taken pride in their school in the sense that through professional growth they were confident with their classroom work; in school programmes like scouting and health promoting requiring the involvement of other educators; in sharing information and in improved learner achievement. That was shared by Mrs Green who maintained that PLCs are needed because they promote professionalism in teachers in terms of acquiring knowledge and skills of teaching in their respective fields. That is what Mrs Green said:

Well professionalism is required; as a teacher, you got to keep on enriching yourself; as a manager you don't sit back, we must keep on learning so that we cope in the ever changing world, and uplift the standard of South African especially the standard of the learners so that they can learn anywhere else outside KZN, South Africa and Africa (Mrs Green).

The data revealed that through teacher professionalism, learners were advantaged in terms of achieving good results which could enable them to study anywhere within and beyond the borders of the country. This suggests that school principals and teachers needed to enhance their professionalism as a prerequisite for good performance in their work and learner outcomes. They could do that first, by upgrading their professional qualifications. This was further corroborated by Ms Bond who said:

A teacher is a lifelong learner, my teachers are learning for their own benefits, and what they learn they use at our school in order for our learners to have better results. We call parents and talk to them about what we do in the school in order to help us with the learners work, call them to come and see their learners work, inviting them to come at school whenever they have problems, we do staff meetings, staff developments, attend workshops and network which helps us a lot. There is also improvement of results (Ms Bond).

According to Ms Bond PLCs are regarded as a need because it makes teachers become learners for life which improves learner outcomes, parents become actively involved in the education of their children, teachers attend workshops and hold staff meetings and staff developments to improve learner achievement. The need for schools to become PLCs is demonstrated by teachers who want to be more knowledgeable in their fields when they collaborate in their community of practice with the goal of improving school performance. This was confirmed by the minutes of the SMT where Mrs Banana the principal of Bayabonga primary school was encouraging the HODs to enrol with distance education institutions to upgrade their qualifications in order to keep pace with current developments in education and to meet the requirements for CPTD.

The emerged views are corroborated by Senge (2004) who maintains that teachers are interested in growing, learning and mastering things that personally matter to them as individuals in the community of practice to improve learner achievement. Teachers as learners are encouraged to be lifelong learners thus promoting the culture of learning (Senge, 1909). The view of bringing back professionalism by both principals and teachers is supported by Mestry and Singh (2007) who state that the factors that could be responsible for poor matriculation results include a breakdown of professionalism by principals and teachers. Concurring with the views above are Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) who assert that schools with educators that embrace PLCs take collective responsibility for student learning, they assist students achieve at higher levels. They learn to share teaching practices and shared leadership is promoted. They make results transparent. They engage in dialogue about improving teaching and learning, which leads to continuous school improvement (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2010).

This was further corroborated by Steyn's (2013) dynamic model which maintains that teachers in such schools develop a change in learning beliefs or values; change teaching practice, change in attitude and

improved student performance. The data above suggest that PLCs are regarded as a need for improved learning outcomes, for the good image of the school and for teacher professional development. The data suggests that with professionals taking charge in schools and considering professionalism as a stimulus for good practice and learning outcomes. Teachers would become lifelong learners and principals would desire to have their schools become professional learning communities.

4.3.7 Principals' perceptions about their schools achieving PLC status

This section presents and discusses perceptions of school principals that completed ACE: SL about their schools achieving PLC status. The data reveals that principals perceived their schools to have achieved PLC status but also that they were still on the change process which made them say they had not reached their destination. They used Annual National Assessment as a means of measurement to assess the extent to which their schools were becoming PLCs.

Some principals who regarded their schools as having not achieved PLCs status eventually described their schools as PLCs nonetheless. The data further indicated that teacher attitude was positive; learner results were improving; teachers had gained self-confidence; they were able to share information; they were open to ask for assistance when they felt they needed to do so; they taught and mentored one another. In response of the views expressed above Mrs Nceku expressed her uncertainty saying:

I'm not very sure if I could say it is met already; I fear to say it has been met but I think with time we are getting there. Teachers do their work positively in improving results. Yes it is met to an extent, few improvements that I can say are happening. I think all the teachers are learning something this year; they are registered to do something(Mrs Nceku).

The perception of Mrs Nceku about schools achieving PLC status was corroborated by Ms Bond who maintained that Nqobizitha Primary School was in the process of achieving PLC status. That was picked when she said: *"We are getting there!"* The notion of collaborating as teachers and parents was prioritised. According to Ms Bond, as a school they did some of the things that can make their school qualify to be called a PLC. Some of those things include the fact that they were acquainting parents about new developments in the education system; these developments included the introduction of ANA and curriculum assessment policy statement (CAPS). Parents were also briefed and cautioned about the effects of late coming and absenteeism by the learners. Furthermore, they were empowered

to assist their children with homework and to check school work. To confirm the statement above this is what Ms Bond said:

We are getting there, yes. We are halfway down the year we have conducted meetings; we have done staff developments; we have called the parents on which we discussed what we mean about CAPS and ANA; late coming; how absenteeism affect learners' work; how parents have to check learners' homework (Ms Bond).

The assertions of principals about their schools becoming PLCs were further corroborated by Mrs Banana who claimed that they could confidently call their school a PLC because they collaborated and supported those who needed help. They organised on-site workshops; they did class visits; they attended workshops organised by the DoE and teacher unions; they have improved standard of teaching and learning; ANA results and learner attainment (the ultimate goal of PLCs) have improved. This is what Mrs Banana said to confirm this:

Yes, we help each other. If others do not understand the concepts we call the meeting and help each other. We organise workshops, even in our timetables SMT is allowed to visit those teachers who are new in the field. They attend workshops organised by the district, those organised by national and meetings organised by unions; the level of teaching is improving. I think so because we have improved the ANA results. I can say that the primary goal has been met(Mrs Banana).

The views in the above extract were corroborated by the content of the minutes of teacher-parents meeting which was held at the beginning of the term where teachers discussed their expectations with the parents. The minutes revealed educators explaining to parents the role they should play to assist their children with school work and homework and the impact of absenteeism. That was further corroborated by the entries made in the log book and time book by Mrs Banana at Khumbula Primary School where teachers' times of departure and reasons for leaving early were stated.

Supporting the views about schools becoming PLCs, are Pedder and Opfer (2011) who claim that networking among the teachers of different schools has the potential to widen the scope for teachers to engage and have access to diverse teaching practices. These views are also expressed by DuFour (2007) when he argues that there are routine practices of the schools when teachers are organised into

teams, teachers are provided with time to meet during the school day at least once a week and are given specific guidelines for engaging in activities that focus on student achievement. The views from the data also suggest that collaboration in their schools is driven by teachers' willingness to enhance learner performance which is in line with the claim made by Hirsh (2012) who maintains that successful PLCs enhance the sharing of effective practices between teachers and are more likely to lead to improved student performance. Teachers' willingness to actively participate in conversations about issues around students' learning goals, teaching practices and students learning is critical to impact PLCs.

The point of attending workshops made by Mrs Banana was supported by Steyn's (2013) model of CPTD when asserting that it aims at encouraging teachers' participation in professional development programmes offered by employers, unions and others to improve their learning and self-development. It also emerged from the data that the level of achieving PLC status differed from one school to the next. The data indicated that three principals were still striving toward attaining the status and they expressed the view that change is a process while the other two confidently claimed that they had attained it because of what they were able to do which they could not do before.

4.4 Chapter summary

This chapter presented and discussed data regarding the perspectives of five rural primary school principals that completed ACE: SL programme about transforming their schools to PLCs. The data indicated that all five principals acquired new leadership styles. The two dominant styles of leadership that they subscribed to were collaborative leadership and distributed leadership although some appeared to be still conservative by showing some remnants of being autocratic. The data has also indicated that time and trust was important tools for optimising the creation of PLCs if utilised well. It was also revealed from the data that time and negative attitudes of teachers and district officials could also be barriers hindering principals in the creation on PLCs. The next chapter provides the summary of the study; the findings and makes recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented and discussed the data that was generated through semi-structured interviews and documents review. In this chapter a summary of the study is presented first, followed by the presentation of the findings. The findings are presented and discussed utilising the research questions that were stated in Chapter One. The presentation and discussion of the findings is followed by the recommendations which are drawn from the findings. It ends with a chapter summary.

5.2 Study Summary

The main focus of this study was to investigate the perspectives of rural primary school principals that completed ACE: SL in transforming schools to PLCs. Chapter One is an overview of the study which provides the background and the purpose of the study. It also provides the three research questions which guided the study. The significance of the study, an overview of the theoretical framework and research methodology are also discussed. Chapter one does not only concentrate on explaining how transforming schools to PLCs; by principals that completed ACE: SL can be understood; but also on the literature that was reviewed when the study was conducted. Chapter Two involves a detailed discussion of the literature review which entails presenting relevant international and local scholarly work which had been conducted in the area. This is done in order to seek divergent views of scholars pertaining to transforming schools to PLCs. In addition, the theoretical frameworks that underpinned the study are also presented.

In Chapter Three research design and methodology that was used in conducting the study is discussed. This chapter presents a detailed explanation of data generation methods and research instruments that were used when the study was conducted. In Chapter Four the presentation and discussion of data is done. The perspectives of 5 primary school principals who completed ACE: SL were discussed. Finally themes that emerged when generated data was analysed are also presented and discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Five presents the findings of the study. However, before these are discussed, a brief summary of the study is presented. This is followed by the re-statement of the research questions which are also used to organise the presentation of the findings.

5.3 Presentation of findings

Findings were presented and summarised using the research questions as addressed in Chapter One. The research questions are stated below before they are used as headings to guide the discussion of the findings:

- What are the experiences of rural primary school principals who completed ACE: SL in transforming their schools into PLCs?
- What do rural primary school principals who completed ACE: SL regard as barriers in transforming their schools into PLCs?
- Why must principals that completed ACE: SL transform their schools to become professional learning communities the way they do?

5.3.1 What are the experiences of rural primary school principals who completed ACE: SL in transforming their schools into PLCs?

The study revealed that all five school principals viewed themselves as having shifted from the old leadership style of working in isolation from other stakeholders and have adopted distributed and collaborative leadership styles. The findings revealed that after completing ACE: SL change started with the principals. Their leadership and management styles were then informed by distributive and collaborative leadership. It dawned to the principals that they cannot work alone; leadership has to be distributed to all structures in the school. Teachers in their schools are empowered. Deputies, HODs and post level one teachers have opportunities to collaborate with or without their principals and share ideas about lesson planning, assessment, reflect on their practice, network with other teachers within and outside the school in order to improve their practice. More details about how these principals experienced the transition and how they coped with the challenges are provided in Section 4.3.2.2 of Chapter Four. These findings are also supported by scholars such as Armour and Makopoulou(2012)who assert that teachers in the same school shouldshare problems, knowledge and

skills during interactive continuing professional development opportunities within a safe, supportive environment.

The findings further show that while principals in the study claimed to have shifted from the old style, some were found to be still conservative. They still believed that the word of the principal is final. They regard the principal as the only figure to be listened to. Their belief is that if the instruction is issued, teachers must carry it. More details on this issue can be found in Section 4.3.1 of Chapter Four. Evidently such views are too conservative and contrary to the discourse of the 21st century, particularly in relation to educational leadership practices and thinking. In addition, Bush (2006) strongly supports the fact that school principals occupy a position of significance in the structural hierarchy of schools but vehemently disagrees with notions of school principals being authoritarian. In fact, Bush (2006) regards it foolish to think that it is only the principals that provide leadership for school improvement in the twenty first century.

5.3.2 What do rural primary school principals who completed ACE School Leadership regard as barriers in transforming their schools into PLCs?

The findings indicate that the five principals tried to change their schools to PLCs; however, their efforts were compromised by the geographical location of the schools. The study indicated that poor transport played a significant role in influencing the ways in which schools are run in terms of time since both the teachers and the learners rely heavily on public transport to travel to and from school. Because of this problem, teachers arrive late at work and they are the first ones to leave. The issue of geographical location of schools is also considered a barrier by Spring, (2008) who maintains that factors such as location of school in a rural or isolated area and history of the school can impact learning communities.

The findings also show that some of the teachers had demonstrated negative attitudes toward the process of transforming schools to PLCs. Similarly, some officials of the provincial Department of Education showed unhelpful attitudes and were not supportive as they should. Teachers that were affected by such attitudes lacked zeal and commitment in their work. They grew resistance

and become negative about everything. More details on this matter can be found in Section 4.3.4 of Chapter Four.

5.3.3 Why do principals that completed ACE School Leadership transform their schools to become professional learning communities the way they do?

School principals in this study attempted to transform their schools into professional learning communities in a particular way. One of the things that they all did was to set aside time for collaborative meetings to take place. They did this because they all believed that by encouraging their teachers to work together would engender team spirit and work as teams. The study has indicated that principals regard renewed professionalism by all professional staff as a prerequisite for them improving learning outcomes, good image of the school and teacher professional development. The findings further revealed that principals regard professionalism as a stimulus for good practice and learning outcomes and through it teachers become lifelong learners.

The findings have also shown that some principals are still authoritarian in their approach. They still consider themselves as the know-all because of their positions as principals. That is a clear lack of understanding of the principles that undergird the PLC concept. This was shown when the principal appeared to be a person that knows everything. This principal appeared to have all the solutions to the questions asked by teachers. There is no instance where they collaborate as a team to share information together and reflect about their practice. Shared leadership is not encouraged by the principals because they know better than their teachers. For a detailed discussion of this theme, please refer to Section 4.3.2.1 of Chapter Four. Evidently, such practices run in sharp contrast to the notion of collaboration, sharing of knowledge and skills as advocated by various scholars such as Hord's (2007) theory.

5.4 Recommendations

The suggested recommendations were drawn from the findings. Firstly, for the DoE to see change taking place in the teaching and learning aspects, and also to ensure that all principals become true

change agents and instructional leaders, it should provide intensive training on this. Such change can result in the empowering of all stakeholders at school level such that they understand how distributive and collaborative PLCs operate.

The other findings is that some principals in the study are still conservative whilst claiming to have shifted from old leadership style. It is recommended that principals need to undergo intensive training about what it means to be agents of transformation. They need to be exposed to training that is aimed at changing their mindset so that they are able to embrace change and drive change processes.

The process of creating PLCs in schools entails a fundamental shift in the mindset of principals. Therefore, for principals to understand the implications of this, they need to embrace collective wisdom and trust in others that they can contribute to the betterment of the school. Therefore, principals need to understand that mere delegation of duties to the HODs or the meeting of teachers does not necessarily demonstrate the existence of professional learning communities; instead, space should be created for all, including principals themselves to learn.

5.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has outlined the summary of the study; key findings and recommendations that are drawn from the findings.

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APPENDIX A

ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



13 May 2014

Mrs Samukelisiwe Maureen Mtshali 211556401
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mrs Mtshall

Protocol reference number: HSS/0088/014M
Project title: Transforming schools into professional learning communities: Perspective from 5 primary school principals who completed ACE Leadership in Uthungulu District

Full Approval – Expedited

This letter serves to notify you that your application in connection with the above has now been granted **Full Approval**

Any alterations to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach/Methods must be reviewed and approved through an amendment /modification prior to its Implementation. Please quote the above reference number for all queries relating to this study. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

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

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol

Yours faithfully

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Humanities & Social Science Research Ethics Committee

/pm

cc Supervisor: Dr TT Bhengu
cc Academic Leader: Professor Pholoho Morojele
cc School Admin: Mr Thoba Mthembu

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

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APPENDIX 1 B

(CONSENT LETTER TO THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

P. O. Box 1216

Mtubatuba

3935

20 October 2013

The Principal

Qhakaza Primary School

P. O. Box 1205

Mtubatuba

3935

Dear Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I am SamukelisiweMtshali, an M Ed student in the School of Education and Development at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). I am required to conduct research as part of my degree fulfilment. It is for this reason that I seek your permission to conduct research in your school.

The title of my study is: Transforming schools into Professional Learning Communities (PLCs): Perspectives from five rural primary school principals who completed Advance Certificate in Education (ACE).

This study seeks to firstly examine the experiences of principals who completed Advance Certificate in Education: School Leadership in transforming their schools into PLCs. Secondly, to explore what principals regard as barriers in transforming their schools into PLCs and thirdly to explore why is there a need for principals who completed ACE to transform their schools into PLCs. The study will be focusing on the principal and minute books for various meeting held in the school.

The study will use document review and interviews. Document review will be done with the principal where various minute books will be perused with notes taken on how meetings are held. Interviews will be conducted with you, the school principal. The aim would be to get your perspective in transforming your schools into PLCs. Responses will be confidentially treated and pseudonyms will be used instead of real names. The information about your school will be kept in my supervisor's locked cupboard for a period of five years and then destroyed. Your participation in the study will be voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time you want to.

For any queries about this research project, kindly contact my supervisor Dr. T. T. Bhengu at 031- 260 3534/ 0839475321; E-mail: bhengutt@ukz.ac.za. For enquiries please be free to contact me SamukelisiweMtshali, Tel: 035-5500978/0839269612; Email: 211556401@stu.ukzn.ac.za.

Your positive response in this matter will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully

S. M. Mtshali (Mrs.)

APPENDIX 1 C

CONSENT LETTER TO THE PARTICIPANT

P. O. Box 1216

Mtubatuba

3935

20 October 2013

The Principal

Qhakaza Primary School

P. O. Box 1261

KwaMbonambi

3935

Dear Madam

PERMISSION LETTER TO THE PRINCIPAL TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

I am Samukelisiwe Mtshali, currently studying a Master of Education degree in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). I am required to conduct research as part of my degree fulfilment. I therefore request your participation in this study. The title of my study is: **Transforming schools into Professional Learning Communities (PLCs): Perspectives from rural primary school principals who completed Advance Certificate in Education (ACE).**

The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of principals who completed Advance Certificate in Education: School Leadership in transforming their schools into PLCs. Secondly, to

explore what school principals regard as barriers in transforming their schools into PLCs and thirdly to explore why there is a need for principals who completed ACE to transform their schools into PLCs. The study will be focusing on the principal and minute books for various meeting held in the school.

The study will use document review and interviews. Document review will be done with the principal where various minute books will be perused with notes taken on how meetings are held. Interviews will be conducted with you, the school principal. The aim would be to get your perspective in transforming your schools into PLCs. Responses will be confidentially treated and pseudonyms will be used instead of real names. The information about your school will be kept in my supervisor's locked cupboard for a period of five years and then destroyed. Your participation in the study will be voluntary and that you are free to withdraw at any time you want to.

For any queries about this research project, kindly contact my supervisor Dr. T. T. Bhengu at 031- 260 3534/ 0839475321; E-mail: bhengutt@ukz.ac.za. For enquiries please be free to contact me SamukelisiweMtshali, Tel: 035-5500978/0839269612; Email: 211556401@stu.ukzn.ac.za.

Your positive response in this matter will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully

S. M. Mtshali (Mrs.)

Declaration

.....

I,.....(Full name of the participant) hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature, purpose and procedures for the study: **Transforming schools into Professional Learning Communities (PLCs): Perspectives from 5 primary school principals who completed Advance Certificate in Education (ACE)**. I have also received, read and understood the written information about the study. I understand everything that has been explained to me and I consent voluntarily to take part in the study. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research project any time I want to.

Signature of Participant: Date:

Signature of witness: Date:

Thank you

Yours faithfully

.....

S. M. Mtshali (Mrs.)

APPENDIX 2A

CONSENT LETTERS FROM THE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

22 October 2013

S. M. Mtshali

Your request to do research in this school is hereby accepted provided the research will be conducted outside school hours, work will not be disturbed. I also understand that participation is voluntary. I am also convinced that I am not forced to participate and that I can also withdraw at any time. I also appreciate the assurance of confidentiality. I wish you a success in your study.

Thank you



Principal

KZN DEPT. OF EDUCATION
THE PRINCIPAL
P. SCHOOL

22 OCT 2013

P.O. BOX
KWAMBONAMBI 3915

25 October 2013

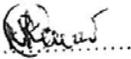
Dear Mrs S. M. Mtshali

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

You are hereby advised that the permission to conduct research you requested is granted. Thank you for the provision you have made to have it conducted outside teaching and learning time. Above all keeping the identity of the school anonymous is highly appreciated.

Thank you

Yours in service



Principal

KZN Dept of Education
The Principal
S.P. School
PO Box
Kwambonambi, 3916

22 October 2013

S. M. Mtshali

Your request to do research in this school is hereby accepted provided the research will be conducted outside school hours, work will not be disturbed. I also understand that participation is voluntary. I am also convinced that I am not forced to participate and that I can also withdraw at any time. I also appreciate the assurance of confidentiality. I wish you a success in your study.

Thank you



Principal

KZN DEPT. OF EDUCATION
THE PRINCIPAL
P. SCHOOL

22 OCT 2013

P.O. BOX
KWAMBONAMBI 3915

21 November 2013

Attention: S. M. Mtshali

P. O. Box 1216

Mtubatuba

3935

Dear Madam

RE-PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Your letter seeking permission to conduct a study in this school has reference. Permission is hereby granted provided that the interviews are not conducted during school hours. I fully understand the contents of your letter and agree that participation is voluntary. Your assurance of confidentiality and anonymity is appreciated. I would like to take this opportunity of wishing you well and every success in your study.

Thank you

Yours faithful



(Mrs)

Principal

DEPT OF EDUCATION
P.O. BOX 1216, MTUBATUBA
TEL: 031 273 0110 FAX: 031 273 0110
11/12/2013

01 November 2013

S. M MTSHALI
P.O. BOX 12
MTUBATUBA
3915

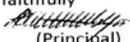
Dear Madam

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEACH

Your letter seeking permission to conduct a study among teachers has a reference. Permission is hereby granted provided that the interviews are not conducted during school hours. I fully understand the contents of your letter and agree that participation is voluntary. Your assurance of confidentiality anonymity is appreciated. I would like to take this opportunity of wishing you well and every success in your study

Thank you

Yours faithfully

Mrs.  (Principal)

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
PRIMARY
SCHOOL
P.O. ~~BOX 100~~ SIMPANGENI 3880
DATE: 01.11.2013

APPENDIX 2B

PROVISIONAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Interview schedule for five primary school principals in rural context who completed ACE: SL

The purpose of this interview is to get the perspectives of principals who completed ACE: SL about their experiences and barriers they encounter when transforming their schools into PLCs. It is for determining if there is a need for them to transform their schools into PLCs.

It is the researchers only who will be allowed access to information generated in this study for it will be kept in the supervisor's locked cupboard for a period of not less than five years. You are guaranteed that your real name and that of your school will not be contained in any reports of this study. You will also be at liberty of reviewing the data generated regarding your participation.

- 1. What are the experiences of rural primary school principals who completed ACE: SL in transforming their schools into PLCs?**
 - What leadership styles you have acquired in ACE: SL you think are assisting you in the process of transforming your school into PLC?
 - Can you and your colleagues say the way your school is run warrants it to be called a PLC?
 - What are the things that you and your colleagues think need to improve for your school to be called a PLC?

- 2. What do rural school principals who completed ACE: SL regard as barriers in transforming their schools into PLCs?**
 - What do you find as a stumbling block in the process of transforming your school into PLC?
 - How do your colleagues respond toward your effort of transforming your school into PLC?
 - Do you think the DoE can do something to assist principals to transform their schools into PLCs

- 3. Why must principals that completed ACE: SL transform their schools into PLC?**
 - Do you think there is a need for your school to become a PLC?
 - Do you think the primary goal of having PLCs in your school is being met?

- Which teaching and learning related activities you think can assist you in making your school a PLC?

APPENDIX 2 B

THE PROVISIONAL DOCUMENT REVIEW SCHEDULE

Documents to be analysed:

1. Minutes of the staff and phase meetings
2. Minutes of the SMT
3. Minutes of the SGB
4. Entries in the log book and time book

The documents above should be between 2006 and 2012 that is, before these school principals attended ACE: SL and after they have completed it.

These documents will be used to confirm and improve the validity of the findings during interviews. Therefore your name and that of the school would be treated with confidentiality. The information that will be generated from these documents will not come out of any of the reports of this study.

1. How democratic is the leadership of the five participants?

2. Who plays a major role in developing the agenda of the SMT meetings?

3. How do five participants involve other stakeholders in the affairs of the school ?

4. How do participants empower their colleagues with leadership leadership and management skills?

5. How transparent are the participants about their leadership and management?
