

THE ROLE OF PRINCIPALS IN TRANSFORMING THEIR SCHOOLS INTO PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES: THE PERSPECTIVES OF TWO SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN UGU DISTRICT

By

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ABSTRACT

The need for collaborative learning between and among teachers has emerged. In the past, teachers were working in isolation; in their classrooms and schools. This practice of isolation, has limited their professional development and to some extent, compromised the quality of education that the schools offer to the students.

The culture of collaborative learning by teachers has been advocated by different pieces of literature, in different contexts, by different researchers to cater for the reciprocal professional grow of teachers.

Principals of schools can play an important role in transforming their schools into professional learning communities. This study, as a result, has been undertaken in order to understand the role that the principals of schools can play in transforming their schools into professional learning communities. The assumption is that after completion Advanced Certificate in Education School Leadership (ACE: SL) programme, the principals would be able to transform their schools into professional learning communities.

In the study, semi-structured interviews, document analysis and informal observations were the methods that were used to generate data. The interviews were recorded and transcribed before they were analysed. Data from the transcripts were coded and themes were form, which were used to analyse the data. Documents were also analysed in accordance to the themes that had been developed and some observations during the interviews process were also used in the analysis of the study.

The results of the study reveal that

- i) The schools whose principals play an active role in transforming them into professional learn communities show better performance in grade 12 than their counterparts that work in isolation.
- ii) Some principals still lack expertise and commitment to transforming their schools into professional learning communities.
- iii) Some principals are engaged in teacher leadership development in such a way that they even allow teachers to attend leadership workshops outside their schools.
- iv) Some principals are so committed to professional learning communities to such an extent that they even provide refreshments and buy some books for the professional learning communities. This instils love for collaborative learning in teachers and learners, as well.
- v) Some principals promote collaborative learning of teachers both from within and outside the schools. This contributes to the reduction of job related stress which is sometimes experienced by teachers who work in isolation.

DECLARATION

I, Bhekukwenza American Francis Ngcamu, declare that

- i) The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work.
- ii) This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
- iii) This dissertation does not contain other person`s data, pictures, graphs or other information unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
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Signed.....

Date.....

Statement by supervisor:

This dissertation is submitted with/ without my approval.

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date.....

DEDICATION

I like to dedicated this work to my daughters; Khulakahle, Khulisiwe, Anele and Nonkazimulo.

You are the best gift I have ever had from God.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

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i) The schools whose principals play an active role in transforming them into professional learning communities show better performance in grade 12 than their counterparts that work in isolation. ii) Some principals still lack expertise and commitment to transforming their schools into professional learning communities. iii) Some principals are engaged in teacher leadership development in such a way that they even allow teachers to attend leadership workshops outside their schools. iv) Some principals are so committed to professional learning communities to such an extent that they even provide refreshments and buy some books for the professional learning communities. This instils love for collaborative learning in teachers and learners, as well. v) Some principals promote collaborative learning of teachers both from within and outside the schools. This contributes to the reduction of job related stress which is sometimes experienced by teachers who work in isolation.

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I also like to convey my heartfelt thankfulness to my former teacher; Mr PV Sithole, who motivated me while I was still in grade seven and eight. Thank you so much Jobe kaMatshana.

ABBREVIATIONS	
ACE: SL	Advanced Certificate in Education in School Leadership
BSS	Bonke Secondary School
HOD	Head of department
PLC	Professional learning community
SSS	Sothole Secondary School

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Hord (2008) contends that all people, anywhere in the world, agree that the purpose of any school is students' learning. Hord (2008) further argues that student learning depends on the quality of teaching they receive at school. The person who is tasked to ensure that students learn, by providing professional leadership, is the principal (Employment of Educators Act, 1998). In contrast, in the South African context, there is no standard qualification which is an entry pre-requisite for principalship (Mestry & Sing, 2007). It is only in recent years that the South African Department of Education has introduced an Advance Certificate in Education in school leadership (ACE: SL), with an aim of developing the practising principals, but it is not an entry requirement into principalship (Bush, Kiggundu, & Moorosi, 2011).

Hord (2008) posits that teachers should be involved in continuous professional development. One of the approaches that can be used for continuous professional development is through the establishment of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) where teachers come together, as professionals, to learn (Hord, 2008; Yukl, 2009). The main aim of such collaborative learning by teachers is to improve the quality of teaching with an ultimate goal of improving the student learning (National Staff Development, 2009). The principals as leaders of schools are the ones who should model and encourage collaborative learning for the teachers in their schools (Bush & Middlewood, 2013). The question is, how are the PLCs established and what is the role of the principal in the establishment of those PLCs? This study therefore, sought to find answers to these questions in the context of specific schools in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. However, the critical questions that underpinned this are provided later on in this chapter.

This chapter is an orientation to the study which focuses on the role of principals in transforming their schools into professional learning communities. This study aimed to solicit views of school principals, heads of departments and the teachers from two secondary schools in Ugu district. The study begins by providing a background to the problems under the gaze, as well as, the rationale which indicates the reason why the study is important and why it should be conducted now. The conceptual framework underpinning the study is also briefly discussed. The overview of the literature that is reviewed in Chapter Two is also provided. The aims and objectives of the study are also presented. Three critical questions that guide the study are presented. Finally, the structure of the study is outlined.

1.2 Background to the study

The Employment of Educators Act (1998) spells out that one of the core duties and responsibilities of the principal is to provide professional leadership of the school. The prerequisite for the professional leadership of the school is the principal's vision which has to be shared by all members of the school community, including teachers (Bush & Middlewood, 2013). Currently, there is an increasing pressure and demand to transform the schools into professional learning communities (PLCs) as Rigelman and Ruben (2012, p.979) acknowledge the "widespread power of professional collaboration".

Bush and Middlewood (2013, pp. 232-237) further posit that the principal should model learning, and inculcate the "culture of inquiry and reflection" in their staff. They further suggest that the principals should encourage teacher collaborative learning in their schools and assess its effectiveness. Other scholars (Snow-Gorono, 2005; Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008; Lee, Zhang & Yin 2011) highlight shared values and norms, clear and consistent focus on student learning, reflective dialogue, de-privatisation of teaching and collaboration, faculty trust in colleagues, supportive conditions for teachers and collective learning for teachers and students as the benefits of the PLCs. This study sought to understand the perspectives from two schools of role of the principals in transforming their schools into PLCs.

1.3 The rationale of the study

I have been a teacher for the past twenty two years in four different schools in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. In two of the schools I worked as Post level one educator, also referred to in this study as teacher. In the other two schools I worked as a head of department (HOD) and later on as a deputy principal.

In those schools I noticed that teachers were still working in isolation instead of working collaboratively among themselves. No meetings were held in which subject matter issues or challenges encountered in the classroom were discussed. There was hardly any meeting (formal or informal) in which teachers discussed any aspect of their teaching and how other colleagues addressed challenges they encountered. The notion of collaborative learning among the teachers never featured in the discourse within the schools. This suggests that there were no professional learning communities in those schools, despite the world-wide demand to transform schools into PLCs (King 2011; Rigelman & Ruben, 2012; Seo & Han, 2012).

This demand is not for the sake of change into something new, but the main value of a PLC is that it aims at improving student learning (DuFour, 1999; Hord, 2008; National Staff Development Council, 2009). The principals of those schools did not deal with the demand to transform their schools into PLCs, though they were aware that the ultimate expectation from any principal is good learner results (DuFour, 1999). Apparently, they did not have expertise to deal with the change or had not realised that one way of dealing with change "is to embrace it" (Taylor & Fratto, 2012, p. 39).

Rhodes and Brundrett (2009, p.153) posit that the “relationship between leadership and learning is increasingly being accepted as one of the most important issues in enhancing the effectiveness” of educational institutions. Good leadership development is therefore important for the effectiveness of the schools otherwise, principals will lack leadership skills (Fullan, 2008; Bush, 2008; Farnsworth, 2010). Literature (Fullan, 2003; Maloney & Konza, 2011; King, 2011) shows that many studies on PLCs have been conducted in the developed countries but not much in the South African context. This study therefore, is important because it will concentrate on the South African context and add to the little literature which is available in this part of the world. This study also sought to explore the role of the principals in transforming their schools into PLCs in the South African context.

1.4 Conceptual framework

Conceptual frame are the main concepts that guide the study. Yin (2004) recommends that a case study should be placed within a conceptual framework. The conceptual framework that guides this study is made up of transformation in education, professional learning communities, distributed leadership, leadership development and collaborative learning.

1.4.1 Professional learning communities

A professional learning community (PLC) is a group of professionals who learn together (Hord, 2008; Yukl, 2009). The main feature of the professional learning community is “sharing of learning” experiences and skills (Bush & Middlewood, 2013, p.223). A PLC may be formed by at least two teachers who plan and work together in order to promote student learning (Bush & Middlewood, 2013, p.223). PLCs may not only be space-bound but may go beyond the teachers’ locality (Fullan, 2003). This means that a PLC may be formed by teachers from different schools or areas. PLCs may even be formed through social networks such as face book, twitter and so forth (King, 2011).

1.4.2 Leadership development

Bush (2008) regards leadership development as “training or preparation for” principalship. Preparatory training of the principals, as Bush (2008) explains, includes all activities undertaken by the principal to equip himself or herself for proper leadership of the school since the principal is the most influential person at school. It is therefore very important that the principal undergoes continuous leadership development.

Rhodes and Brundrett (2009, p.153) suggest that there is a relationship between leadership and learning and states that leadership is increasingly being taken as one of the cornerstones of effective education in schools. Farnsworth (2010) emphasises that it is important for the school leader to possess an academic certificate in leadership. This suggests that the schools need to be led by leaders and managers “who are personally committed to their own personal development” so that they may influence the teachers they supervise (Bush

& Middlewood, 2013, p.232). Bush (2008) contends that training of principals is a moral obligation of the education department and believes that principals become better leaders after effective training. Mestry and Sing's (2007) study indicates that principals get a chance to share their expertise and frustrations during their ACE: SL cohort meetings.

1.4.3 Transformation in education

Taylor and Fratto (2012, p.39) refer to change as “altering, making different or causing to pass from one state to another”. My view of transformation is that of change for the betterment of education. In this study, transformation, change and reform are used interchangeably due to the close connection between them. Transformation in education has been continuously taking place globally (Fullan, 2003) while very little effort was made to transform the South African education system during the apartheid era.

Fullan (2003, p.4) mentions United States as the country that saw a need for educational change in 1986 after a concern about “the performance and accountability of the schooling system”. At that time the reforms were based on uniformed prescription by the state, and as a result, there were no capacity-building endeavours and resources (Fullan, 2003). Fullan (2003, p.4) asserts that England exercised an “informed prescription” of reforms in education in the 1990s. During this era, policy reforms and practice were based on well researched knowledge (Fullan, 2003).

Major educational transformation in South Africa took place after the abolishment of apartheid and at the wake of a democratic system of governance. Since 1994, after holding the first democratic elections, educational transformation has been ongoing. Van Wyk (2009, p.134) asserts that these changes are not taking place for the sake of change but are as a “result of environmental pressures” and demands. The demands are that the principals of schools should be developed on leadership so that they can embrace new developments and innovations in global educational leadership practices. Taylor and Fratto (2012, p.39) believe that one way of dealing “with change is to embrace it”. One of the innovations that the principals of schools should embrace is the transformation of schools into professional learning communities (Coe, Carl, & Frick, 2010). In order to embrace the establishment and leadership of professional learning communities, the principals themselves, should have had an experience of being part of professional learning communities for example, those who have undergone an ACE: SL programme (Bush, Kiggundu & Moorosi, 2011).

1.4.4 Shared leadership/ distributed leadership

Spillane (2001, p. 20) defines distributed or shared leadership as the “practice distributed over leaders, followers and their situation and incorporates the activities of multiple groups of individuals”. Harris (2009) asserts that distributed or shared leadership is the expansion of leadership activities in schools beyond the people in formal leadership positions or administrative positions. The underlying factor of distributed

leadership is that it has emphasis on multiple leaders.

Harris (2009) asserts that distributed leadership contributes to the improvement of student learning. Literature (Fullan, 2008; Bush, 2008; Farnsworth, 2010) shows that widely spread leadership is important for the effectiveness of the school. For example, Rhodes and Brundrett (2009, p. 153) add that the “relationship between leadership and learning is increasingly accepted as one of the most important issues in enhancing the effectiveness of educational organisations”. Dempster and Logan`s (1998) study shows that teachers and students alike enjoy participation in the leadership of their school. Hilty (2011) asserts that schools that value distributed leadership, have structures in place in which teachers work in teams and lead study groups, subject committees, action research and so on.

Harris (2009) argues that principals of schools are engulfed in a multitude of external demands and pressures and believes that distributed leadership supports them in school leadership. In this instance, Farnsworth (2010, p11) contends that transformation in education requires “new and redirected leadership at school” level. Harris (2009) adds that the principal cannot deal with all the leadership responsibility, alone, at school. Although Yukl (2009) emphasises that it is a challenge for leaders at all levels to create conditions that will ensure maximum level of innovation and collaborative learning, distributed leadership is seen as relevant to the creation and sustaining of PLCs. This can be noticed even in organisations other than education institutions, that much of the work is done in small teams, small crews, task teams, committees and so on (Yulk, 2009)

1.4.5 Collaborative learning

Collaborative learning involves a group of learners who work together to achieve a particular aim (Byrne-Jimenez & Orr, 2007; Yukl, 2009). The ACE School Leadership (ACE: SL) programme is an example of collaborative learning of principals from different schools. In collaborative learning, the group shapes its procedures and content for development (Byrne-Jimenez & Orr, 2007). Teachers working in neighbouring schools may also practise collaborative leaning in order to address the issue of the resources and expertise constraints (Beare, 2002). Xu (2009) argues that collaborative learning among teachers is key to educational transformation.

In China, the importance of teacher involvement in curriculum reform is well documented and there is a firm belief that without teacher involvement, the whole transformation in education will be superficial and bear no fruit (Xu, 2009). For instance, Ruben`s (2012) study shows that learning is a collaborative endeavour and teachers need to reflect and critique their own practices in their classrooms. They also need to allow other teachers in their classrooms to collaborate with them (Ruben, 2012).

The study conducted by Coe, Carl and Frick (2010) in the rural areas of China shows that teachers may engage in lesson studies when practising collaborative learning and they believe that the same can be practised by the South African teachers. Teachers working in neighbouring schools may also practise collaborative learning in order to address the issue of the resources and expertise constraints (Beare, 2002).

1.5 Review of literature

Current literature on professional learning communities has been reviewed. This includes international and local literature because “the world’s thinking and planning are networked” (Beare, 2002, p. 57). Current literature review assisted by providing information about the current research that has already been done on professional learning communities (Stake, 2010).

1.6 Context of the study

The study was conducted at two secondary schools, in Ugu District, with the principals who have completed an ACE: SL programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The study took place between January 2014 and July 2014.

1.7 Aim of study

The aim of this study is to explore the role of the principals in transforming their schools into professional learning communities.

1.8 Objectives

1. To determine the role played by the principals in transforming their schools into professional learning communities.
2. To investigate why the principals handle the demands to transform their schools into professional learning communities.
3. To determine how do principals deal with the demands to transform their schools into professional learning communities.

1.9 Critical questions

- What role do the principals play in transforming their schools into professional learning communities?
- How do the principals deal with the demands to transform the schools into professional learning communities?
- Why do the principals handle the demands to transform their schools into professional learning communities the way they do?

1.10 Research methodology

Research methodology is concerned with both detailed research methods through which data was produced and general philosophy upon which generation of data and analysis are based (Haralambos, 1997). This study is located in the interpretivist paradigm, which ontologically contends that there is a multiple reality (Nieuwenhuis, 2012). In my study, the principals of two schools and two members of different PLCs were interviewed per school in accordance with an epistemological perspective of interpretivist paradigm which contends that knowledge is socially constructed (Nieuwenhuis, 2012). A qualitative approach was used in this study and the details about how it was conducted are discussed in Chapter 3 under research design and methodology.

1.11 The structure of the study

This section deals with chapter division of my study on “The role of the principals in transforming their schools into professional learning communities: perspectives of two secondary schools in Ugu district”. This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter division is shown below.

Chapter 1

This chapter sets the stage for the study. It gives the background for the study. The rationale of the study is also provided which indicates why the study is important and worth conducting, and also why it is important to conduct it now. Conceptual framework that guides the study also is provided. The context of the study which gives the context in which the study was conducted is also presented. An overview of literature that was reviewed is also given in this chapter. The aim and objectives of the study were also provided. The critical questions that the study aims at answering are provided. An overview of research methodology that was used in this study is provided.

Chapter 2

This chapter is based on the literature that was reviewed. The literature that was reviewed includes international and local literature.

Chapter 3

This chapter provides research design and methodology that was used to conduct this study. Research methods and instruments that were used are provided in this chapter.

Chapter 4

In this chapter, data that was generated through interviews, document analysis and observations, are presented. In this chapter, the profiles of principals and teachers that were interviewed are presented. The

themes and categories that emerged are also presented and discussed.

Chapter 5

In this chapter, key findings are presented and synthesised and form the basis for making recommendations.

1.13 Chapter summary

In this chapter the stage was set for the study conducted on the role of principals in transforming their schools into professional learning communities. The background of the study was provided. The rationale, conceptual framework, research methodology, aim and objectives of the study were presented. An overview of literature review and methodology were also presented. The next chapter provides a detailed discussion of the literature that was reviewed.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, literature on professional learning communities (PLCs) is reviewed. Such a review includes international and local literature because “the world’s thinking and planning are networked” (Beare, 2002, p. 57). It was anticipated that the literature review would assist by providing information regarding the work and research that have already been done on the leadership role of principals in professional learning communities (Stake, 2010). Besides the presentation of literature, it is important to understand the main purpose of the schools’ existence.

The review is the discussion of key concepts that frame the study. In trying to understand the significance of leadership in professional learning communities, it is important to note that the main purpose of the school is student learning (Hord, 2008; DuFour, 2011). Quality teaching is a pre-requisite for quality student learning to take place at any school since there are standards that have to be met (Hord, 2008; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2010). Those standards cannot be met unless learning has been facilitated by teachers (Slabbert, de Kock & Hattington, 2009). To facilitate learning and for professional growth, self-evaluation and reflections by the teachers play an important role (Slabbert, de Kock & Hattington, 2009).

Rigelman and Ruben (2012) contend that teaching is a collaborative endeavour and cannot be successfully conducted in isolation. Establishment of professional learning communities (PLCs) is one of the milestones of global educational reforms that replace the culture of teacher isolation in the classroom (Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2007; Carl & Frick, 2010). PLCs also provide opportunities for continuous professional growth and development for the teachers (Hord, 2008; Slabbert, de Kock & Hattington, 2009). Ash and D’Auria (2013) believe that the PLCs should concentrate on curriculum, assessment, professional development and instruction in order to address the issues related to student learning, which is the main focus of the school. This discussion on professional learning communities is presented under the following themes, namely, the landscape of the PLCs; the conditions under which PLCs thrive; the Hord’s model of PLCs; the benefits of the PLCs; the rationale for leadership development; the creation and development of professional learning communities and challenges around PLCs.

2.2 The landscape of professional learning communities

Historically, teacher professional development was conducted by the people from outside the teaching and learning institutions until an alternative “collaborative action research activities” which involved teacher professional reflection, validated teachers as producers of valid and reliable knowledge (Burbank &

Kauchak, 2003). These scholars further argue that the establishment of collaboration among teachers dates back to the times of the American reforms in education more than three decades ago. That was the time when the American education system wanted a way of involving teachers in the educational reforms. The term “Communities of Practice” was first noticed in the business sector where workers were working in small teams to generate knowledge (Schenkel & Teigland, 2008, p.1). When teachers come together, as a group of professionals, with a purpose of learning about issues that promote student learning, they are referred to as a professional learning community (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace & Thomas, 2006; Hord, 2008).

Stoll et al. (2006) contend that the term Professional Learning Communities was brought to education by those who supported education or schools such as Shirley Hord. The concept of PLCs encapsulates reflective enquiry, and self-evaluation by their members (Stoll et al., 2006; Hord, 2008). On the same vein, Coe, Carl and Frick (2010) cite the lesson study as an example of the programmes that need to be incorporated into the activities of the PLCs since it involves teacher collaboration and is aimed at student learning. Hord (2008) contends that team teaching took its toll during the 1980s. The effects of team teaching were easy to notice since teachers started to share ideas about their teaching “workplaces and effects on their morale, knowledge, skills and other characteristics” (Hord, 2008, p.10).

Hord (2008) further notes that teachers started to arrange workshops and meetings outside their places of work and often reported to the colleagues on meetings or seminars they had attended. These collaborations boosted teachers’ morale and motivation and also helped them to realise that they were not alone in their classrooms but had other colleagues (Hord, 2008). Hord (2008) further indicates that although there was no one who paid any attention or bothered to know what the teachers were doing or discussing at those meetings, schools ensured that those meetings took place. This implies that schools saw the benefits of the teachers’ meeting. Some of the other positive fruit of these teacher collaborations were that teachers started to make good use of videos and in some instances organised guest speakers to their meetings (Hord, 2008). In those collaborations, as Hord (2008) notes, they also started to share ideas on instructional strategies and work programmes. Hord (2008) equates these teacher collaborations with professional learning communities.

2.3 Benefits of Professional Learning Communities

The establishment of PLCs falls within the school response to the multi-faceted demands and constant changes that take place in schools which require more time, workforce and resources (Hatch, 2009). Hatch (2009) further maintains that the schools need to develop on-site capacity building strategies in order to face the demands and changes that emerge now and again in order to help students to reach high standards in

terms of learning and achievement.

Literature (DuFour, 2011; Barth 2011; Pella 2011) shows that there is a growing demand to transform the schools into PLCs since they benefit different stakeholders at school, such as the learners, the teachers and the school as a whole. To this effect, Vescio, Ross and Adam (2007) found out, in their review of the studies conducted in America and England that, well established PLCs had a positive impact on teaching as a practice and also on student learning. Although scholars such as Hord (2008); DuFour (2011); Ash and D'Auria (2013) agree that the aim of the school is student learning, different stakeholders also benefit in different ways from the establishment of the PLCs. These stakeholders include students, the teachers and the schools since the school is afforded the opportunity to work in teams (Ash & D'Auria, 2013). The following section demonstrates how the learners, the teachers and the school benefit from effective PLCs.

2.3.1 Benefits of PLCs to the students

Research by DuFour (2011) shows that the students' performance rises if their teachers are committed to working in PLCs and in accordance with the principles of PLCs. This finding is in agreement with that of Harris and Jones (2010) which suggest that PLCs improves student performance. Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, Powers, and Killion (2010) are of a similar view that continuous school-based teacher learning, based on their day to day encounter with the students improves the students' achievement. Harrison and Jones (2010) also point out that teachers working in PLCs hardly absent themselves from school. This contributes to the reduction of teacher absenteeism from school and promotes student learning, which is the sole aim of the existence of the school (Harrison & Jones, 2010).

In addition, Barth (2011) believes that if teachers work in PLCs, decision –making becomes more democratic and students get more disciplined. Since teachers who work in PLCs also share ideas about the textbooks they use, students get better textbooks to be used in their classrooms (Bath, 2011). Hatch (2009) puts forward the view that on-site capacity building helps students to attain high standards in terms of learning and achievement.

2.3.2 Benefits of PLCs to the teachers themselves

Quality teaching is a prerequisite for student learning and achievement (Hord, 2008). This suggests that teachers should continuously improve their teaching strategies in order to improve student learning and achievement. Hord (2008) contends that some teacher learning is as a result of teacher collaborations. This assertion is substantiated by the study conducted by Pella (2011) in the United States of America, which found out that teachers learn much easier if they are in PLCs than when they are in isolation. Literature (Harrison & Jones, 2010; Barth, 2011) reveals that teachers who work in PLCs model learning to the students,

as learning is the most important enterprise of the school. Hord (2008) has a view that teachers who work in PLCs find their job more satisfying and their morale is boosted. Hord (2008) further notes that the teachers who work as a team get more motivated than those who work in isolation.

The same findings are evident in the study conducted by Seo and Han (2012) in Korea, which has also shown that there is a relationship between teacher satisfaction and working in PLCs. The finding is that, teachers who work in PLCs find their work as teachers more enjoyable than those who work in isolation (Seo & Han, 2012). Pella's (2011) study shows that learning in PLCs provide room for discussions and addressing concerns about the issues that arise during the process of learning. Barth (2011) adds that the teacher's confidence is boosted and looks at himself as first class citizen of the school, if he is afforded an opportunity to lead the PLC. Barth (2011) further asserts that the teachers get relieved from thinking about the classroom routine when they work in PLCs and they get a chance to work with both the adults and the youngsters.

In the review of an Advanced Certificate in Education in School Leadership programme, offered by South African universities and Mathew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance to the principals of schools, Bush Kiggundu and Moorosi (2011) note the prevalence of networking by principals to share ideas about good leadership practices. Networking is important and Bush Kiggundu and Moorosi (2011) regard it as an internationally recognised practice that promotes the foundation of the professional learning communities. Working in teams and networking by principals who are part of ACE: SL puts them in a better position to transform their schools into PLCs since they get the experience of being members of the PLCs themselves.

2.3.3 Benefits of PLCs to the school

The establishment of the PLCs benefits the school in different ways since it provides a fertile ground for on-site capacity-building (Harris & Muijs, 2005; Hatch (2009). Among many benefits of the PLCs is that they provide space for distributed leadership which affords the school an opportunity to have multiple leaders (Harris, 2009). These multiple leaders give advice to the principal at an earliest opportunity of the challenges faced by teachers in their classroom since the principal cannot always be aware of those challenges (Yulk, 2009). This suggests that the bottom –up approach assists the school to adapt to the necessary changes at an earliest opportunity at school (Yulk, 2009; Barth 2011). DuFour (1999) believes that if the principal encourages the teachers to work in PLCs at the school, the teachers move the school closer to the collective vision of the school they all wish to have.

Ash and D'Auria (2013) assert that a human being is a social animal which is more progressive if it collaborates with others. On that note, the establishment of the PLCs in a school transforms the culture of

isolation at school into the culture of collaboration (Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2007). Little (2002) argues that when teachers work collaboratively and question ineffective teaching and learning practices, teaching and learning in their classrooms improves. Hord (2008) marks the improvement of teachers' morale and motivation when they work in PLCs. Harris and Muijs (2005) views PLCs as capacity building structures which also ensure school development even from within.

Hatch (2009) maintains that on-site capacity building helps schools to respond to the multitude of demands and changes that prevail in the schooling system which require more time, work force and resources. Hatch (2009, p. 101) further asserts that the school with PLCs gets a chance to network with other schools and access better resource of the other schools and address "what they perceive as their most pressing needs and concerns". Another point that Hatch (2009) makes is that the school gets a golden opportunity to address its deficiency in terms of expertise, which is available in other schools. Ash and D'Auria (2013, p. 49) believe that information flow "between and among teachers and school leaders increases" if the school works in synergy. Student performance data is easily accessible and any deficiency can be addressed either by the school itself or by the source from outside the school (Ash & D'Auria, 2013). These scholars further argue that collaborative learning increases problem-solving capacity of the school since collaboration leads to improved or even novel strategies to solve problems. Hatch (2009, p. 101) looks at teacher collaborations as an "opportunity for staff members to learn about one another's work, contribute to one another's effectiveness and developing the sense of trust and shared responsibility" and accountability. Ash and D'Auria (2013) share the same view that working in teams creates trust among the teachers.

2.4 Conditions for professional learning communities to thrive

Some scholars (Harris & Muijs, 2005; Sargent & Hannum; 2009) suggest that teacher professional development should be a continuous engagement, which of course, is one of the aims of transforming the schools into PLCs. Sargent and Hannum (2009, p. 259) mention two prerequisite for PLCs to thrive; the first is that teachers should meet regularly and discuss issues around teaching and learning. This involves "collaborative lesson planning", lesson study, peer observation and so on. The second prerequisite, as Sargent and Hannum (2009) assert, is that teachers should read research and produce knowledge on teaching.

Harrison and Jones (2010) argue that teachers may come together for professional collaborations but if their collaboration does not have teaching and learning improvement as its main purpose, that collaboration misses the golden opportunity offered by PLCs since the purpose of PLCs is to improve student performance. The same argument is also raised by DuFour (2011), although DuFour's (2011) main concern is student learning, unlike Harrison and Jones (2010) who emphasises teaching. However, Hord (2008) remarks that student learning depends on the quality of teaching. Therefore both arguments supplement each

other.

Sargent and Hannum (2009) found out, in a study conducted in China, that for the PLCs to thrive, the principal's leadership and teachers' own initiative play an important role. In this instance, the principal and the teachers themselves determine "the nature and development" of the PLCs (Sargent & Hannum, 2009, p1). Therefore, the principal should play a supportive role in the creation and development of the PLCs in their schools (Hord, 1997). Hord (2008) contends that power, authority and decision-making should be shared but within the departmental policy boundaries. The principal should initiate new elements, give support to the teachers and give guidance when necessary (Hord, 2008).

Literature (Harrison & Jones, 2010; DuFour, 2011; Barth, 2011; Maloney & Konza, 2011) puts forward the point that the PLCs should focus on learning and teaching, working collaboratively on issues pertaining to learning and collective accountability for the results. Stoll et al. (2006) believe that teachers should have commitment to continuous improvement and should ask themselves the following questions:

- What is it that we want to accomplish?
- What evidence do we need to ensure that we on course of accomplishing it?
- What are the strategies necessary for improvement?

Since PLCs involve teacher leadership, Lieberman, Saxl and Miles (1988) sound a warning that, while teacher leadership is important in PLCs, it is equally important for teachers to learn leadership skills, so that they can lead knowledgeably. The leadership skills that are necessary for the teachers in order to be successful in PLC leadership are "the ability to build trust and develop rapport, diagnose organisational conditions, deal with the learning processes, manage the work itself and build skills and confidence in others" (Peterson & Deal, 2011, p.54).

Bush, Kiggundu and Moorosi (2011) are in agreement with Rhodes and Brundrett (2009, p. 153) that leadership and management are increasingly recognised as vital for student learning. This suggests that one of the demands placed on the shoulders of the principal is staff development in terms of leadership skills (Mestry & Sing, 2007). The PLCs should believe that the principal supports their attempts to improve student learning and also trust that the principal takes their input seriously (Sing, 2010). Sing (2010) believes that if such trust does not exist, the teacher collaborations would be a futile exercise that will bear no fruit.

Figure 1 below shows the interdependence between trust, collaboration, leadership and capacity-building.

Ash and D`Auria (2013) graphically represents the interdependence among the four drivers of the successful PLCs.

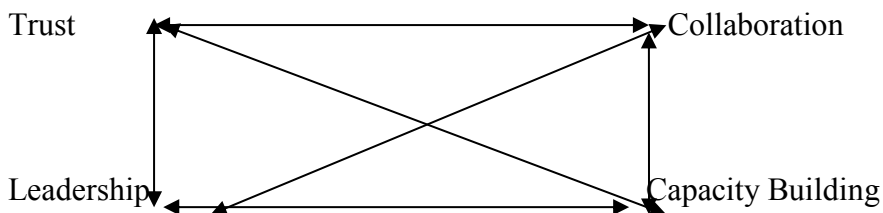


Figure 1: Adapted from Ash and D`Auria (2013, p.50).

Figure 1 above, shows the interdependence between the four drivers of the successful PLCs or synergy as Ash and D`Auria (2013) call it. In figure 1 above, the arrows illustrate that trust affects collaboration, leadership and capacity-building (Ash & D`Auria, 2013). The same is true with leadership, collaboration and capacity-building; as arrows indicate. This can happen in a positive or negative way. If there is no trust, leadership, collaboration and capacity-building would be tarnished or if there is high level of trust, leadership, collaboration and capacity-building would rise (Ash & D`Auria, 2013). The same is true with any of the four drivers of the success of the PLCs. All these drivers should work together as one system, as Ash and D`Auria (2013) suggests.

Although PLCs should be led by teachers, Harris (2009, p. 52) points out that leadership should be “distributed to those who have or develop the knowledge or expertise” necessary for carrying tasks as expected. This suggests that not all teachers can lead the PLCs. When the principal transforms his school into PLCs and adopts distributed leadership style, Harris (2009) suggests that a pre-planned way is needed to coordinate the work and monitor multiple leaders (Harris, 2009).

Despite all the positive stories from the scholars above, Stoelinga (2008) points out that it is not as easy to transform the culture of the school. Stoelinga (2008) brings to our attention that there are other informal formations in schools that have very powerful influence on the reform endeavors of the schools. These formations or groups of teachers, as Stoelinga (2008) argues, determine whether the reforms will be successful or not. Stoelinga (2008, p. 116) suggests that there should be “alignment between the formal leadership positions and informal leadership positions”. This alignment between formal and informal leadership positions gives space to the school formal leadership to understand what the staff members believe are important issues for them so that the school reforms may be fitted in (Stoelinga, 2008). This scholar goes on to argue that if there is no understanding of the values that individuals and subgroups represent, inability of the formal leadership to cater for the interests of the staff members may result. Stoelinga (2008) asserts that if the informal teacher leaders are incorporated in the planning of school goals they may be strong pillars of the school improvement. However, Harris (2009) maintains that not every

teacher can lead the reforms.

2.5.1 The rationale of leadership development for school principals

Bush (2008) asserts that leadership development is preparation or training for principalship. Bush (2008) further states that, the preparatory training of the principal includes all activities undertaken by the principal to equip himself for proper leadership of the school, since, the principal is the most influential person at school. The principal's main duty is to influence the classroom practices of the teachers under his or her supervision (Bush, Bell & Middlewood, 2010). It is therefore very important that the principal should undergo continuous leadership development.

Literature (Hatch, 2009; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009; Bush, Kiggundu & Moorosi, 2011) suggests that there is a relationship between leadership and student learning and constantly assert that leadership is increasingly being taken as one of the cornerstones of effective education in schools. In the same vein, Harris (2009) states that there is no school that can improve student learning without good leadership.

Bush, Kiggundu and Moorosi (2011) are in agreement with Farnsworth (2010) that leadership requires specific preparation and they assert that it is important for the school leader to possess an academic certificate in leadership. This suggests that the schools need to be led by leaders and managers "who are personally committed to their own personal development" so that they may influence the teachers they supervise to be committed in continuous professional development (Bush & Middlewood, 2013, p.232). Furthermore, Bush (2008) asserts that training of principals is a moral obligation of the education department and believes that principals become better leaders after effective training. Trained principals are therefore in a better position to "release the enormous creativity and skills locked up within the teaching staff" (Calitz, 2002, p. 18).

2.5.2 Leadership development in different contexts

Fullan (2010) identifies poor leadership as the worst enemy of the establishment and sustainability of the PLCs. On that note, different countries have started to pay a particular attention to leadership development in their schools. The United States of American started to pay attention to school leadership development as early as the 1980s (Fullan, 2003). In Scotland, the Scottish Qualification for Headship is being offered (Reeves, Forde, Morris & Turner, 2003). In this model, the principals learn leadership as individuals (Reeves, Forde, Morris & Turner, 2003). In Singapore, the label they use for the leadership qualification that they offer is Leaders in Education (Bush, 2010).

England started to pay attention to school leadership development from the 1990s (Fullan, 2003). The formal institution that offers principals leadership development is National College of School Leadership

(Bush, Bell & Middlewood, 2010). The principalship qualification offered in England is known as National Professional Qualification for Headship (Bush, 2010). In the South African context, the department of education introduced an Advanced Certificate in Education in School Leadership in 2007 (Bush, Kiggundu & Moorosi, 2011). This certificate is offered by some of the South African universities and Mathew Goniwe School of Leadership (Bush, Kiggundu & Moorosi 2011).

Mestry and Sing's (2007) study conducted in South Africa, indicates that principals get a chance to share their expertise and frustrations during their ACE: SL cohort meetings. Those discussions and sharing of ideas equip the principals with the leadership and management skills that are necessary in the execution of their duties in schools. Since principals who attend ACE: SL cohort meetings learn leadership as a group; they stand a better chance of transforming their schools into PLCs. In the leadership of PLCs, Harrison and Jones (2010) regard the ability to influence others, as one the most important skills. The principal needs to promote the skill to influence others to teachers that will work as a PLC (Harrison & Jones, 2010). Harrison and Jones (2010) also note that some teachers find it difficult to work with teachers from other schools.

In such instances, Hord (2008) suggests that the principal should start by developing teachers' leadership skills. The areas that must first be developed, as Hord (2008) suggests, are teachers' attitudes, respect and trusting others since teaching is a social practice. Peterson and Deal (2011, p.54) add "the ability to build trust and develop rapport, diagnose organisational conditions, deal with the learning processes, manage the work itself and build skills and confidence in others". Attitudes, respect and trust are encapsulated in emotional intelligence and invitational leadership concepts. Sing (2010) in the study conducted in South Africa, affirms the relationship that exists between the emotional intelligence and the collegial leadership style of the principal.

Emotional intelligence attributes of the principal create an environment that is conducive to teacher leadership (Sing, 2010). This suggests that the principal should possess leadership skills. Leadership development of the principals imbues them with emotional intelligence, collegiality skills, invitational and distributed leadership theories that are necessary when the principals wish to transform their schools into PLCs since teachers need to be developed in leadership before they engage in PLCs (Hord, 2008; Harris, 2009; Peterson & Deal, 2011).

Figure 2 below, shows the relationship that exists between the emotional intelligence and collegiality of the principal (adapted from Sing, 2010, p.49).

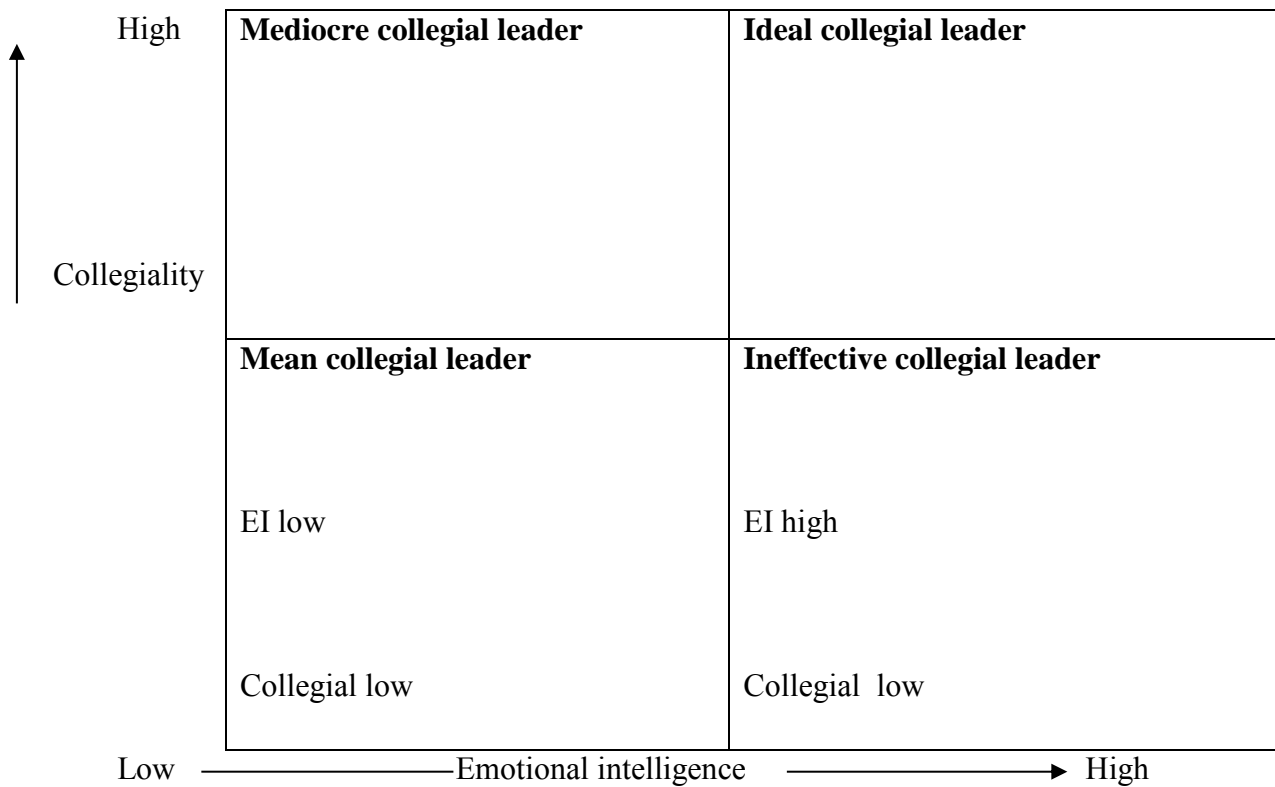


Figure 2. Collegial leadership grid (Sing, 2010, p49)

Sing (2010) divides collegiality into mediocre collegiality, mean collegiality, ineffectual collegiality and ideal collegiality.

2.5.2.1 Mediocre collegiality

Sing (2010) argues that a mediocre collegial leader does not appear to be optimistic and cannot control his or her emotions even though chances of shared leadership are evident in his leadership style. Sing (2010) contends that such a leader constantly creates ambiguity and confusion that cloud his intentions to create a positive learning environment.

2.5.2.2 Mean collegiality

Sing (2010) contends that this leader shows low emotional intelligence and collegiality and demonstrates autocratic style of leadership. This kind of a leader struggles to create a healthy and conducive environment for teaching and learning (Sing, 2010) to occur.

2.5.2.3 Ineffectual collegiality

Sing (2010) believes that this leader has healthy relationship with the colleagues but create too little chance for shared leadership. The main characteristic of this leadership style is bureaucracy and bossiness (Sing, 2010). These leaders do not involve staff members in decision-making; they simply dictate what “the expectations of the organisation” are (Sing, 2010, p.48). Sing (2010) argues that ineffectual collegial leaders are a source of job dissatisfaction at the workplace.

2.5.2.4 Ideal collegial leader

Ideal collegial leaders possess high emotional intelligence and collegiality at the work place (Sing, 2010). This is manifested in the form of empathy, staff empowerment, collective decision-making and distributed leadership (Sing, 2010). These leaders have personal and social skills that bring about happiness and job satisfaction to the fellow staff members (Sing, 2010). Sing (2010, p.49) further contends that in such an environment, staff members feel motivated and happy to work in such a nurturing “warm and sincere” environment where they can participate in decision-making, echo their views, express how they feel and participate in leadership. Ideal collegial leader seems to be ideal for the school to be transformed into PLCs. Bush (2010) makes an important observation that leadership development is not just a one size fits all, but the local organisational culture and context should be considered instead of transplanting the model.

2.6 Hord’s Model of Professional Learning Communities

Hord’s model of PLCs will be used in this study, since Hord’s model gives a clear picture of the role that is expected to be played by the principal if the school is to be transformed into professional learning communities. Hord (2008) believes that the transformation of the school into PLCs depends on the active role played by the principal of the school. Hord’s (2008) model of leadership of professional learning communities comprises five aspects and these are listed below:

1. Shared and supportive leadership
2. Collective intentional learning and its application
3. Shared belief, value and vision
4. Supportive conditions, both structural and relational
5. Shared personal practice

The discussion below clarifies the Hord’s (2008) model of professional learning communities.

2.6.1 Shared and supportive leadership

Spillane (2001, p. 20) defines distributed or shared leadership as the “practice distributed over leaders, followers and their situation and incorporates the activities of multiple groups of individuals”. Harris (2009) views distributed or shared leadership as spreading leadership roles in an institution beyond the formal leadership positions or administrative posts. The underlying factor of distributed leadership is that it puts emphasis on multiple leaders. Although Yukl (2009) laments that it is a challenge for leaders at all levels to create conditions that will ensure maximum innovation and collaborative learning, Harris (2009) insists that distributed leadership is key to leadership capacity building across the school and will address the issues related to maximum innovation and collaborative learning.

Yukl (2009), on the other hand, admits that even in organisations other than education institutions, much of the work is done in small teams, small crews, task teams, committees and so on. In the case of the school,

distributed leadership is seen as one of the most relevant leadership approaches if the principal wants to create and sustain the PLCs in his school (Harris, 2009). Hord (2008) contends that power, authority and decision-making should be shared but within the departmental policy boundaries. Hord (2008) suggests that the principal should initiate new elements, give support and guidance to the teachers when necessary. In this instance, the principal should start by developing leadership skills to the teachers so that teachers, themselves, can lead the PLCs and the principal can “lead from the side” (Hord, 2008, p.12).

In this instance, Harris (2009) suggests that the school needs to believe in distributed leadership where there are those in formal leadership positions, others in an informal leadership positions and others randomly selected to lead some teams. However, Harris (2009) cautions of the danger of adopting distributed leadership in such a way that major structures, culture and micro-politics of the school are ignored. Harris (2009, p.49) believes that it will be very difficult to implement distributed leadership in such conditions, since it may even threaten those in formal positions since they will have to “relinquish direct control over certain activities” and may feel vulnerable. Hord (2008) believes that the areas that must be developed first are teachers` attitudes, respect and trusting others; since teaching is a social practice.

2.6.2 Collective intentional learning and its application

Rogan (2008) points out that it is not sufficient to publish a new curriculum, but the development of the workforce to implement it is equally important. Rogan (2008) points out that the staff, at the school level should be developed first. One way to develop staff is through the establishment of professional learning communities (Hord, 2008). The staff members should come together at their staff meetings and study student learning data in order to identify the student needs and other areas that need attention (Hord, 2008). After identifying the needs of the students, the staff members need to plan accordingly on how they will learn and address those needs and also identify the resources that will be needed during the PLC meeting. Those areas for improvement are addressed at the PLC meetings. This constitutes collective intentional learning (Hord, 2008).

2.6.3 Supportive conditions, both structural and relational

Supportive conditions include time to meet, place where meetings should be held, resources to be used when the teachers comes together to learn (Hord, 2008). In this model, the principal should schedule time for meetings, assign rooms to be used for the meetings, help in drafting policies for the PLCs, and providing resources to be used by the PLCs (Hord, 2008). The principal should develop leadership capacity amongst the staff members. Areas like attitudes, respect and trusting one another are “the heart and soul” of the PLCs and should be emphasised by the principal (Hord, 2008, p.12). Slabbert, de Kock and Hattington (2009) concur with Hord (2008) that self-knowledge is one the important attribute that teachers should possess in order to work in PLCs.

2.6.4 Shared personal practice

Hord (2008) believes that teachers must visit one another in their classrooms while teaching in order to share professional practices. The visiting teacher should observe the other teacher while teaching and take notes and discussion of the findings after the lesson should follow. This practice should be encouraged by the principal since the principal's core duty is to professionally lead the school (Employment of Educators Act, 1998). Hord (2008) contends that this practice encourages teachers to be honest about what they are able to do and what they are not as yet able to do. This opens up the space for professional development since the areas where the teacher needs development will be known (Hord, 2008; Slabbert, de Kock & Hattington, 2009). The PLCs should subject their members to the following questions:

“What are you learning?
Why are you learning it?
How are you learning it?”

As Hord (2008, p.13) suggests, these questions will keep the PLC members focused on their work and the reason for their existence (Hord, 2008). Fullan (2010) argues that the PLCs are sustained well in the schools where the principal and other school leaders are also more involved working in the PLCs. Fullan (2010, p. 48) believes that if all the school leaders are involved in PLCs, “ideas, leadership and commitment” flow easily across all levels of the school.

2.6.5 Shared belief, values and vision

The school community should agree on what school they wish to have in future (Hord, 1997; DuFour, 1999). This will be the foundation upon which shared values and vision of the school will be crafted. The principal's leadership of the school should be based on the shared values and vision (Hord, 1997; DuFour, 1999). The professional learning communities as well, should stick to the same beliefs, values and goals of the school whose aim is to improve student learning (Hord, 2008)

2.7 The role of the principal in PLCs

DuFour (1999) is in agreement with Hord (1997) that the principal should lead the school through shared values, beliefs and vision. DuFour (1999) further recommends that teachers should read research on school improvement and share the findings with the other colleagues in order to take informed decisions about the school they wish to have. The principal should take lead in encouraging teachers to read research and new developments in their different fields. Fullan (2008) recommends that the principal who leads the PLCs should elevate the instruction as the mainstay at school, figure out delegation of managerial work and ensure that the instructional work is carried out.

2.7.1 Elevation of instruction as the mainstay

The principal's main duty is to ensure that teaching and learning takes place as it is the primary goal of

education (Calitz, 2002; Fullan, 2008; Hord, 2008). In executing his duties, the principal should ensure effectiveness and efficiency of the teachers (Calitz, 2002). To ensure effectiveness and efficiency, Fullan (2008) believes that the principal should undertake the following tasks:

1. Select a small number of instructional goals that suit the needs of the students.
2. Work on teaching and learning practices.
3. Establish methods to assess the learners daily.
4. Put into place all important elements, for example, budget, professional learning, communication inside and outside the school
5. Encourage the school to learn even from sources outside the school.

2.7.2 Figuring out delegation of managerial work

Much work in organisations, including education institutions, is done by small teams, small crews, committees and so on (Yulk, 2009). Important discoveries or innovations in small and large organisations are made by individuals or small groups of individuals (Yulk, 2009). Such institutions justify the importance of PLCs and delegation of some managerial duties to others. The principal, at some stage, should delegate some managerial work to the colleagues (Xu, 2009). Delegation of important managerial duties to the other colleagues helps the school to move closer to the shared vision (DuFour, 1999). Barth (2011) adds that delegation of important managerial work to the teacher boost self-esteem and self-worth and starts to regard himself as the first citizen of the school. In this regard, Fullan (2008, p. 40) warns that if “the growing managerial demands are mishandled”, they become distracters. This justifies the transformation of the school in such a way that multiple leaders are engaged in the leadership and development of the school (Harris, 2009). Transforming the school into PLCs provides good space for such innovation to occur.

2.7.3 Ensuring that the instructional work is carried out

Fullan (2008) emphatically states that the principal should make teaching and learning the core business of the school. Fullan (2008) further emphasises that the principal should model what he preaches. In other words, the principal should model classroom instruction. Fullan (2010, p. 98) argues that teachers should realise that schools need good principals and highly skilled teachers who are committed to “creative learning and inquiry learning”. This is suggestive of continuous professional development (Slabbert, de Kock & Hattington, 2009)

Xu (2009) believes that the implementation of any reform is context based; hence, the principal and the teachers should ensure the practical implementation thereof. Devolution of some powers to teachers by the principal, through responsible delegation, is crucial to the implementation of the reforms “at classroom level” (Xu, 2009 p.54). Yulk (2009) is of the view that leaders should encourages discussions that lead to collective decisions and positively consider the ideas that seem vague at the beginning and work on them in

such a way that in the end, important decisions are taken based on them. Yulk (2009) further suggests that teachers should be encouraged to experiment with innovative ideas and monitor any event that is relevant to the activities of the team.

2.8 Creation and development of professional learning communities

Some principals create PLCs in their schools as an alternative approach to the retraining of teachers by experts from a particular structure and entities like universities, who do not exactly know their needs and their students' needs, who just come with what they assume teachers need to know (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoon, 2001). When creating a PLC, the principal ensures that groups of teachers come together to learn, with a sense of shared purpose and a sense of the schools they are trying to create and have "a collective commitment to creating that school" (DuFour, 2010, p1). Stoll et al. (2006) contend that there are a number of processes that the principal should consider in order to develop professional learning communities; both inside and outside the school. Stoll et al. (2006) put forward the following as main issues that must be considered when establishing the PLCs:

Focus on learning processes

1. Making the best of human and social resources
2. Managing structural resources and
3. Interacting and drawing from external agents

2.8.1 Making the best of human and social resources

Literature (Hord, 2008; DuFour, 2009; Harrison & Jones, 2010) emphasise that teacher collaboration is not only a matter of coming together as collaborations, but coming together for the collective purpose of improving student performance. Harrison and Jones (2010) argue that if teachers come together to learn about everything else other than improving teaching and student learning, that collaboration misses an important characteristic of the PLC. In other words that collaboration cannot be referred to as PLC.

2.8.2 Managing structural resources

Harrison and Jones (2010) regard the ability to influence others as one of the most important skills in the leadership of PLCs. The principal needs to promote the skill to influence others to teachers that will work as a PLC (Harrison & Jones, 2010). Harrison and Jones (2010) further note that some teachers find it difficult to work with teachers from other schools. In such instances, Hord (2008) suggests that the principal should start by developing teachers' leadership skills. The areas that must first be developed, as Hord (2008) suggests, are teachers' attitudes, respect and trusting others; since teaching is a social practice. The view brought forward by Aquino and Wideman (2009) is that, at the start of the PLCs, the school need not to have all the features of Hord's model of the PLCs. The school should adopt incremental change.

2.8.3 Interacting and drawing from external agents

Fullan (2003) argues that the establishment of PLCs is not limited to the teachers' locality.

Harrison and Jones's (2010) study conducted in Wales, substantiates Fullan's (2008) argument that PLCs are not limited to one school only but collaborative learning can be practised by teachers from different schools too. A different study conducted in the United States of America confirmed that the establishment of PLCs is not space bound (King, 2011). King (2011) further shows that social networks such as face book and twitter provide good space for the establishment of PLCs. Since there is an agreement in the literature (Fullan, 2003; Harris & Jones, 2010; King (2011) that the establishment of PLCs may go beyond the teachers' locality; teachers from different schools may form PLCs.

2.9 Challenges around professional learning communities in different contexts

Sargent and Hannum (2009) assert that teachers need to be given support by the principal when they are involved in PLCs. Time and space are some of the important commodities for the PLCs to thrive (Hord, 2008). In Singapore, for instance, expert teachers are given 1000 hours a year for teacher development and 24 hours per week to work with others in their classrooms, but in the United States of America, there is no time set aside except for the workshops that are run after school (Sargent & Hannum, 2009).

The study by Maloney and Konza (2011) shows that it sometimes takes time to change the existing culture of the staff members, of teaching in isolation and to immediately introduce the change to collaborative learning may not work. That is why the steps of Hord's (2008) theory on PLCs are difficult to implement immediately. Harris and Jones's (2011) study concurs with Maloney and Konza's (2011) argument that it is difficult to immediately change the culture of the school. In this instance, Aquino and Wideman (2009) bring forward the view that, at the start of the PLCs, the school needs not to have all the features of Hord's (2008) model of the PLCs. The school should engage in incremental change rather than the revolutionary one (Aquino & Wideman, 2009).

Although some scholars (Harris & Jones, 2010; Seo & Han, 2012) underline job satisfaction of teachers working in PLCs, Maloney and Konza (2011) found out in their study that there are many other factors that affect the engagement of teachers in PLCs. The factors that have a bearing on the engagement of teachers in PLCs include tension, differences regarding philosophical perspectives, perceived value of group learning, time, demands of the job and the role of the school (Harris & Muijs, 2005; Maloney & Konza, 2011). The study conducted by Harris and Jones (2011) in Whales shows that teachers from different schools sometimes experience difficulties when they have to work with teachers from other schools.

Yulk (2009) mentions a different set of obstacles; these include top leadership wanting to lead most of the changes and innovations, conflicts amongst the various stakeholders and restriction of others to access

information and knowledge by those who want to maintain power and their bias in decision-making. Yulk (2009) further laments the filtering and sometimes, distortion of information and knowledge by those in power, which hinder the progress of those who need accurate information and knowledge.

In the case of South Africa, there are workshops that are organised by the education department for the teachers to encourage them to collaborate in their practice (Coe, Carl & Frick, 2010). In addition, Coe, Carl and Frick (2010) note that, such workshops provide teachers with the feeling of collaborative learning. However, it is not clear whether South African teachers continue with such collaborations or not, after the workshops. In addition, Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman and Yoon (2001) lament that, such a strategy of addressing the issues of teacher professional development lacks precision in terms of the teachers' needs and those of their individual students in their individual schools.

Fullan (2010) identifies poor leadership as the worst enemy of the establishment and sustainability of the PLCs. There is a danger of adopting distributed leadership in such a way that major structures, culture and micro-politics of the school are ignored (Harris, 2009). Harris (2009, p.49) believes that it will be very difficult to implement distributed leadership in such conditions, since it may even threaten those in formal positions since they will have to "relinquish direct control over certain activities" and may feel vulnerable.

2.10 Chapter summary

From the above discussion it is clear that teachers are at the centre of education reforms, therefore they should play a central role in the improvement of student learning (Gareth, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoon, 2001). The discussion was based on the review of the literature which is relevant to the PLCs. The review provided the landscape of the PLCs, the benefits of the PLCs, the conditions under which the PLCs thrive, the rationale of leadership development for school principals, leadership development in different contexts, Hord's model of PLC leadership, the role of the principal in the leadership of PLCs and the challenges around professional learning communities in different contexts.

There is an agreement in literature that the main existence of any school is student learning (Hord, 2008; DuFour, 2011). There is also an agreement that the prerequisite for successful student learning is quality teaching that is provided (Hord, 2008; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2010). This suggests that principals should transform their schools into PLCs and formally sponsor them since they may boost the student learning and performance in their schools (Schenkel & Teigland, 2008). The next chapter provides a detailed account of the research design and methodology that was followed in carrying out the research.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

It is important for the researcher to show how he went about designing the research, generating data and analysing it. The previous chapter discussed the literature that was reviewed in the area of professional learning, collaborative learning, transformation in education and professional development, to name but a few. This chapter deals with research design and methodological issues of this study. Research design and methodology encompass research paradigm, research approach, sampling and sampling methods, research methods, ethical issues, trustworthiness, limitations and delimitations of the study. All these elements are discussed below.

3.2 Research paradigm

Creswell (2009, p.6) posits that research paradigm is the worldview or set of beliefs or “general orientation about the world” of the researcher. This study is located in the interpretivist paradigm, which ontologically contends that there is no just one reality or truth, but multiple realities or multiple truths (Nieuwenhuis, 2012). In this study, the principals of two schools and two members of different PLCs constituted research participants. Qualitative data was generated from them in accordance with an epistemological perspective of interpretivist paradigm which maintains that knowledge is socially constructed (Nieuwenhuis, 2012).

3.3 Research design

A case study design was adopted in this study. The word “case study” is from a Latin word “*casus*” which means “event, situation or condition” (Swanborn, 2010, p.2). The case study concentrates on one event or phenomenon. In studying the phenomenon, the researcher may read document available, conduct interviews or do observation of the phenomenon (Swanborn, 2010, p.2). The study of a small number of cases may also be taken as a case study (Swanborn, 2010).

The advantage of a case study is that it answers broad research questions about the phenomenon by providing an understanding about that phenomenon since it uses many sources of data and many methods for data generation (Yin, 2004; Swanborn, 2010; Walliman, 2011; Nieuwenhuis, 2012). This provides in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied since it elevates intricate and detailed information about the phenomenon under investigation.

A case study design was relevant to this study because the study itself is about the principals` endeavours to transform their schools into PLCs. This necessitated that the principals and the teachers should be

interviewed in their natural settings, namely, their schools. Using their natural settings assisted me by providing the participants with a relaxed atmosphere which would support them in giving information with ease. The case is the role of the principals in secondary schools and the unit of analysis is transformation of schools into professional learning communities (PLCs). This required in-depth understanding of how and why the principals transformed their schools into professional learning communities.

3.4 Research methodology

Research methodology is concerned with both detailed descriptions of the research methods through which data was produced and the general philosophy upon which the generation of data and analysis are based (Haralambos, 1997, p.808).

A qualitative approach was adopted in this study, since it relies on human understanding and perception of the phenomenon (Stake, 2010). The study is based on the understanding of the principals' perspectives of their role in transforming their schools into professional learning communities and also the perspectives of their staff members. In this study, the principals of two secondary schools, three HODs and two post level one teachers per school, were research participants.

3.5 Method used to select the schools and the participants

Sampling is selection of a portion of the population under study (Kumar, 2005; Walliman, 2011; Nieuwenhuis, 2012). In qualitative research, the phrase "participants selection", is sometime preferred to "sampling". Therefore, it may be more appropriate to use the term 'selection of participants' rather than the 'sampling of participants'. Purposive selection of participants was used in this study using certain characteristics with which the participants had to comply (Nieuwenhuis, 2012). The main criterion that was used to select the schools and participants in this study was that the principals must have done and completed Advanced Certificate in School Leadership (ACE: SL). The participants must have done the course through the University of KwaZulu-Natal between 2007 and 2010.

In this study, two schools, in Ugu District, headed by the principals who completed an ACE: SL programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal were selected. The University of KwaZulu-Natal has a data base of all the names of principals who completed ACE: SL at that university. Therefore, it was easy to access the list of the principals who had completed ACE: SL at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

I selected these participants because in ACE: SL programme, principals come together to learn and share ideas about good practices on school leadership and management with a view to improving student learning in their schools (Bush, Kiggundu & Moorosi, 2011). This is a good example of a professional learning community. Therefore, it was thought that these principals were more likely to understand how to establish

PLCs and how to lead them.

3.6 Data generation methods

Data generation methods are techniques that are used to generate data that will assist in answering research questions that drive the study (Van der Westhuizen, 2012). There are many methods that can be used in qualitative research. The methods that were employed to generate data in this study were semi-structured face to face interviews, observation and document review. Each of these is described below.

3.6.1 Semi-structured

Semi-structured interview is an inquiry by the researcher to elicit in-depth understanding of the phenomenon from the participant's point of view (Mitchell & Jolley, 2004). The face to face interviews may be conducted at the work place and not only subordinates may be interviewed, leaders may be interviewed as well (Walliman, 2011). This study was conducted in two secondary schools in the Ugu District. The principals of the two schools, HODs, as well as two teachers, per school, were interviewed. One or two icebreaking questions were asked to each participant in order to encourage spontaneity in answering the research questions (Sharp, Peters & Howard, 2010). After the icebreakers, a series of common questions were asked to different participants, as Newby (2010) suggests.

The advantage of the interviews was that I could notice if the interviewee had not understood the question and I would clarify the ambiguity in the question. It also allowed me to do follow up on unclear responses from the participants (Mitchell & Jolley, 2004; Walliman, 2011). I was also able to clarify some concepts and issues related to the questions when the participants requested such clarification (Kumar, 2005; Walliman, 2011). This study also required in-depth information about the role of the principal in transforming their school into PLCs. Hence, semi-structured interviews put me in a better position to obtain more information from the principals themselves, the HODs and the teachers in their natural settings (Kumar, 2005). Sometimes I used visual signs such as nodding, smiling and so on, to encourage the participants to give more information as Walliman, (2011) suggests.

3.6.2 Documents review

Documents review entails reading the documents that are relevant to the study (Swanborn, 2010). Creswell (2009) separates the documents that may be investigated into public and private documents. Private documents include diaries, letters, emails and so on while public documents include staff meetings, newspapers, official reports, agendas and so on (Creswell, 2009). Swanborn (2010, p.73) believes that "agendas and minutes of meetings" are important documents for analysis since they are very stable and are not influenced by the researcher bias. Agendas, minutes of staff meetings and departmental meetings were

read in order to get some clues and understand about the role of the principals in transforming their schools into PLCs. What was important was to find out whether those documents had anything to do with improvement of student learning and teacher collaborative learning.

3.6.3 Observation

Observation entails looking closely at the phenomenon or participant and noting when the participants act in a particular manner different from what he says (Walliman, 2011). I carried a small note book where I jotted some notes of what I could observe during my stay at each school. Walliman (2011) contends that observation method of data generation does not depend only on the sense of sight but on all other senses as well. Swanborn (2010) adds that observation should also include artefacts, physical resources, and human behaviour. What I wanted to observe was whether there were any activities that supported collaborative learning by teachers, PLC activities by teachers and principal's endeavours to transform the school into PLCs. The examples of what I wanted to observe was whether there were classrooms or offices that would be used by PLC members for their meetings. The availability of physical resources like computers, telephones and so on would also be observed. Production of supporting evidence by the principals, HODs and teachers would also be noted. Listening to informal conversations about PLCs or collaborative learning would also form part of my observation.

The advantage of this method, as Walliman (2011), suggests, is that it sometimes quickly provides preliminary information or data about that phenomenon under study. I made it a point that no one noticed that I was taking notes since I feared that, if anybody could notice it, that might have a negative effect on participants' attitude towards the study and to the quality of responses at the interviews. This became part of the data I had generated which also contributed to the understanding of some responses during the interviews and the school context. The observation notes also contributed during data analysis.

3.7 Data analysis method

Data analysis is the process of "ordering and structuring of data" to generate knowledge (Sharp, Peters & Horward, 2010, p.113). Data analysis methods are techniques used to split data into parts or themes as guided by the research questions (Swanborn, 2010). Data analysis was started after all data had been generated. The notes of data sources were consulted now and again when different data had to be verified (Sharp, Peters & Howard, 2010). The coding of data, based on research questions, was done first to ensure that themes and categories were formed (Mitchell & Jolley, 2004). Data was then arranged according to those themes and categories.

In the context of this study, I had to ensure that before data analysis process could begin, the data had to be prepared in such a way that it ready to be subjected to qualitative data analysis. Therefore, the data was

transcribed from the digitally recorded voice into a written form, *verbatim*. This needed a lot of time since it involved transcription from a verbal text from the digital voice recorder to a written text. This is done to ensure that no part of the narratives by the participants is missed. The transcript was used during the coding and construction of themes and sub-themes. Transcripts were also used during the analysis of the findings.

3.8 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of the study is the evaluation of its worth (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In ensuring trustworthiness of the findings, I used the framework developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These scholars suggest four issues that must be considered by qualitative researchers to evaluate the trustworthiness of the study. Those issues are credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability.

3.8.1 Credibility

Credibility is the strategy employed by the researcher in order to minimise the researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To minimise my bias, I used different methods to generate data. I also generated data from different sources. Those data sources are principals, HODs and teachers. This method is also known as triangulation and may entail the use of two or more data generation methods “in the study of human behaviour” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p195). In the context of this study, besides using different data sources (principals, HODs and teachers), I also used different methods of data generation (semi-structured interviews, documents review and observations). The strength of the case study methodology is that many research methods and multiple sources of data are used to generate data (Yin, 2004; Nieuwenhuis, 2012). The use of variety of methods minimised my bias in the study and helped in the study triangulation.

3.8.2 Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that transferability is the possibility to use same data in other situations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend that the researcher should be able to provide data that will make it possible to establish the transferability of the study. The findings from this study can well be applied in other schools. Data and instruments that were used to generate that data are kept for anyone who might wish to use it in other contexts. This ensures the possibility of audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.8.3 Confirmability

Confirmability is the establishment of coherence between data, findings and data interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking was done with the participants to check whether my interpretation of their narratives was correct or not (Swanborn, 2010). The findings were supported by the data that had been generated and therefore coherence between data, findings and interpretation was established (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member-checks were done with the participants at different stages of the study to ensure the authenticity of the original data (Nieuwenhuis, 2012).

3.8.4 Dependability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) believe that dependability of the study is to realise when different methods were used to account for data. The findings from this study are rooted in the analysis of the data that have been generated using different qualitative methods. Those methods were semi-structured interviews, observations, document analysis and member-checking. The aim of using different methods was to minimise my bias in the study and to determine “the extent to which” I accounted for the data I had generated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 324).

3.9 Ethical issues

Ethical issues are moral aspect of the study (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012). They concern the effect that the researcher has or might have on the people who are involved in the study process (Walliman, 2011). There are a number of steps that the researcher has to consider as part of ethical practice. One of them involves honouring the autonomy of the participants as well as their rights to participate and not to participate; voluntary participation and the right to withdraw from the study at any stage of the study, should they wish to do so, without any harm happening to them. While considering all these issues, I had to first ensure that the study was given ethical clearance which provides approval that the study complies with all ethical considerations.

In keeping with ethical practice, I first applied to the University of KwaZulu-Natal’s Ethics Committee for ethical clearance. Besides this, I also applied to the school principals as gatekeepers, seeking permission to conduct the study in their schools. The provincial department of education had delegated this authority to the schools. I explained in detail about the nature of the study and the implications of their participation in the study. Besides, the gatekeepers, I also asked each participant to participate in the study. I also explained to them the nature of the study.

3.9.1 Autonomy and informed consent

Diener and Crandall as quoted in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) state that informed consent are procedures that give the participant a choice to participate in the study or not to, after being given information about the study. A written request to participate in this study was made to each participant. The focus of the research and the right to withdraw at any stage was explained from the onset (Mitchell & Jolley, 2004). The participants were assured of anonymity and that *pseudonyms* would be used to hide their real names and schools (Mitchell & Jolley, 2004). Each participant signed a written consent, in which each participant declared his or her understanding of what the research is about and that they understand the nature of the study. In addition, the declaration of informed consent spelled out what the participant would do in the study (Mitchell & Jolley, 2004).

3.9.2 Non-maleficence

Lecompte and Preissle, cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) state that non-maleficence is the assurance given by the researcher to the participants in the study that they will not be exposed to any risk or harm. Clough and Nutbrown (2008) assert that the researcher should protect the participants and their interests at all times. In keeping with the principle of non-maleficence, assurance was given to the participants that the study would not pose any harm to any participant before the consent forms were signed (Mitchell & Jolley, 2004; Mitchell & Jolley, Walliman, 2011). The details about how, for instance, how they would be protected from any harm is given in the above section.

3.9.3 Non-Beneficence

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) assert that beneficence is disclosure by the researcher to the participants, of the benefits due to them when the study has been completed. Declaration was made; before the participant signed the declaration of informed consent forms, they were briefed that there would be no direct benefits for them by participating in the study. However, it was explained that their participation would only contribute to body of knowledge in social sciences; thus, knowledge produced would be of social benefit (Mitchell & Jolley, 2004; Mitchell & Jolley, 2007; Walliman, 2011).

3.10 Delimitation and limitations of the study

The study was based on the secondary schools headed by the principals who had completed an ACE:SL programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal only, whereas there are some principals who had completed the same programme at other universities as well. The study was conducted in Ugu District only, whereas there are principals who completed the same programme in other district. Some of the limitations of the study could be that what was found could only be limited to those schools and those principals and exclude other principals who may have done the same course.

3.11 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have described the research design and methodology that was used in the study. The case study methodology was used in the study and was discussed. Interpretivist paradigm was followed since the study is based on the understanding of the role of the principals in transforming their schools into professional learning communities. An interpretivist paradigm assumes that knowledge is socially constructed. The research methods and their relevance to the study were discussed. The advantages of those methods were also discussed. Participant selection method and its relevance to the study were also discussed. The discussion of ethical issues, trustworthiness of the findings as well as, the limitations of the study were discussed. The next chapter focuses on the presentation and discussion of the data.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter (Chapter 3) dealt with the research design and methodological issues of this study. This chapter deals with data presentation and discussion. The data was generated through the use of semi-structured interviews with principals, HODs and teachers from the two participating schools. Documents reviews and informal observations had also been used. *Verbatim* quotes from the participants' narratives are used as evidence of what is emerging from the analysis. Literature as well as the conceptual framework that was discussed in Chapter 2, is injected in order to strengthen the arguments and reveal "possible new insight or corroboration of existing knowledge" (Maree, 2012, p.113). This chapter presents the themes that emerged from the data, and these themes are presented in the section below.

4.2 The themes that emerged from data

There are seven themes that emerged from the data that was generated from the two schools at which the study was conducted. Those themes are, the principals' perception of the benefits of professional learning communities; benefits of professional learning communities to the students; promotion of professional learning communities; support given by the principal to the professional learning communities; time provided by the principal for the professional learning communities to meet; trust and respect as important elements to nourish the professional learning communities and the perception of the role of emotional intelligence in the leadership of professional learning communities.

4.2.1 Principals' perception of the benefits of professional learning communities

It emerged from the two sites where the study was conducted that professional learning communities have benefits for the learners and the teachers. This was evident during the narratives of the principals, heads of department (HODs) and teachers at the sites where the study was conducted. It emerged that teachers reaped some benefits from the professional learning communities in different ways. These include subject knowledge gaps, job satisfaction and stress relief.

The principal of Bonke Secondary School (BSS), Mrs Mkhize argued that it was uncommon to find a situation where different teachers are interested in different parts or sections of the subjects and not in the other parts or sections. In many instances, the teachers concerned did not have confidence teaching such sections, and that create subject knowledge gap for them. She continued to say that in such instances, it became important for the teachers to collaboratively learn from each other with the purpose of eliminating such subject knowledge gaps and this empowering each other or one another. This is what Mrs Mkhize had

to say:

People are different. One person may be interested in one part of the subject, maybe not only interested but also good in one part of the subject while with the other part is not easy for him or her; so when they meet they discuss those difficulties. After the discussion you may find that even the one who hadn't been sure of a particular section will be able to handle it. That way, he or she will have been empowered (Mrs Mkhize, the principal of BSS).

The same view was shared by Mr Msibi who is the principal of Sothole Secondary School (SSS), who maintained that the professional learning communities addressed the subject knowledge issue and added that teachers stopped pointing fingers at other teachers, saying for example, that they do not know their work.

I used to encourage teachers to work together in teams; to address the issue of subject knowledge gaps. You know, there is this tendency of the teachers who teach higher grades that they point at fingers at the teachers in lower grades; that they don't know their work (Mr Msibi, the principal of SSS).

Similarly, Mr Cain who is an HOD at Sothole Secondary School concurred with both principals that professional learning communities were able to address problem areas in a subject that were difficult to address in isolation. This is what this HOD had to say:

When we work as teams, even the things that seem to be difficult when you are on your own, you find that when you are in a team somebody comes with something you were not aware of and shows you how it works. It is beneficial to work as a team to face a problem. Even in terms of policies; as subject teachers, we have these policies that keep on changing. The current policy that we are dealing with now is CAPS. We discuss the aspects that we need to complete each and every year as individual teachers. When we are now together as a team, we unpack these aspects. We discuss how to navigate our way through (Mr Cain, an HOD from SSS).

Miss Msiya, a teacher from Bonke Secondary School (BSS), expressed her beliefs that subject knowledge gaps were easily created when the teacher had been teaching the subject for a long time. She, however, agreed with Mrs Mkhize, the principal of BSS that professional learning communities helped to close such knowledge gaps in the subject. This is what she had to say in this regard:

Let me talk about what we did in the previous school. We invited teachers for all subjects from other schools to come and teach learners on Saturdays. The reason for that is that it may happen that the learners are now used to Teacher X and on the other hand, Teacher X is also used to the subject and is now touching only on certain areas where he or she is comfortable. The teachers from other schools come and address the areas that our teacher is not comfortable with (Miss Msiya, a teacher at BSS).

Similar sentiments were expressed by Miss Naidu who is also a teacher at Bonke Secondary School. However, she had a different view about the source of subject knowledge gaps which she attributed to the time of training of the teacher. She seemed to believe that those teachers who were trained long ago were not

conversant with the modern technology as compared to the new teachers. She seemed to believe that collaborative learning between the old and the younger teachers could close this kind of knowledge gap. This is what she had to say:

The younger teachers come from various universities usually, with the advanced knowledge of technology. You will remember when you were trained at the college, it was in the 1990s and now things have changed and we have got new things that need us to share ideas about (Miss Naidu).

When I visited Bonke High School, I also went to the offices and the staffroom to see how they looked like and perhaps, elicit some information that would give me some clues about any collaboration that may be happening in the school. During the time of my visit, all teachers seemed to be working in isolation; there was nothing on the notice boards which had anything to do with teamwork; it did not appear that there was any team work among the teachers. The atmosphere seemed to contrast with the principal's and the HOD's narratives.

At Sothole Secondary School, it was observed that on the Science HOD's notice board, there was a list of subject committees. The subjects that appeared on that list were Mathematics, Physical Sciences, Life Sciences and Geography. However, this document was found to be silent about what the committees were expected to do. The minutes of the Science Department's meeting that was held on the 3rd of September 2014 indicate that the team of Science teachers had discussed the issue of teachers who had challenges with providing evidence of teaching all the work that they were supposed to teach. In this instance, the HOD, Mr Cain, had requested Science teachers to encourage their learners to carry their files to school on daily basis.

Teachers are asked to kindly encourage the learners in various grades to have Science files where they will keep their Science tasks and always carry them along to school every day (Science Departmental meeting minutes).

Job satisfaction and the relief from job related stress has also been highlighted as another benefit of the professional learning communities at the two schools studied. Mrs Mkhize, the principal of BSS said that working collaboratively among the teachers yielded job satisfaction and relieved the teachers of the stress of trying to teach what they did not understand.

Going to class being not sure about what you are going to teach is very stressful. Once you have found somebody that you know maybe have done some research on the subject or a teacher from another school that has resources like a library, or another teacher who has a computer, may help resolve some knowledge deficits and also relieve stress. (Mrs Mkhize, the principal of BSS).

The question of work-related stress and the role that professional learning communities can play in mitigating it was also shared by Mr Msibi, the principal of Sothole Secondary School. This was prevalent among those teachers who taught in higher grades and who, most of the time, used to blame the teachers in lower grades for learners' inability to cope with their school work.

There is this tendency of the teachers who teach higher grades to point fingers at the teachers in

lower grades. They say learners don't know this and that. Working in teams reduces this stressful condition because the whole group is both responsible and accountable for student learning at school. It also improves teachers' job satisfaction (Mr Msibi).

Miss Msiya, who is an HOD at Bonke High School, agreed with the principals that job satisfaction was one of the benefits of working as professional learning communities.

In these teams, we also discuss issues such as discipline, late coming of both the teachers and the learners; these contribute to teachers' job satisfaction (Miss Msiya).

The view held by Mrs Mkhize, the principal of BSS and Miss Msiya that teacher collaborations helped in relieving the teachers' stress and that the teachers become more satisfied with their job when they work in PLCs, was also shared by Mr Mnomiya, an HOD at Bonke Secondary School. This is what this teacher had to say:

We have to discuss issues around learner discipline, teaching methods and the challenges we encounter in the classrooms. There are many things that we discuss as teachers and they relieve us of stress, and as a result the love for our job is revived (Mr Mnomiya).

The notion of the PLCs assisting in enhancing the understanding and quality of teaching was also shared by Mr Mlungwana who is also a teacher at Bonke Secondary School. This teacher narrated stories about how working in PLCs helped them; he highlighted the view that in the PLC, they got the opportunity to discuss their successes and failures in the teaching and learning fraternity. This is what he said:

Working in team helps us in that we are able to communicate with one another. In these teams we discuss our successes and failure in teaching (Mr Mlungwana).

Mr Benjamin of Sothole Secondary School shared the same sentiments with his principal, that working together as professional learning communities, helped breed job satisfaction since there was no learner who complained that he or she had not been taught as it used to be the case.

The teachers become happy with their job because there is no learner who complains that teaching has not been done because if anybody has any challenge; we share it and sometimes we help one another (Mr Benjamin).

It also emerged from the narratives with the principals, the HODs and the teachers that PLCs also benefited the learners in many ways. One of them was that they helped improve their academic performance, access to quality teachers and access to quality resources. To elaborate on this point Mrs Mkhize, the principal of Bonke Secondary School asserted that by the teachers working collaboratively, the learners enjoyed some benefits in that they gained access to quality teachers since they were afforded a chance to be taught by different teachers from different schools. She believed that, through such processes, the learners ended up

understanding the subject and enjoying the lessons.

Learners end up understanding the subject better if the teachers meet and work as a team. They start to enjoy the lessons and get motivated. The performance normally rises (Mrs Mkhize, the principal of BSS).

The notion of maintaining good quality education has been expressed by different scholars. For instance, Hord (2008) maintains that quality teaching is a prerequisite for student learning and achievement. The views expressed in both Bonke Secondary School and Sothole Secondary School were also consistent with the view held by Hatch (2009) that the schools need to develop on-site capacity building strategies in order to face subject knowledge demand. Furthermore, Hord's (2008) model of professional learning communities suggests that teachers who work in PLCs find their job more satisfying compared to those who worked in isolation. Seo and Han (2012) reached the same conclusion in the study they conducted in Korea which also revealed that there was a relationship between teacher satisfaction and working in PLCs.

Literature (Hord, 2008; Harris & Jones, 2010; DuFour, 2011) further reveals that the professional learning communities benefit the learners in different ways. The benefits include improvement their academic performance, access to quality teachers and access to quality resources as it emerged in the narratives of the principals, the HODs and the teachers at the two schools studied. DuFour's (2011) research also showed that academic performance of the learners improved if their teachers are committed to working in PLCs. Similarly, Harris and Jones (2010) substantiate this finding. Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, Powers and Killion (2010) emphasise the same idea that continuous school-based teacher learning based on their daily encounter with the learners, improves their academic achievement.

All the participants from the two research sites were in agreement that PLCs improved the academic performance of the learners. The principal of Sothole High School for example, attributed their success, in terms of results, to the professional learning communities. He cited good results in Geography in the first and the second quarter of 2014 as another example of improvement of learners' academic performance.

4.2.2 Promotion of professional learning communities

The principals of the two schools employed different strategies to promote professional learning communities in their schools. There are two kinds of PLCs that emerged from the narratives from the two research sites. The first is what I call on-site capacity building PLCs and I call the second one, PLCs based on networking with other schools. Mrs Mkhize, the principal of Bonke Secondary School, said that she set aside days for staff development activities. She said that she used these staff development sessions to promote professional learning communities, and argued that teachers should learn together irrespective of union affiliation. Commenting on this issue, this is what she said:

There are days that I set aside for teacher development. In teacher development sessions such issues

like learning together by teachers are discussed. We even discuss the union matters for that matter that although people may be from different unions, they can still learn together because even though the unions are different, they have the same goal; teaching the learner (Mrs Mkhize).

However, Mr Msibi, the principal of Sothole Secondary School had a different view about this issue. He maintained that he held sessions specifically for leadership development and not anything else. His contention was that leadership is largely based on reading. He recalled that one of his workshops was on assertiveness and collaborative learning. He says he even issued certificates of acknowledgement to the session attendees to acknowledge their attendance.

In leadership you can't make it without reading and learning because you must keep abreast with the latest developments in your field. I hope you can see there was a workshop that I conducted on assertiveness and co-operative learning. I think you have seen in almost all the SMT members' offices that there are certificates acknowledging that I conducted a workshop on assertiveness and co-operative learning (Mr Msibi).

Mr Msibi further stressed that professional learning communities should not be limited to Grade 12 teachers only but it should be spread across the whole school. Mr Cain, an HOD at Sothole Secondary School also confirmed that their principal was very supportive of the professional learning communities. He emphasised that the principal must often run staff developmental sessions whenever he sees the need. Emphasising the fact that his principal actually conducted some workshops, Mr Cain said:

Our principal normally runs developmental workshops. What I can say is that he usually calls meetings and advise us on how important it is to work in groups. He would advise us to work as teams so that we can discuss the difficulties we encounter concerning learners. Above that, whenever the principal sees the need for a meeting because he has something in mind he calls it and develops us. This happens because the leader must have a goal in mind that he wants to achieve. As a leader he knows how he wants that to be achieved (Mr Cain).

The above view was shared by Mr Bensons, a teacher in at the same school, (Sothole Secondary School) who confirmed that their principal conducted developmental meetings on team work. This is what he had to say:

Actually he encourages us at the meetings to work together in teams to discuss issues around student learning. For example when we are at the meetings he always emphasises that teachers should work together and he does that every time we have a meeting, even general meetings (Mr Bensons).

These views also came up from various participants from both schools and they all said the same thing about their principals that they encouraged them to work in teams and also in subject committees. I must also state that what all the participants said focused on the principals encouraging them to work collaboratively, but not necessarily conducting any specific activities that can be regarded as developmental in nature. There was one major point of disagreement that emerged strongly from the two school principals. This related to the utilisation of expertise outside the school. Mrs Mkhize, the principal of Bonke Secondary School, on one

hand, argued for her teachers working with their peers from the neighbouring schools. She felt that such a practice could help to relieve stressful experiences by the teachers of going to class lacking confidence about what they will be teaching in class. She also believed that by sharing ideas with teachers from other schools, they may even obtain fresh ideas in terms of addressing school's infrastructural challenges. This is what she had to say in that regard:

I encourage teachers to work with teachers from other schools because going to class not sure what you are going to teach is very stressful. Once you have found somebody who might have done research or may be a teacher from another school that has a library, that teacher may come with more information. Some teachers have computers; they research. It is better to work with teachers from other schools because nobody has everything (Mrs Mkhize).

While Mrs Mkhize viewed the utilisation of teachers from neighbouring in a positive light, Mr Msibi on the other hand, vehemently disagreed. He felt that other schools have problems of their own, and therefore that his school might not benefit anything from such collaboration. He further mentions an instance when their teachers experienced problems when they attempted to work with teachers from other schools. This is what he had to say:

I remember at one stage when one of our colleagues was asked to go and assist somewhere he came back and reported that there is no cooperation whatsoever. Teachers themselves were disorganised. When teachers go out to assist they come back and say some people have problems in their schools (Mr Msibi, principal of SSS).

It may be worth noting that an HOD from Bonke Secondary School disagreed with her principal that they worked with teachers from other schools. She said that she had never seen teachers of Bonke Secondary School working with teachers from other schools. She believed that their school relied heavily on their own teachers only. This is what she had to say in this regard:

It this school, I haven't seen teachers working with other colleagues from other schools. They are heavily relying on the teachers that they have within the school. I think the principal thinks that the teachers from within the school will meet alone and help other (Miss Msiya).

Similarly, Miss Naidu from the same school as Miss Msiya disagreed with their principal; instead, she concurred with the view held by Miss Msiya. Such contradictions emerging from the same school raise some questions about what the principals claim to be happening in their schools.

Notwithstanding the arguments made above, I should mention that at Sothole Secondary School, there seemed to be some collaboration with teachers from other schools. This is contrary to the position adopted by the principal of this school. For instance, on my second visit to Sothole Secondary School, I overheard a teacher talking to an HOD; Mr Cain about a meeting that he had requested to have with a certain Mr Samuels, a Grade 10 Geography teacher from a neighbouring school. The purpose of the meeting was to

discuss issues around setting the Grade 10 Geography common paper for September. In fact, that meeting happened and this confirmed the view that networking and collaboration with neighbouring schools was actually happening and had positive outcomes.

During the time of study, many teachers at Bonke Secondary School worked in isolation and there was no sign of teamwork or collaborative teaching or collaborative learning. When I entered the principal's office, I noticed that on the wall behind the principal's seat there were two posters. One of them was titled *teamwork* and the other had a picture of three lions pulling an impala together and was titled *together we are much stronger*. This suggested something about some attempts being made in the school to inculcate values of teamwork and collaboration.

Hatch (2009) maintains that on-site capacity building helps schools to address many demands and changes that occur in the schooling system which require more time, work force and resources. Ash and D'Auria (2013, p. 49) believe that information flow "between and among teachers and school leaders increases" if the school works in synergy. Learner performance data is easily accessible and any deficiency can be addressed by the school.

The principal of Bonke Secondary School seemed to be talking about working in professional learning communities but she seemed not to be serious enough about transforming her school into PLCs. The teachers of Bonke Secondary School, for example, revealed that their principal did not check whether they worked as PLCs or not. However, the principal of Sothole Secondary School seemed to be encouraging his staff to work in PLCs. The narratives of the HOD and other teachers confirmed that teachers worked in PLCs. The posters and minutes of the Science Department suggested that the principal believed in distributive leadership and professional learning communities.

Fullan (2003) asserts that the establishment of PLCs is not limited to the teachers' locality. Harrison and Jones's (2010) study conducted in Wales, substantiates Fullan's (2008) argument that PLCs are not limited to one school only but collaborative learning can be practised by teachers from different schools too. Another study conducted by King (2011) in the United States of America confirmed that the establishment of PLCs is not space bound. This study showed that teachers from different places may work as PLCs through the use of communication technology. There is an agreement in literature (Fullan, 2003; Harris & Jones, 2010; King, 2011) that the establishment of PLCs may go beyond the teachers' locality. This agreement suggests that teachers from different schools may form PLCs.

The principal of Bonke Secondary School seemed to believe in her teachers alone. The narratives of the principal, the HODs and the teachers were suggestive of the fact that there was no agreement between the

principal, HODs and teachers about working in PLCs. In the case of Sothole High Secondary, the principal was sceptical about working with other schools whereas his teachers showed much interest and courage to work with the teachers from other schools.

4.2.3 Support given by the principal to the professional learning communities

The principals of both participating schools seemed to be supporting the professional learning communities. It emerged from the data that they provided teachers with the venues where meetings were held; they also provided some computers, photocopiers and similar equipment that supported teaching. Mrs Mkhize, the principal of Bonke High School said that she provided professional learning communities with the venue and equipment that were used during their meetings.

It also depends on their needs for that day. However, I normally provide them with the classroom, tables and chairs, photocopier, paper if they need to make copies and everything they need to support their teaching and learning (Mrs Mkhize).

Mr Msibi, the principal of Sothole Secondary School, just like Mrs Mkhize, stated that he provided his teachers with all necessary materials they need during their professional learning communities meetings. In addition, he gave them some booklets to read.

I provide them with almost everything including books. Just here next to me I have these books. These books tell us how to deal with stress because stress is one of the things that can impact negatively on the performance of the teacher (Mr Msibi, principal of SSS).

However, Mr Cain, an HOD from the same school, highlighted different resource that their principal provided them but concurred with him in terms of him providing resources. This is what he had to say:

Because we are human beings, there are times when we need human resources. If it needs be, he organises somebody who can assist us whenever we need somebody to talk to us. If ever we need something to write on or to use as posters he provides us with the necessary material like paper, if we need to photocopy there are machines. It depends on what we need at that particular time. He even provides us with money if we need some financial support in order to buy refreshments (Mr Cain).

The views expressed by the HOD were also shared by Mr Bensons, a teacher at Sothole Secondary School. Similar views were also shared by other teachers and HODs from the other school Bonke Secondary School regarding the practice of the two principals of providing adequate supplies of resources. For instance, equipment Miss Msiya, an HOD from Bonke Secondary School had this to say:

She provides us with the venue, the classroom and furniture. We also make use of computers and photocopying machines and various reading materials which we can use to professionally empower ourselves (Miss Msiya).

I noted for instance, that in the HODs' offices, there were many different books besides textbooks for the learners. Some of them were leadership and management books such as the one authored by Alan Clark;

titled *The Handbook of School Management*.

Hord (2008) asserts that the principal should provide supportive conditions for the PLCs to thrive. Supportive conditions include time to meet, place where meetings should be held and the resources to be used by the teachers when they come together to learn (Hord, 2008). In both schools material and emotional support was made available for the teachers.

4.2.4 Time provided by the principal for the professional learning communities to meet

PLCs need to meet regularly in order to discuss issues related to student learning as Hord (2008) suggests. The principals are in a better position to allocate time to the PLCs due to them being heads of their respective schools. Mrs Mkhize, the principal of Bonke Secondary School said she did not allocate specific time to the PLCs. Time allocation is based on the submission of the professional learning community's schedule which indicated dates and time for the meetings. However, Mrs Mkhize sounded a warning that teachers should ensure that their work is not compromised during the meetings of the PLCs. This is what she had to say:

I do not just allocate time to the teachers to meet but before I allocate time I insist that they should give me their schedule of meetings. Their schedule should indicate the dates and time. The reason for me to ask them to give me the schedule is that I can't just give them time; they must adjust their work in such a way that it allows them to meet. These meetings take place once per quarter (Mrs Mkhize).

The above view was shared by Mr Msibi, the principal of Sothole Secondary School. He too, allocated time for the professional learning communities to meet under certain conditions. Mr Msibi emphasised that when teachers meet, they had to discuss the issues related to the performance of their learners and feedback was always required after the meeting. This is what Mr Msibi had to say in that regard:

We do allocate time to educators to discuss the performance of their learners. Then we come together after they have had their discussions and discuss what had transpired in their meetings (Mr Msibi).

Contrary to what Mrs Mkhize, the principal of Bonke Secondary school had said, Miss Msiya, an HOD from the same school, argued that the principal gave them time to meet as professional learning communities every second week of every month and not as Mrs Mkhize had claimed. Miss Msiya further asserted that they used to meet, either as departments or as staff, for thirty minutes.

There is time every second week of the month. We usually start our periods at quarter to eight and close at two o'clock instead of half past two. We use those thirty minutes for our departmental meetings. If not, we have the staff development meetings where we meet as a staff, then, the principal

addresses us as a staff (Miss Msiya).

It is evident that meetings the issue of scheduled meetings for PLCs does not appear to be a normal occurrence. This point was illustrated by Mr Mnomiya, an HOD from Bonke Secondary School when he argued that they should have minutes set aside for their meetings since, at the moment they did not have anything written down. He further revealed that they only met reactively, only when there is a problem.

If it happens it happens haphazardly since there is nothing written down about such meetings. You just meet with the teachers you need at any time, if you have a problem just for that particular problem. If you don't have a problem you don't meet anyone (Mr Mnomiya).

The same view was also shared by Miss Naidu, a teacher at Bonke Secondary School stated that there was no time allocated by the principal for PLCs. Similarly, Mr Mlungwana from the same school echoed the views of Miss Naidu.

Among supportive conditions that Hord's (2008) model of PLCs suggests, is time to meet. In this model, the principal should schedule time for meetings for the PLCs. Sargent and Hannum (2009, p. 259) mention two prerequisites for PLCs to thrive; the first is that teachers should meet regularly. This involves collaborative lesson planning; lesson study and peer observation, to cite just a few. The second prerequisite as Sargent and Hannum (2009) argue, is that teachers should read research and produce knowledge about their teaching.

Both schools faced the challenge of time. The principals did not allocate specific time for the PLCs to meet. The principal of Bonke Secondary School said that she allocated teachers time for discussion only once per quarter. However, the teachers disagreed with the principal in terms of time allocated for PLC meetings. They also differed on the duration for the PLC meetings. On top of that, it was not clear whether what they discussed at those meetings had anything to do with the learners' learning, since minutes of those meetings were not made available to me to read.

In the case of Sothole Secondary School, there was an agreement between the principal, the HODs and the teachers that the PLCs were normally allocated time so that they could come up with sound strategies to address deficiencies in terms of learner performance. Minutes of the PLC meetings were made available to me during my visits to the school. It emerged from the narratives and documents review that in both schools teachers did not meet regularly to discuss issues around student learning, but at SSS, such meetings occurred, although not regularly.

4.2.5 Leadership skills development of the professional learning communities

The PLCs are led by the teachers themselves (Hord, 2008). This makes to be a necessity for the teachers to

possess leadership skills, and the principal is in a better position to develop teachers on leadership skills. To do this, principals need to have sessions for leadership development at their schools. Mrs Mkhize, the principal of Bonke Secondary School shared this view about setting aside time during which professional development activities can be conducted. This is what she had to say in this regard:

I conduct workshops with the teachers. There are days that I set aside for teacher development. In teacher development issues like leadership are discussed (Mrs Mkhize).

It is interesting to note that there are different views and experiences of different teachers from the same school. For instance, while Miss Msiya, an HOD from Bonke Secondary School admitted that there were developmental meetings that were conducted by the principal at their school; other members had a different view. For instance, Miss Msiya contended that the meetings took place only when there were problems that had been identified in the teachers' files during the monitoring processes. This is how Miss Msiya put it:

She encourages teachers and the HODs that they must meet. She addresses issues pertaining to leadership during the staff meetings. She workshops the HODs and the HODs arrange such meetings. The HODs arrange such meetings only if there are problems in certain subject files during monitoring (Miss Msiya).

This view was shared by Mr Mnomiya as well. Miss Mnomiya was an HOD at the same school as Miss Msiya. She argued that the subject team committee meetings only took place only when there were pressing issues to be addressed. *We meet as a team only when the HODs complain about the work in our files (Mr Mnomiya).*

While the importance of meeting was emphasised at Bonke Secondary School, a different strategy was used at Sothole Secondary School. Mr Msibi, the principal of that school emphasised reading as an alternative approach. He said that he encouraged teacher leaders to read about leadership. For attendance, teachers are given certificates which he used as acknowledgement and perhaps, also as incentives for attending these developmental sessions. As evidence of the claims he was making, he produced copies of certificates he had issued after one of his leadership workshops.

I think you have seen in the offices where you were; in almost all the offices, the SMT members have the certificate acknowledging that I had conducted workshops on assertiveness. They need to be assertive and should be able to stamp their authority (Mr Msibi).

The above view was also shared by Mr Cain who is an HOD at the same school as Mr Msibi. Mr Cain's narrative showed that distributed leadership was practised at Sothole Secondary School. This is what he said:

Our principal is usually workshops us on many things; Sometimes he workshops us at staff development workshops; on leadership skills. Like me and other school leaders; we usually have our team meetings as a school management team since we are the managers here at school (Mr Cain).

This view is supported by many pieces of literature. For instance, Hord's (2008) model of the PLCs suggests that the principal should develop leadership capacity amongst his or her staff members. Harrison and Jones

(2010) believe that the ability to influence others is one the most important skills needed in order to lead the PLCs. The principal has to promote the skill to influence others among his teachers so that they will be able to lead the PLCs (Harrison & Jones, 2010). Other areas that need to be developed first, as Hord (2008) suggests, are teachers' attitudes, respect and trusting others; since teaching is a social practice. The narratives of the principal, the HODs and the teachers from Bonke Secondary School indicated that the principal of that school encouraged teachers to work together during staff meetings.

4.2.6 Trust and respect as important elements to nourish the professional learning communities

Trust and respect are issues of concern whenever people work together and this is equally true for PLCs. Trust and respect are very important in order for the PLCs to thrive; without them the PLCs cannot survive (Hord, 2008; Peterson & Deal, 2011). It also emerged from the narratives of the principals, the HODs and the teachers that they regarded trust and respect as being at the heart and soul of the PLCs. Mrs Mkhize, the principal of Bonke Secondary School stated that trust and respect are very important to any kind of leadership including the leadership of professional learning communities.

It is very important to trust the person you are working with in the team because if I do not trust the person that I work with our work will not bear fruit. I have to trust the person I work with. Trust and respect should go hand in hand. You can't work with the person that you don't respect. The person may have lower qualifications than yours but there must be respect. Trust and respect are related. You can't respect a person you do not trust and you can't trust the person you don't respect (Mrs Mkhize).

The above view was also shared by Mr Msibi, the principal of Sothole Secondary School. This is what he said:

Trust and respect are very important. If you can see the letters that I wrote to appoint them today; for invigilation; they say something about trust. That is very important to the life of any team. That is what I earn from my colleagues and I may acknowledge the respect the learners give to the teachers (Mr Msibi).

While also agreeing with the views expressed by the two principals above, Miss Msiya, an HOD from Bonke Secondary School went a step further to say that trust and respect were important elements for teacher collaborative learning. She said:

Trust and respect go hand in hand and are very important for teacher teams; Trust and respect are pillars of all teams because it is difficult to work with the person you don't trust or respect and in turn, who does not trust or respect you (Miss Msiya).

It is evident that trust and respect for others is crucial if people have to work as teams. These values are also important, especially if teachers are to take an active role in leadership within schools. Since PLCs involve teacher leadership, Lieberman, Saxl and Miles (1988) believe that it is important for the teachers to learn

leadership skills. The leadership skills that are necessary for the teachers in order to be successful in PLC leadership include “the ability to build trust and develop rapport, diagnose organisational conditions, deal with the learning processes, manage the work itself and build skills and confidence in others” (Peterson & Deal, 2011, p.54). Areas like attitudes, respect and trusting one another are “the heart and soul” of the PLCs and should be emphasised by the principal during leadership development sessions (Hord, 2008, p.12). There seemed to be an agreement among various participants in the two research sites that trust and respect are important for the PLCs to thrive. The principals, the HODs and the teachers, in both research sites were unanimous that trust and respect are important components of the PLCs.

4.2.7 The perception of the role of emotional intelligence in the leadership of professional learning communities

Emotional intelligence has been identified as one of the pillars of the PLCs. It has emerged from the narratives of the principals, the HODs and the teachers that the teachers need to be assisted in terms of emotional intelligence development since PLC members should understand one another. On this issue, Mrs Mkhize, the principal of Bonke Secondary School, stated that she usually conducted workshops with teachers where they discussed issues such as emotional intelligence and its importance.

We have workshops with the teachers. There are days that I set aside for teacher development. During such teacher development sessions, issues like emotional intelligence are discussed. We even discuss the union matters where people from different unions are present. We do this to show that even if the unions can be different, as professionals they have to focus on one thing because they have the same goal; teaching the learner and the nation (Mrs Mkhize).

The above view was also shared by Mr Msibi, the principal of Sothole Secondary School. He too, maintained that it is important to understand yourself and other people in a team. For that to happen, emotional intelligence is a key to the smooth functioning of the team. This is what he had to say:

It is very important to understand yourself and others. We, as management, know that the teams that we lead consist of different personalities coming from different backgrounds and have different attitudes. As a manager you need to accommodate all that. (Mr Msibi).

On the same vein, Mr Cain, an HOD from Sothole Secondary School agreed with the principals that emotional intelligence is important for the PLC leadership. He believed that the leader should know the strengths and weaknesses of the individuals in the team.

Understanding yourself helps you to know your weaknesses and your strong points, so that when you meet other people you know who are going to help you and strengthen your weaknesses. You need to know the people who are going to strengthen you. Our principal usually talks about self-understanding and understanding others (Mr Cain).

Mr Benson who is a teacher at Sothole Secondary School pointed out that their principal used to provide workshops for them on the importance of understanding and controlling of emotions. He maintained that it

was important to understand another person's emotions when you are a team. This is what he said:

Our principal talks about that at staff meetings that the understanding and the control of emotions is important. Even if you are talking of husband and wife, if the husband does not respect his wife's emotions or the wife does not respect her husband's emotions, there will be clashes. It is very important to respect the emotions of others in whatever you do (Mr Benson).

Similar views were also expressed by Miss Msani, a teacher at Sothole Secondary School who confirmed what was said by her principal and the HODs, regarding the role played by the principal on issues of emotional intelligence. She added that it is important for the leader to be emotionally intelligent. All other research participants shared these views about the importance of emotional intelligence among the teachers and also among school principals.

The importance of emotional intelligence is captured by various scholars. For instance, Slabbert, de Kock and Hattington (2009) share similar views with Hord (2008) that emotional intelligence is one of the important attributes that teachers should possess in order to work in PLCs. Sing (2010) believes that a leader who possesses high emotional intelligence and collegiality at the work place is needed. This is manifested in the form of empathy, staff empowerment, collective decision-making and distributed leadership (Sing, 2010). These leaders have personal and social skills that bring about happiness and job satisfaction to the fellow staff members (Sing, 2010). Furthermore, Sing (2010, p.49) contends that in such an environment, staff members feel motivated and happy to work in such a nurturing "warm and sincere" environment where they can take part in decision-making, express their views about how they feel and participate in leadership.

Ideal collegial leadership seems to be relevant for the school to be transformed into PLCs. However Bush (2010) observes that leadership development is not just a one size fits all; the culture of the school and its context should be considered instead of transplanting the model. There is an agreement between the principals, the HODs and the teachers, in both schools that emotional intelligence is important for the leadership of PLCs.

4.4 Synthesis

There is agreement among the participants from the two schools that PLCs have benefits that improve student learning. This is evident from the narratives of the principals, the HODs and the teachers. These benefits come in the form of quality education offered by teachers who are well-informed, satisfied with their job and less stressed. There is also agreement among participants from both schools that mutual respect, trust and emotional intelligence, were regarded as important for the PLCs to thrive.

Documents review, informal observations and narratives from the principals, the HODs and the teachers indicate that there were areas where the differences between them existed. For instance, Sothole Secondary

School seemed to be on track with regards to school transformation into PLCs. This was evident from the time you enter the school until you leave it. There were posters that speak about teamwork, minutes of the meetings of the PLCs and the teachers working in teams.

Bonke Secondary School seemed to be still struggling in relation to transforming itself into PLCs. Teachers seemed to be working in isolation and constantly complaining about heavy loads and other related matters. The teachers' narratives showed that they met only when there was a problem. This implies that they did not meet if they had not noticed any problem. This is dangerous because the school might end up working in a fire-fighting mode which might compromise the quality education it offers.

4.5 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I presented and discussed the data that was generated from the two research sites where this study was conducted. It was shown that different themes emerged from the data that was generated. Those themes are, the principals' perception of the benefits of professional learning communities; benefits of professional learning communities to the students; promotion of professional learning communities; support given by the principal to the professional learning communities; time provided by the principal for the professional learning communities to meet; trust and respect as important elements to nourish the professional learning communities and the perception of the role of emotional intelligence in the leadership of professional learning communities. In this discussion, it is shown that different methods were used to generate data. Those methods were semi-structured interviews, documents review, as well as, informal observations. The next chapter (Chapter 5) presents the findings and based on the findings, it makes recommendations and implications of the study.

CHAPTER 5

STUDY SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter (Chapter 4) dealt with the presentation and discussion of data. This chapter synthesises the study by presenting the findings and the recommendations based on the findings. However, before the findings are presented, a summary of the whole study is presented.

5.2 Study summary

Professional learning communities are a reality in the field of education and research has been done in different contexts about this phenomenon. Research has shown that professional learning communities have various benefits for the learners, the teachers and the school as a whole.

This study is based on the role of the principals in transforming their schools into Professional learning communities in the South African context. Chapter 1 was dedicated to setting the stage for the study. It therefore discussed various components of the research process, including the background to the problem; statement of the problem; rationale and significance of the study, to name just a few of these components. Chapter 2 focused solely on reviewing literature on professional learning communities and also the concepts that framed the study. The literature that was reviewed comprises international and local literature. Chapter 3 provides research design and methodology that was used to conduct this study. Chapter 4 deals with the presentation and discussion of data that was generated at the two sites where the study was conducted. In Chapter 5, key findings are presented and synthesised. Those findings are drawn from the analysed data, and on the basis the findings, recommendations are made.

5.3 Findings

The findings that were arrived at after analysis of the data are presented using the research questions. That makes it easier for assessing the extent to which the research questions have been addressed. Each of the three research questions has been used as a subheading to present the findings. The research questions under which the findings are discussed are as follows:

- What role do the principals play in transforming their schools into professional learning communities?
- How do the principals deal with the demands to transform the schools into professional learning communities?
- Why do the principals handle the demands to transform their schools into professional learning

- communities the way they do?

5.3.1 What role do the principals play in transforming their schools into professional learning communities?

The findings show that school principals in varying degrees, played a role in creating professional learning communities in their schools. At Sothole Secondary School, it was found that the principal encouraged his teachers to learn and work collaboratively. He did not only limit this spirit to Grade 12 teachers but he spreads it evenly to the whole teaching staff. The principal even encouraged his teachers to network with others within the school and outside the school. This is something that was discouraged in the other school (Bonke Secondary school), yet, it forms part of the pillars of PLC concept.

When it comes to networking with the teachers from other schools, it was found that Bonke Secondary School teachers still worked in isolation; they did not work with teachers from other schools; the principal discouraged that despite its advantages. This is evident from the narratives of the HODs and teachers; whereas Sothole Secondary School, teachers worked well with the teachers from outside. For detailed discussion on this issue, please refer to section 4.2.2 in Chapter 4.

5.3.2 How do the principals deal with the demands to transform the schools into professional learning communities?

It was evident that changes in curriculum exerted pressures on the teachers to perform better in terms of supporting the learners improve their academic achievement. Because of this, school principals are expected to provide adequate support that will ensure that such a goal is realised. Therefore, what was found in this study is that both principal made an effort to provide sufficient physical resources to support to the PLCs. For example, at Bonke Secondary School the principal was prepared to give physical resource support to her staff. It also emerged from the staff narratives that the professional learning communities did not exist at this school except circuit clusters that were formed by the Department of Education, which were compulsory particularly for Grade 12 teachers. Therefore, it cast some doubt if the concept of PLC had taken root in the mind and life of the principal at Bonke Secondary School. However, at Sothole Secondary School, the situation was different; it was found that the principal supported professional learning communities.

The narratives by the principal, the HODs and teachers revealed that the principal provided physical resources such as rooms for meetings, computers, photocopiers and papers. The principal even provided refreshments when there were PLC meetings. It has to be remembered that, this is the principal that encouraged the teachers to hold quarterly meetings that were dedicated to leadership development support. Therefore, there was more commitment to the existence and sustenance of the PLC concept at SSS

compared to BSS. Evidently, the principal of SSS played an active role in this process whereas, his counterpart at BSS did not show any positive, and active role and commitment to this process. More details are provided in Section 4.2.3 of Chapter 4.

5.3.2 Why do the principals handle the demands to transform their schools into professional learning communities the way they do?

Before we can tackle the question of why the principals handle the demands to transform their schools the way they do, we need to first refer back to what we found in the data. It has been found that both school principals saw the need for the teachers to participate in professional learning communities. However, they did not handle issues of professional learning communities in the same way. For example, at Bonke Secondary School, the principal believed that the teachers needed to submit the schedules of meetings first before the time can be allocated. When they failed to comply with this requirement, they ended up not getting time allocated to PLC meetings. In that way, PLC activities suffered.

However, there was a different scenario at Sothole Secondary School. The principal did not prescribe any condition; he provided time to the staff for PLC meetings. Drawing from the narratives of the HOD and the teachers, it was found that each PLC was afforded time to meet on quarterly basis. However, teachers did not observe this requirement; they continued to meet at their own time and there was no specific time for the meetings of the PLCs. The length of time for the meeting was determined by the issues that were being discussed. One of the reasons for the principal to set quarterly meetings was that the principal wanted to use such meetings to talk about leadership development that was held at Sothole Secondary School where leadership development sessions were prevalent. In addition to this, teachers were sent to workshops on leadership, organised by people outside the school. More details on these issues are provided in section 4.2.5 of Chapter 4.

5.4 Recommendations

It is evident that the two principals that participated in this study did not have a clear understanding of the concept of professional learning communities. Most of the activities that they designed as a way of creating and supporting learning communities were actually the basic activities that the principals are supposed to do and there is nothing much that we can say constituted a learning community of professionals. It is therefore recommended that principals who have completed this programme need to refresh their course content, particularly in relation to what they can and should do to encourage a learning culture among their staff members. They need to do this by engaging in serious reading around this concept. In addition, there is a need for more research that focuses on what principals understand to be their roles in creating and supporting professional learning communities in the South African context.

5.5 Chapter summary

This is the final chapter of this study. It started by presenting a summary of the study followed by the presentation of the findings. Research questions were utilised in presenting the findings. Thereafter, the recommendations were made that were drawn from the findings. The study has shown that some of the principals who underwent the ACE: SL programme are not able to implement some of the key principles that underpinned the study. For instance, the findings have shown that the understanding of the concept of professional learning communities has not been adequately grasped by all principals that participated and completed this programme. An example of this conclusion can be seen where some of the principals had difficulties in transforming their schools into professional learning communities, although they had gone through the programme.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX: A

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION FROM THE GATEKEEPER

Box 960

Scottburgh

4180

19 June 2014

The principal

.....
.....

Dear Sir/ Madam

I am a Master of Education student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in the discipline of Education Leadership, Management and Policy (ELMP). Currently I am conducting a research on “THE ROLE OF PRINCIPALS IN TRANSFORMING THEIR SCHOOLS INTO PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES: THE PERSPECTIVES OF TWO SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN UGU DISTRICT”

I hereby request you to grant me the permission to conduct this research I your school.

This research has no direct benefit to the school but will contribute to the field of ELMP and research. The participants may decide to withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences.

For further information or clarity, my supervisor, Dr TT Bhengu may be contacted on 031 2603534

Email address: bhengutt@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you for your support.

Yours faithfully

BAF Ngcamu

.....

APPENDIX: A

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Thank you for your support.

Yours faithfully

BAF Ngcamu

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APPENDIX: B

PERMISSION FROM THE GATEKEEPER

Mr BAF Ngcamu

P.O. Box 960

Scottburgh

4180

Dear Sir

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A STUDY ATSCHOOL

I,, the principal ofSchool hereby permit you to conduct the study titled "THE ROLE OF PRINCIPALS IN TRANSFORMING THEIR SCHOOLS INTO PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES: THE PERSPECTIVES OF TWO SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN UGU DISTRICT"

I understand that participation is voluntary and participants can withdraw at any time from the study without any consequences.

Please ensure that teaching and learning is not compromised during your study.

I wish you every success with your studies.

Yours faithfully

..... (Principal)

APPENDIX: B

PERMISSION FROM THE GATEKEEPER

Mr BAF Ngcamu

P.O. Box 960

Scottburgh

4180

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Please ensure that teaching and learning is not compromised during your study.

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Yours faithfully

..... (Principal)

APPENDIX: C

REQUEST TO PARTICIPANTS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

Box 960
Scottburgh
4180
Date.....

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May I request you to kindly participate in this study.

Please note that this study has no direct benefit to you but will contribute to the field of ELMP and research. You may decide to withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences. The data that will have been generated will be treated as confidential as possible. Your name or surname or school name, will be anonymised and only pseudonyms will be used in the study. This study will pose no harm to you as a participant or anybody else.

For further information or clarity, my supervisor, Dr TT Bhengu may be contacted on cell:

Email address:

The University ethical clearance officer, Mariette Snyman may also be contacted on phone number: 031 260 8350 or email snyman@ukzn.ac.za.

Thank you for your support.

Yours faithfully

.....

APPENDIX: D

INFORMED CONSENT

Mr BAF Ngcamu
P.O. Box 960
Scottburgh
4180

Dear Sir

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY: THE ROLE OF PRINCIPALS IN TRANSFORMING THEIR SCHOOLS INTO PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES: THE PERSPECTIVES OF TWO SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN UGU DISTRICT

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As the research and its purpose was explained to me, I understand what will happen during and after the study.

I understand that the interviews will be recorded for quality purposes, and I give consent to be recorded. I understand that there will be no direct benefit due to me after participation in the study. I also understand that I can withdraw from the study at any point in time.

I know the contact details of the supervisor and the research officer.

Thank you for selecting me as a participant in the study.

Yours faithfully

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I know the contact details of the supervisor and the research officer.

Thank you for selecting me as a participant in the study.

Yours faithfully

APPENDIX: E

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE PRINCIPALS

1. What do you do to encourage teachers to work in small groups to discuss issues around student learning?
2. Is there any time that you allocate to the teams to meet and discuss issues around their student learning? If yes, how frequent and how long?
3. What resources do you provide to support teacher collaboration?
4. Why do you encourage teachers to work together in teams in dealing with student learning of their subjects?
5. What benefits does working in small teams, by teachers, have to the teachers themselves?
6. What benefits do learners enjoy from teacher teams?
7. How do you assist the teams to work co-operatively during their meetings?
8. How do you ensure that the teacher teams meet and discuss issues relevant to the improvement of student learning?
9. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of the success of the teacher collaboration?
10. How do you support teacher teams when they face different unforeseen challenges?

APPENDIX: F

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR HODs

1. What does the principal do to encourage teachers to work in small groups to discuss issues around student learning?
2. Is there any time allocated by the principal to the teams to meet and discuss issues around their student learning? If yes, how frequent and how long?
3. What resources are provided by the principal to support teacher collaboration?
4. Why does the principal encourage teachers to work together in teams in dealing with student learning of their subjects?
5. What benefits does working in small teams by teachers have to the teachers themselves?
6. What benefits do learners enjoy from teacher teams?
7. How does the principal assist the teams to work co-operatively during their meetings?
8. How does the principal ensure that the teacher teams meet and discuss issues relevant to the improvement of student learning?
9. How does the principal evaluate the effectiveness of teacher collaborations?
10. How does the principal support teacher teams when they face different unforeseen challenges?

APPENDIX: G

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

1. What does the principal do to encourage teachers to work in small groups to discuss issues around student learning?
2. Is there any time allocated by the principal to the teams to meet and discuss issues around their student learning? If yes, how frequent and how long?
3. What resources are provided by the principal to support teacher collaboration?
4. Why does the principal encourage teachers to work together in teams in dealing with student learning of their subjects?
5. What benefits does working in small teams by teachers have to the teachers themselves?
6. What benefits do learners enjoy from teacher teams?
7. How does the principal assist the teams to work co-operatively during their meetings?
8. How does the principal ensure that the teacher teams meet and discuss issues relevant to the improvement of student learning?
9. How does the principal evaluate the effectiveness of teacher collaborations?
10. How does the principal support teacher teams when they face different unforeseen challenges?