

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

**A CASE STUDY OF THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN A  
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY IN THE EASTERN CAPE**

**MABEL MANDISA NTENGWANE**

**2012**

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by

**MABEL MANDISA NTENGWANE**

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the Master of Education (MEd) degree in the discipline  
Educational Leadership, Management and Policy, School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal

**SUPERVISOR:** Dr Inba Naicker

**DATE SUBMITTED:** June 2012

## **SUPERVISOR'S STATEMENT**

This dissertation has been submitted with/ without my approval.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dr Inba Naicker

## ABSTRACT

The study was sparked by the current national outcry on school principals' lack of professional leadership and management skills, knowledge and expertise which has resulted in poor student performance in schools, particularly in the Eastern Cape. The study sought to achieve three objectives. Firstly, to determine the methods employed in professional learning communities to develop school principals. Secondly, to make known the experiences of school principals with regard to their professional development within a professional learning community. Thirdly, to determine the impact of learning from professional learning communities on leadership and management practice of school principals, placing emphasis on student performance. This was a qualitative study which employed semi-structured interviews to collect data. The participants were six school principals from three selected high schools and three selected junior secondary schools in Matatiele district in the Eastern Cape. Gender and age representation were considered when selecting participants. Document analysis in the form of minutes of professional learning community meetings which had previously been held and attended by participant school principals were also used as a secondary source of data.

Literature reveals that school principals in South Africa have not been adequately and professionally developed to meet the demands of leadership and management and the accompanying multitasking that a school principal must fulfill. Literature also reveals that professional learning communities in the United States of America, United Kingdom, New Zealand and other international countries have been successfully used as spaces for professional development of teachers and school principals. However, the study revealed that professional development of school principals in South Africa generally and particularly in the Eastern Cape is still in its infancy. A selective approach which is mostly superficial and reactive is adopted towards professional development of school principals. Therefore, the study has significant implications for policy development and implementation mechanisms for professional development of school principals. An integrated approach should be applied for holistic and accelerated professional development of school principals if the whole school improvement marked by quality learner performance is to materialise.

## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, **Mabel Mandisa Ntengwane**, 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.
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*Mabel Mandisa Ntengwane*

# **ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**

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Finally, my late mother and father for the values they instilled in me. The foundation they laid was strong.

## **ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE TEXT**

<b>ACE-</b>	Advanced Certificate in Education
<b>CAPS-</b>	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
<b>C2005-</b>	Curriculum 2005
<b>DET-</b>	Department of Education and Training
<b>CoP-</b>	Community of Practice
<b>DoE-</b>	Department of Education
<b>EDO -</b>	Education Development Officer
<b>FET-</b>	Further Education and Training
<b>GET-</b>	General Education and Training
<b>IQMS-</b>	Integrated Quality Management System
<b>NCS-</b>	National Curriculum Statements
<b>LPC-</b>	Leadership Practice Community
<b>LTSM-</b>	Learning and Teaching Support Material
<b>NCS-</b>	National Curriculum Statements
<b>NPDE-</b>	National Professional Diploma in Education
<b>OBE-</b>	Outcomes Based Education
<b>PD -</b>	Professional Development
<b>PPN-</b>	Post Provisioning Norms
<b>PLC -</b>	Professional Learning Community
<b>RNCS-</b>	Revised National Curriculum Statements
<b>SA-</b>	Subject Advisor
<b>SMT-</b>	School Management Team
<b>U.K.-</b>	United Kingdom
<b>U.S.-</b>	United States of America



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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **BACKGROUND AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

The current school principals are a mixed group of two distinct socio-political and historical backgrounds. The first group are those school principals who started teaching before 1994 during the apartheid regime. The second are those who joined the profession after 1994 and were later promoted to become school principals with or without much experience in the teaching field. The former group have experiences of the two distinct political periods and the latter group know only the democratic post-1994 period. My experience as a teacher in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal during both the pre-democratic and post-democratic eras exposed me to a number of school principals whose disposition and practice I have keenly observed.

The former group of school principals have been exposed to the pre-1994 highly bureaucratic and hierarchic order with its stringent subjugating practices of the apartheid regime. The education system was highly fragmented and centrally controlled (Naong, 2011). The former group of school principals have been subjected to a system which required them to be docile and submissive to the then inspectors and anyone in authority. The inspectors were always judgemental and applied punitive measures like threatening demotion against those school principals found wanting in their practice. These school principals did not question anything and they were centrally controlled. The inspectors had power over them and they in turn had power over their colleagues formerly called subordinate teachers. The school principals were mere submissive consumers who accepted any regulation imposed on them and expected the same of their 'subordinates'.

The Department of Education (1996) describes this as a top-down management system where school principals and educators were at the receiving end. The school principals were thus accustomed to instructions and hand-outs. The system and practice of top-down management by the then central Department of Education and Training (DET) resulted in ‘indecisiveness by authorities’ (Naong, 2011, p.1). Therefore, this cohort of school principals lacks the initiative and responsibility even for their own professional development.

The latter group is a product of the political revolution. They have antagonistic and resisting tendencies. They have transferred and applied political resistance and tensions to the educational terrain and as a result, they always find a reason to oppose what those in authority suggest usually to the detriment of their professional development and improvement of the education system generally. In studies conducted by Naong (2011, p.1) ‘politicking’ is cited as one of the challenges facing some public schools. Subsequently, there has always been tension and conflict between the departmental officials and the schools. My experience has also shown me how the lingering tension in some public schools has resulted in lack of consensus over a number of operational issues. This has resulted in a state of apathy and a conflict ridden education system. Both conditions have led to a collapse of education in many public schools particularly in the Eastern Cape (‘Daily Dispatch’ 09 September 2011). The Grade 12 results which have been used to measure academic performance of schools have unfortunately been disappointing in many schools.

A number of school principals who know no other era but the democratic one have misconstrued democracy to mean ‘*laissez faire*’ and lack of accountability and responsibility. Even people responsible for the recruitment and selection processes of school principals did not take time to scrutinise people and their track records before recommending them for appointment as school principals. People who were responsible for selection and recommendations of school principals were the newly appointed undertrained school governing bodies (SGB’s) who lacked the acumen to manage appointment of appropriately qualified people.

Thurlow (2003) states that the structures to regulate selection and appointments were there, but were newly instituted and thus the selectors had a meager knowledge to do the job. Subsequently, appointments of school principals were in some instances tainted by subjective undertones, emanating from demographic transformation imperatives and processes other than professional demands of leadership and management.



Teaching experience was the only criterion for appointment into the position of school principal. Unfortunately competence in leadership and management were not checked before appointment into the leadership and management position of school principals were effected. The Department of Education (2005) attests to this by stating that no national standard or structure exists for the training and accreditation of school principals. Van der Westhuizen and van Vuuren (2007) explain that up until 1995, South Africa was one of the few countries that did not require any compulsory and specific qualifications or formal leadership training. According to these authors principals have merely been appointed on the basis of their teaching record. The afore described background and profile of school principals clearly indicate the need for professional development of school principals which is the focus of exploration in this study.

## **1.2 MOTIVATION AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

Statistics and the media reveal that the Eastern Cape remains one of the worst performing provinces in education generally. This poor state of affairs in education has a negative ripple effect on the quality of Grade12 performance and results which have always been low, ('City Press' 02 April 2006, Makuphula, 2011). The former Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor paid a visit to the province of the Eastern Cape in 2006. The intention was to encourage school principals to lead and manage schools effectively so that the core business of schools, which is teaching and learning could proceed normally. The current Minister of Education, Angie Motshekga has also paid numerous visits to the Eastern Cape during 2011 in order to attend to the school leadership and management problems which beset schools in the Eastern Cape.

I stay and have taught at a high school in this province for the past ten years. The exposure I had to the principals, at both General Education and Training (GET) and Further Education and Training (FET) bands, revealed that leadership and management skills and knowledge of school principals is not up to standard. Consequently, their schools suffer due to their lack of skills and knowledge in school leadership and management. I aspire to become a school principal therefore, understanding what is entailed in professional development of school principals is worthwhile. Hence, exploring what happens within a learning community of school principals with regard to professional development of school principals will shed light on how they are equipped in service, to lead and manage schools.

Education plays a critical role in development of any society. Therefore, the significance of addressing the issue of professional development of principals cannot be overlooked and understated (Botha, 2004 & Steyn, 2010). Hargreaves (2003) states that teaching is increasingly a complex work which requires higher standards of professional practice. If good practice is not achieved, this would have an adverse effect on quality education, socio-economic transformation and development agenda of the post- democratic South Africa and particularly of rural areas. The issue of leadership generally and school principalship in particular is a major concern in the South African education system. Schreuder, du Toit, Roesch and Shah (1993) assert that professional development is a necessary measure for one to be better equipped as an educational practitioner.

School principalship has unfortunately hardly been perceived and established as an occupation which requires specific professional knowledge, skills and expertise. Mathibe (2007) states that principals in South Africa are not appropriately skilled and trained for school management and leadership, and as a result there is a call for professional development of school principals. The current legislative mandates and policies on professional development place emphasis on attainment of qualifications and certification (Department of Education, 2006). Recently, from 2007- 2009 in South Africa the professionalisation of principalship began to be formalised through a certification programme called Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE): School leadership programme (Mestry & Singh, 2007), (Bush, Kiggundu & Moorosi, 2011). It is at this point that one must pause and ask whether obtaining an accredited qualification guarantees professional and competent practice.

The challenges of a school, especially leadership and management demand professional expertise because it is only when leadership is good that the school curriculum can be well managed, and teaching and learning can be effective (Steyn,2009; Steyn,2010 & Botha, 2004). The Department of Education has also embarked on measures to beef up district staffing by appointing many office-based education practitioners. Firstly, education development officers (EDO's) who are responsible for leadership, management and governance matters were appointed. Secondly, subject advisors (SA's) who are subject specialists responsible for curriculum advice have been appointed. Joint meetings with school principals are usually convened by EDO's and or SA's. These meetings are termed circuit meetings. In this study, these meetings will be referred to as professional learning community (PLC) meetings.

The studies conducted on professional development of school principals in South Africa have explored the establishment of accredited qualification programmes and obtaining accredited qualifications by school principals. There is apparently a gap regarding exploring what school principals do as PLC's and whether participation in these PLC's professionally develop school principals. This study therefore, seeks to explore whether participation in these PLC meetings provide school principals with the necessary knowledge, skills, values and attitudes needed to address the challenges of their daily educational practice so that teaching and learning can be enhanced and quality student performance realised.

### **1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The aim of this study is to explore the professional development of school principals in a PLC in the Eastern Cape. It seeks to attain the following objectives: Firstly, to determine how school principals are developed in a professional learning community. Secondly, to make known the school principals' experiences of their professional development within a professional learning community. Thirdly, to determine the impact of learning from a professional learning community on leadership and management practice of school principals.

### **1.4 KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The study seeks to address the following questions:

1. How and in what ways are school principals developed in a professional learning community?
2. What are the school principals' experiences of their professional development within a professional learning community?
3. How does a school principal's leadership and management practice change as a result of participation in a professional learning community?

## **1.5 DEFINITION OF TERMS**

In order to facilitate a common understanding, broad definitions of key terms used in this study are provided. The key terms that are pivotal to the study are professional development (PD) and professional learning community (PLC).

### **1.5.1 Professional development (PD)**

Professional development is the skills, knowledge and ongoing learning opportunities undertaken to improve one's ability to do the job and grow as a professional, be on top of the game and stay abreast of professional advancements (Davies, 2011).

According to Steyn and van Niekerk (2007) the purpose of professional development is three fold. It is for personal, career and organisational development. Organisational development purpose of professional development entails improving performance to benefit the whole school. The organisational development purpose of professional development can benefit and serve the primary aims of the education system, the promotion and attainment of quality teaching and learning (Steyn & van Niekerk, 2007). The purpose of this study is to explore the role of PLC's in the professional development of school principals so that the organisational development of schools can be enhanced.

### **1.5.2 Professional learning community (PLC)**

A professional learning community is a team or groups of teams working interdependently to achieve a common goal for which members hold themselves mutually accountable (DuFour, 2004).

Hargreaves (2008) defines PLC's as educational leaders working together to improve teaching and learning within specific districts.

In this study, I view the gathering of school principals within a circuit as a PLC.

## **1.6 REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The purpose of literature review in my study was to present issues in the literature relating to professional development of school principals through professional learning communities. To this end, I engaged in a comprehensive search of various national and international databases on current and completed research. The majority of the books and journal articles consulted were obtained from the library at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

## **1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

A summary of the research methodology employed in this study is presented. The study is located within the interpretive paradigm. Lowe(2007)states that interpretive research focuses on understanding situations. This study aims to make meaning of professional development of school principals within a professional learning community.

In terms of the methodology, this is a case study of a professional learning community in the Eastern Cape. Gillham (2000) and Bertram (2004) describe a case study as an in-depth study of one particular case which may be a person, a group of people, a school, a community or an organisation. In this study, the case selected is one circuit of school principals who regularly meet as a professional learning community. Two methods were used to generate data in the study namely, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. One circuit was purposively sampled based on convenience. Within this circuit, six school principals were purposively selected for the interviews. The data from the interviews and documents were analysed using content analysis.

## 1.8 CHAPTER OUTLINE

The research study is divided into five chapters.

**Chapter One** provides a general background and overview of the key aspects of the study. The study is introduced by first pointing out the profile of the current school principals. Thereafter, the motivation and rationale for the study is outlined followed by the aims and objectives of the study. The key research questions are highlighted and brief definition of pertinent terms is given. The purpose and sources of literature review are introduced. Finally research design and methodology are briefly introduced.

**Chapter Two** focuses on the literature reviewed with regard to the key research questions. The review commences with theoretical frameworks. Thereafter, conceptual guidelines reviewed and lastly studies conducted on PLC's are specified. This literature gave credence to the objectives of the study and provided significant information about the theoretical and conceptual context of the study. It also strengthened the rationale for the significance of the study and was the fundamental basis which set guidelines for the research design, instrumentation and plan for data analysis.

**Chapter Three** presents the research design and methodology of the study. This chapter focuses on six key areas pertinent to the research design of the study. These key areas are paradigmatic positioning of the study; description of the research design and methodology; data collection methods and research instruments; description of target population and sampling, trustworthiness, ethical considerations and lastly limitations of the study.

**Chapter Four** presents data used in the study; analysis of data and discussion of findings.

**Chapter Five** presents the summary of the study, findings from the study. Recommendations based on the findings have been suggested. The chapter concludes with limitations and suggestions for future research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter outlined the background and introduction to this study. This chapter focuses on the literature reviewed with regard to the key research questions formulated in chapter one. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) define a literature review as a critique of the status of knowledge on a carefully defined topic. Therefore, the purpose of a literature review is to provide the body of knowledge which already exists in relation to a given topic. This body of knowledge provides theoretical underpinnings and conceptual understanding of the research topic and affords the researcher the opportunity to summarise, classify and compare previously produced information with the intention of producing a critical analysis. Therefore, this literature review concentrated on the professional development of school principals and professional learning communities (PLC's). This review commenced with the theoretical underpinnings of the study. Theories on professional learning communities and adult learning were presented. Thereafter, an account on the related literature linked to the research questions was presented.

#### **2.2 THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS**

This study is underpinned by theories related to professional learning communities and adult learning.

##### **2.2.1 PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES (PLC's)**

Professional learning communities traditionally refer to a group of educators who continuously seek and share learning and who then act on their learning (Hord & Hirsh 2008). The goal is to make educators more effective through continuous inquiry and improvement. A professional learning community is a team or are groups of teams working interdependently to achieve a common goal for which members hold themselves mutually accountable (DuFour, 2004). Hargreaves (2008) defines PLC's as educational leaders working together to improve teaching and learning within specific districts. Stretching the limits and boundaries of PLC's to district level meant moving beyond the school level which was the milieu of the traditional PLC.

What makes these educational leaders a 'community' is their shared purpose, mutual regard and caring and an insistence on integrity and truthfulness with the intense purpose of elevating their work in schools to the level required by a true community (Lambert, 2003).

Professional learning communities where collaborative learning occurs are also described as 'small groups of head teachers on a two year development programme who form action learning sets which work on real issues in real time and act as a clearing house for exploring, implementing, reviewing and developing school-focused strategies' (West-Burnham, 2009, p.109). Piggot-Irvine (2004); Piggot-Irvine (2006); Mullen (2010) and Spanneut (2010) also define PLC's as spaces where school principals are collaboratively professionally developed. Apart from PLC's, various scholars use different but synonymous terms to refer to these teams. These are communities of practice (COP's) (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder 2002) and leadership practice communities (LPC's) (Helsing & Lemons, 2008).

A number of perspectives regarding description of PLC's have been given by numerous authors in existing literature. Hord (1997); Hord (2004); Hord (2007); Hord & Hirsh (2008); Newman (1996); Vescio, Ross & Adams (2006) and Snow-Gerono (2005) confine the description and application of PLC's to teachers' professional development. Hargreaves (2008) is among the authors who define PLC's as educational leaders working together to improve teaching and learning within specific districts. Hargreaves (2008); Lambert (2003); Piggot-Irvine (2004); Piggot-Irvine (2006); Mullen (2010) and Spanneut (2010) highlight the impact of PLC's specifically on school principals' skills and expertise. Other scholars perceive the theory of PLC's as applicable to any community of practice regardless of age, rank or level. West-Burnham (2009); Hargreaves (2008) and Lambert (2003) are among the scholars who view PLC's as applicable to students, teachers and educational leaders.

The origins of professional learning communities can be traced back to 1992 in Texas (Hord, 2004). The government and researchers were concerned with the decline in performance of students in the United States of America, particularly the Texas region. Despite this decline, there was one school with a markedly different atmosphere and outstanding educational results from those around it. This school portrayed itself as a vibrant organisation of learning. The entire school staff- teachers, parents and students saw themselves as a community of learners who shared a common vision about aspirations for the school accomplishments.



Teachers were innovative and encouraged to reflect on their practice. There was shared decision making. This school was used as a model for other schools to emulate. In 1995, the practice, communities of continuous inquiry and improvement known in the literature as ‘professional learning communities’ was started (Hord 2004, p.1). According to Newman (1996) cited in Vescio, Ross and Adams (2007), there are five key characteristics of professional learning communities. Firstly, shared values and norms must be developed with regards to the group’s views of learning, school priorities for the use of time and space and the roles of parents, teachers and administrators. Secondly, there should be a clear and consistent focus on student learning. Thirdly, there must be reflective dialogue characterised by extensive conversations among teachers about the curriculum, instruction and student development. Fourthly, teaching must be public. Lastly, there should be focus on collaboration.

Hord (2004) concurs with Newman (1996) and identifies the following major themes which encapsulate essential characteristics of PLC’s. Firstly, PLCs are characterised by supportive and shared leadership which requires collegial and facilitative participation of the principal who shares leadership –and thus power and authority – by inviting staff input and action in decision-making. Secondly, values and vision are shared and this must translate to an unwavering commitment to student learning that is constantly articulated and referenced in the staffs’ work. Thirdly, collective learning and application of learning is essential. This requires that school staff, at all levels are engaged in processes that collectively seek new knowledge among staff and application of learning to solutions that address students’ needs. Fourthly, supportive conditions must exist. This includes physical conditions and human capacities that encourage and sustain a collegial atmosphere and collective learning. Fifthly, is shared practice which involves the review of a teacher’s behaviour by colleagues and includes feedback and assistance activity to support individual and community improvement.

These authors share a common view of what is entailed in professional learning communities. They both put emphasis on collaboration, learning of students and learning of teachers with colleagues and improvement by teachers which will result in a positive impact on learners’ performance and quality learning. The implication of the above features and practices within a PLC is that if carefully transferred, customised to meet professional demands of school principals and applied to PLC’s for school principals, professional development in service will be enhanced, manifesting itself in improved leadership and management practice by school principals.

In order for school principals to develop effective PLC's, 'they should be willing to challenge and question, they should be self-managing and self-directing and develop strategies and protocols to support their working processes, they should work through highly sophisticated communication using modern techniques and traditional social and relational skills' (West-Burnham, 2009, p.108). The advice offered by this author is helpful for the establishment and maintenance of effective PLC's for school principals. However, for this advice to hold, school principals should be encouraged by the district officials to change their mindset from expecting handouts to willingness and commitment to be innovative, creative and own their professional development. Professional learning communities are therefore good formations for professional development of school principals. The contextual and substantive challenges, like the psychological development of a people in a particular nation have to be considered for the effectiveness of a newly instituted structure. South African school principals have emerged from a dispensation where they were used to relying on hand-outs and accustomed to accepting the status quo. School principals as adults should change this mindset, become self-directing and support structures that promote their professional development.

### **2.2.2 ADULT LEARNING THEORIES**

School principals are adults. Therefore, professional development of school principals should take into account the way adults learn. Consequently, adult learning theories provide a framework for understanding how adults learn.

Trotter (2006) contends that an awareness of adult learning theories assists in offering effective and sustainable professional development activities by educational districts. Trotter (2006) concurs with Hargreaves (2003) in referring to districts as applicable geographic spaces and domains for professional development of school principals and other educational leaders. The district domain applies to my study because the circuit I will be studying is a sub-division of a district as these sub-divisions apply in the Eastern Cape. Knowles (1984) makes a distinction between andragogy (adult education) and pedagogy (education for children and adolescents). It is with this understanding of adult education as a separate discipline, that adult learning theories, which should inform professional development of principals as adults are explored in this study. The adult learning theories explored are andragogy, experiential learning theory and social constructivism.

### **2.2.2.1 ANDRAGOGY**

According to Knowles (1984) andragogy makes the assumption that adults want to know why they need to learn something. Adults need to learn through experience and they learn best when the topic is of immediate significance and value to them. Further, adults approach their learning as problem-solving. Knowles (1984) takes interest in those adults who are self-directed and want to take responsibility for their decisions. Oja (1980) as cited in Trotter (2006) studied adult learning as it applied to teacher in-service education by identifying four key elements for successful adult learning. The key elements are firstly, use of concrete experiences. Secondly, is the continuous supervision and advising. Thirdly, is the encouragement of adults to take on new and complex roles. Fourthly, is the use of support and feedback when implementing new techniques.

Although the above elements were initially suggested in relation to teacher learning, I perceive them as also applicable to school principals. School principals also need to be encouraged to take on new and complex roles like taking charge and ownership of the effectiveness of their PLC's and improving their leadership and management practice. They should also be encouraged by being given supportive feedback if and when their leadership and management practice has improved. This could be some form of motivation and reinforcement.

### **2.2.2.2 EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING THEORY**

Kolb (1984) states that experiential learning theory emphasises the role that experience plays in the learning process. According to Kolb (1984), experiential learning is conceived as a process where ideas are not fixed and immutable elements of thought but are formed and re-formed through experience. Adaptation and creativity are essential for personal growth and development.

I think the implication is that adults bring their life and work experiences to learning and professional development. These life and work experiences, should be used by adults (school principals), in the context of my study as springboards for their learning and professional development. Professional development of school principals can also be better achieved if their school experiences are taken into consideration.

School principals can therefore acquire new skills, knowledge and expertise when they adapt, transform and modify the skills that they already have in order to meet the demands of their various dynamic contexts. The process of considering one's environment or context when learning is what Kolb (1984) terms transaction between the person and the environment.

Kolb (1984) in experiential learning theory and Knowles (1984) in andragogy share the same view that adults learn through experience. Experiential learning theory can therefore benefit PLC's when various principals from different schools share their experiences and techniques for professional development. Through collaboration and networking, experience can be a means to enrich PLC's as principals will share challenges they have experienced and solutions they have utilised in various contexts. Principals need to be reflective of their experiences and practices in order to become innovative and creative, thus coming up with better insight, new strategies and techniques of meeting the students' needs for enhanced and improved learning. Such strategies could be *inter alia* curriculum management techniques which promote learning. What transpires from this discussion of experiential learning is that experience offers ground and material for reflection, modification and adaptation, improvement and development. Experiential learning theory applies to PLC's because, according to Buysse, Sparkman and Wesley (2003), PLC's are grounded in the assumption that knowledge is situated in the day-to-day lived experiences of teachers and best understood through critical reflection with others who share the same experience. Moon (2004) perceives experience as a resource from which learners draw as they reflect. Experience and critical reflection are therefore the key elements of both PLC and experiential learning theory.

Experiential learning theory brings about easy navigation and understanding of what is entailed in a PLC. One can therefore conclude that according to experiential learning theory, learning is experience embedded and self- driven in the sense that learning is both experience based and experience driven. Experience informs adults as they learn and experience also compels adults to learn. Experience intrinsically motivates adults to engage in learning. Learning is also described as experience-driven and experience enriched because according to Trotter (2006) adults are motivated to learn as they experience the needs and challenges. What should also be understood is that sometimes negative experience can create pessimism among other people.

Professional learning communities should therefore be viewed in a positive light as sources of hope and support for school principals who may have had challenging and negative experiences that it had resulted in despair and despondency. Kolb (1984) asserts that adults bring in their experiences to learning.

In the context of my study, this suggests that school principals should take the initiative of directing their professional development using their experiences and compelled by the demands and challenges they experience in their operational contexts. This theoretical insight will assist me when I study adult learning of school principals in the PLC under investigation.

### **2.2.2.3 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM**

According to Derry (1999) and McMahon (1997) cited in Kim (2001) social constructivism emphasises the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding. Social constructivists have various premises that underlie reality, knowledge and learning. The assumptions and premises that underlie learning in social constructivism are relevant to this study and thus, worth the subsequent explanation. According to McMahon (1997), social constructivists view learning as a social process. Learning does not take place only within an individual, nor is it a passive development of behaviours that are shaped within external forces. Meaningful learning occurs when individuals are engaged in social learning. Lave and Wenger (1991) assert that learning occurs within social communities of practice whose members engage in collective learning. Burns, Menchaca and Dimmock (2001) identified six principles as significant and essential to constructivist learning theory: Firstly, learners bring unique prior knowledge, experience and beliefs to a learning situation. Secondly, knowledge is constructed uniquely and individually in multiple ways, through a variety of authentic tools, resources, experiences and contexts. Thirdly, learning is both an active and reflective process. Fourthly, learning is a developmental process. Fifthly, social interaction introduces multiple perspectives through reflection, collaboration, negotiation and shared meaning. Lastly, learning is internally controlled and mediated by the learner.

Using the multiple perspective view will assist in my understanding and meaning making of what obtains in a PLC as the school principals will be unpacking how professional development happens in their PLC. The above mentioned principles of constructivism are closely connected to the dimensions or major themes of a PLC.

Traditionally, all participants in a PLC are regarded as learners regardless of age. One defining feature of a PLC is that all members learn. This implies that all educational leaders who are school principals learn from their colleagues. Hord (2009) confirms that professional learning communities encourage constructivism by providing the setting and working relationships demanded of constructivist learning.

In the case of my study, school principals are expected to learn in their schools and with their colleagues in the PLC. Social constructivist theory will therefore be used as a lens to examine how principals in the PLC which is the unit of analysis engage in activities and learning for professional development. The intention is to elicit information as to how principals construct meaning of professional development, and how they individually and collectively construct and develop insight into professional development issues.

The study will further attempt to establish as to how the socially or collectively constructed meaning and insight is applied to their school contexts to meet the student needs and subsequently enhance students' performance. Knowles (1984) maintains that adults approach learning as problem-solving technique. The question that the study intends to answer is whether the adults (principals) who participate in the PLC use their learning and collectively constructed knowledge and skills to effectively solve the professional problems they encounter in their contexts which are schools.

The three adult learning theories offered a rich backdrop against which the researcher could analyse and understand the PLC in the study. These theories also highlighted the common typological elements of a traditional PLC and adult learning theories applied in the study. Some of the common elements were sharing, collaboration, experience, reflection and problem-solving. Corroboration of the typological features among the essential elements of a PLC and adult learning theories as revealed in literature, illuminated the ontological quintessence of a PLC as a phenomenon explored by the researcher.

### **2.3 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

The aim is to review the available literature and highlight findings from various studies internationally and nationally. The review of literature will concentrate and be limited to studies on professional development of school principals and professional learning communities. Although the study will concentrate on the professional development of school principals, leadership and management issues which are inextricably related to professional practice of a school principal cannot be totally excluded.

### **2.3.1 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The field of education is the cradle for the future of any nation. It is therefore imperative that the personnel charged with the task of leading and managing should be well equipped with leadership and management skills in order to ensure that education of high quality is delivered. Professional development of school principals becomes necessary. Therefore school principals should perpetually undergo professional development in order to broaden their knowledge and revive, sharpen and augment their skills, thus enabling them to render quality service. Professional development is one of the ways in which the readiness and ability to cope with the daunting task of educational leadership and management can be acquired.

#### **2.3.1.1 CONCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Professional development is the skills, knowledge and ongoing learning opportunities undertaken to improve one's ability to do the job and grow as a professional, be on top of the game and stay abreast of professional advancements (Davies, 2011). Mathibe (2007) defines professional development as appropriate skilling and training of principals for management and leadership. Steyn and Van Niekerk (2007), describe professional development as an ongoing development programme which focuses on a wide range of knowledge, skills and attitudes required to lead and manage effectively. According to Steyn and van Niekerk (2007) the purpose of professional development is threefold. It is for personal, career and organisational development. The organisational development purpose of professional development entails improving performance to benefit the whole school, serve the primary aims of the education system, the promotion and attainment of quality teaching and learning (Steyn & van Niekerk, 2007).

The above definitions imply that professional development is a process which needs participation in professional development programmes and structures like the PLC and applies to both teachers and principals. Appointment as principal does not mean one has exhausted the acquisition of skills and knowledge in the educational leadership profession and that one ceases to be responsible for teaching and curriculum management. Principals, involved in the day-to-day management of their schools need to take time to reflect on their personal growth as leaders and managers.

Succintly, professional development generally refers to ongoing learning opportunities available to all education personnel, through their schools and districts. Professional development has a ripple effect on the attainment of quality teaching and learning manifested in the improved performance of learners and quality results at schools in all grades and especially in Grade 12.

Su, Gamage and Mininberg (2003) state that research studies on the demographic characteristics and professional development of educators have focused more on teachers than school administrators. Subsequently, the slow and deficient professional development of school principals has resulted to the majority of school principals still found wanting in the practice of school leadership and management.

Steyn (2009) perceives the school principal as a key individual who can impact the development of a school for the benefit of students. The implication is that the school principal is a key teacher in a school who needs multi skilling and thorough professional development. I think the principal plays the role of a catalyst for a performing functional school or a dysfunctional underperforming school. Therefore, the professional development of a school principal cannot be trivialised and understated, given the current appalling state of affairs and a reality of a high number of underperforming schools, particularly in the Eastern Cape. This has led to the establishment of PLC's for professional development of school principals and other educational leaders.

In this study, the focus of professional development will be on school principals. The ultimate aim for the establishment of PLC's is professional development. Therefore, it is appropriate to examine how literature defines professional development in order to establish whether the PLC I will be focusing on professionally develops school principals or does not. Guskey (2000) and Guskey and Killion (2006) place emphasis on the evaluation of a programme. It is also with this mindset of program evaluation that I intend to establish whether participation in a PLC really develops school principals professionally and leads to the subsequent improvement on student performance.



### **2.3.1.2 INTERNATIONAL DISCOURSES ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Although the context of my study is South African, international discourses on professional development are worth exploring for the purposes of benchmarking and grounding the study. It is a formative norm that a country in its developing stages like South Africa, should look up to developed countries for best practice that one aspires to emulate in order to attain quality achievement. I will therefore present what researchers in the United States of America (U.S.), United Kingdom (U.K.) and Australia say on professional development of school principals. Literature indicates that there is general consensus that professional development projects have focused on teachers but not on principals or school leaders.

According to Bush and Jackson (2002), the problem of appointing competent principals is by no means confined to developing countries. Many developed nations, including England, face this problem. Specific preparation before appointing new principals, and training for other leadership roles is often inadequate, uncoordinated or worse. Duignan (2004) emphasises the need for grooming capable leaders who will be competent enough to meet leadership challenges. Su, Gamage and Mininberg (2003) state that research studies on the demographic characteristics and professional development of educators have focused more on teachers than school administrators. Little information is available about profiles and preparation of school leaders to meet the new challenges in the twenty-first century schools.

If this is the case in Western and developed countries, the implications are that there is a greater need for South African educationists to conduct more studies and produce more strategies for professional development of school principals. Thus, professional development is an indispensable means for school improvement. Professional learning communities serve as suitable forums for capacity building of school principals.

Drake and Roe (2003) and Hargreaves (2003) explain that professional development of principals is an engagement which should be planned, long-term, job-embedded sharing of concerns and advices on strategies to deal with concerns. Matters discussed should not only be managerial, but mainly, strategies to meet student needs and improve teaching and learning are of prime importance.

Weiss (2006), Russo (2006), Pianta (2006), Jonas (2006) and Huang (2006) concur with the aforementioned authors regarding the nature of professional development programs. They assert that professional development cannot be achieved through a one-day workshop. Professional development should be a planned, long-term process which does not begin and end with isolated individuals, but rather the process should happen through coaching, online networking, cascade model and case method. These Harvard authors, also state that those who are professionally developed should be transformed into a professional workforce which impacts positively on the child's performance and youth development. Dempster (2001) asserts that a professional sustenance orientation towards professional development emphasises learning derived from the individual and the collective subjective experience of people in their everyday educational practice. From this perspective, principals' professional development in a PLC seeks to meet personal and collective development. Professional sustenance oriented professional development activities require participants' involvement in determining the topic, direction and means to achieving necessary outcomes which address the needs identified.

I think the implication of deriving learning from the individual and collective experience could be a positive influence, as the subjective thought, perception and practice can be transformed to objective and unbiased perception and improved subsequent practice. Professional learning communities could thus provide spaces where intellectually deliberated and collaboratively generated multiple solutions are found for contextually related challenges. The collective experience and collaborative endeavour offer the much required triangulation and formidable consolidation of effort which occurs as various ideas and perspectives from different participants are balanced against one another. This results in solid and formidable views which are objective and well informed.

Therefore, professional learning communities or circuit meetings in the context of this study should be forums for vibrant teamwork, diversity management, capacity building, learning and support. The question to ask is whether school principals who participate in a PLC acquire the skills, values and attitudes which impact positively on the performance of a child at school and development of children as youth.

### 2.3.1.3 SOUTH AFRICAN DISCOURSES ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The discourse on professional development of principals in South Africa started in the recent years. Van der Westhuizen and van Vuuren (2007) explain that there was rarely any formal leadership training and principals are appointed on the basis of their teaching record. Van der Westhuizen and van Vuuren (2007) explain that up until 1995 South Africa was one of the few countries that did not require a compulsory and specific qualification for principalship. This situation began to change when according to Mathibe (2007); Van der Westhuizen and van Vuuren (2007); Bush and Odura (2006); Moloji (2007); Mestry and Singh (2007) and Bush, Kiggundu and Moorosi (2011) professionalisation of principalship began to be formalised through a certification programme called Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE): School leadership. Literature reveals that it is teaching and not principalship *per se* which has been regarded as a profession. It is only during the late 1990's that a shift towards paying attention to principalship as a profession began.

However, there are still constraints on principals' exercising autonomy and having their voice heard in matters of their professional development. It has only been recently through Integrated Quality Management Systems (IQMS), that school principals could indicate areas where they needed development. But, even then school principals could still not come up with self-initiated and self-directed strategies of professional development.

It has therefore not been in order to appoint teachers into principalship as a profession on the basis of their teaching record without any formal leadership training as Van der Westhuizen and van Vuuren (2007) explain. Steyn (2009) puts emphasis on a principal as a key individual who can impact the development of a school for the benefit of students. Just as Hoyle (1986) harps on functions of school principals, the Department of Education (1998) lists a number of laden duties that the principal has to fulfill. The core duties and responsibilities of a school principal are divided into six main categories each with a number of responsibilities. These are general administrative duties; personnel duties; teaching duties; extra- & co-curricular duties; interaction with stakeholders and communication. The magnitude of these duties and responsibilities that the principal has to fulfill as a person and also ensure that other teachers fulfill their duties as well, implies the significance of professional development of a school principal and necessitates an in depth insight into what is entailed in professional development.

Steyn and Van Niekerk (2007), describe professional development as an ongoing development programme which focuses on a wide range of knowledge, skills and attitudes required to teach learners effectively. Mathibe (2007) defines professional development as appropriate skilling and training of principals for management and leadership. Schreuder, du Toit, Roesch and Shah (1993) describe professional development as participation in development opportunities so as to be better equipped as a teacher and educational leader.

The above definitions imply that professional development is a process which needs participation and applies to both teachers and principals. Daily activities of school principalship require dovetailing from a multi-skilled practitioner. Therefore, school principals involved in the day-to-day management of their schools need to take time to reflect on their personal growth as leaders and managers. The flux of changes and numerous responsibilities that are in the hands of school principals necessitate professional development of school principals. Therefore, this study will endeavour to establish as to whether the current processes in the circuit meetings which are professional learning communities effectively equip school principals with appropriate skills, attitudes and knowledge for management and leadership.

Mestry and Grobler (2002) and Botha (2004) state that the training and development of principals can be considered as the strategically most important process necessary to transform education successfully. I think it is unfortunate that in South Africa, a developing country inundated with so many changes especially in education, professional development of school leaders has not been prioritised until recently when only obtaining a qualification was considered necessary for principalship.

Perhaps South Africa as a nation became highly occupied with political changes to the detriment of educational leadership and management reform. The high price that South Africa is paying as a country is the appalling state of education emanating from lack of training and professional development of educational leaders including school principals. The knock-on effect of all this has a negative impact on the performance of learners in schools. All this renders professional development even more essential because school principals are required to act as professionals when executing their duties.

The officials in the higher echelons of national government have also realised the need for professional development of school principals and subsequently engaged in robust public debate and bold discourse, vociferously suggesting areas of professional development for school principals. Minister Motshekga (2010) when addressing the annual conference of school principals in Durban and Cape Town highlighted enhancement of skills and competencies; improvement of recruitment and selection; induction and professional preparation of school principals as areas which needed serious attention.

The qualitative studies conducted by Mestry and Singh (2007), showed that continuing professional development through accredited courses like Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE): School leadership benefits school principals. However these courses occur only during holidays and the course material is structured by universities. School principals indicated that during the short lived contact sessions they had, fruitful informative conversations were held with cohort colleagues. This implies that there is a need for regular conversation and discussion sessions among school principals for their continued professional development. Professional learning communities are suitable spaces for these envisaged dialogues on professional development of school principals.

#### **2.3.1.4 MODELS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Research on professional development has been widely conducted throughout the first world countries, with intense studies undertaken in the United States of America (U.S.), United Kingdom (U.K.) and Australia. Studies conducted by Hargreaves (2003); Su, Gamage and Mininberg (2003) indicate that initially attention, was given to professional development of teachers generally, but during the 1990's to early 2000 emphasis has shifted to the professional development of school principals as well.

The studies conducted by Fenwick and Pierce (2002); Echols (2005) and Wiley (2007) reveal that the fast becoming complex nature of teaching, leadership and management due to heterogeneous demographics, socio-political and technological changes have necessitated professional development for principals as well, around the globe. The literature produced from these and other studies provides various models of professional development for principals.

Fenwick and Pierce (2002) identify three models of professional development for principals in service. First, is the traditional model which is characteristic of preparation programmes at a university. In this model, the principal engages in coursework to upgrade or advance professionally in an area of interest. This model is research-based work which is packaged by the institution where the principal attends. The content of the course is not tailored to suit the contextual needs of the principal. Second, is the craft model wherein the principal is trained by another experienced professional school principal. The developing principal observes the seasoned administrator as he or she interacts with the personnel and public. The observer learns other ways of handling school concerns in a practical school context. The source of knowledge is the practical response of the observed experienced practitioner. The third model is reflective inquiry approach to professional development of the principal. The principal himself or herself is encouraged to generate knowledge and critical reflection of values, beliefs and practice. The principal is an active participant who also generates knowledge and new skills to apply in the school situation. The key components in this approach are networking, mentoring and reflective reading and writing.

Therefore, this suggests that professional development particularly of the twenty first century school principal and of a developing country like South Africa cannot rely on ‘one-shot’ or one-day workshops for effectiveness. For effective professional development to occur there must be continuous learning. Professional learning communities can offer vibrant and viable means for continued professional development of school principals.

### **2.3.1.5 FORMS OF LEARNING FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS**

Various approaches to professional development have been identified and applied in the U.S. Networking is one of these approaches which has been found appropriate for professional development of principals. Hargadon (2009) defines networking as interacting and learning from each other as colleagues. Isolation is eliminated through networking. Online networking and webquests are technological forms of eradicating isolated learning. The opportunity for both emotional support and for sharing and exploring new ideas is created through networking. Best practices can be shared and continuous learning encouraged and accomplished. Networking for professional development in the reflective model is based on the collegial approach which emphasises collaboration with colleagues and learning through shared and joint effort.

Networking has subsequently led to the establishment of principal centres throughout the U.S. These centres provide learning spaces where principals are presented with the opportunity to share concerns and advices on job-related matters. Networking online and otherwise has led to the formation of professional learning communities (PLC's). Networking online facilitates collaboration with external partners and colleagues (Fenwick & Pierce, 2002).

In the Eastern Cape, it is not centres in the sense of infrastructural places specifically erected for the purpose of use by the school principals who meet for professional development. Rather, schools are utilised as temporary centres where the EDO decides to convene a meeting with a group of principals when the EDO deems necessary. Reading and keeping reflective journals are other key aspects of reflective inquiry approach to professional development of a school principal. Keeping reflective journals allow for creation of personal portfolio around the issues in management and leadership. Reflection entails meditation and thinking about one's practice in a critical and analytical manner. Self-assessment and evaluation are also key elements in critical reflection. Astuto, Read and Fernandez (1993) maintain that reflection leads to continuous inquiry and improvement.

Mentoring is another popular approach to professional development. Daresh (2002) defines a mentor as a professional colleague and critical friend who assists the principal to understand professional norms and job expectations. A mentor is expected to provide advice on job challenges. This implies that a mentor has to be more experienced in the field than the mentee. Mentoring is described as the relationship between a less experienced individual called mentee and a more experienced individual called a mentor. This relationship is described as a 'face-to-face long term relationship between supervisor and novice' (Wai-Packard, 2004, p.1).

In the study, I will endeavour to establish as to whether these forms of learning apply to school principals in the PLC under study. These forms of learning will also assist me in understanding how school principals engage in learning and why they make their choices of forms learning if they do. Investigation into the effect of principals' learning on students' learning and achievement will also be done. The study also intends to establish whether participation in PLC in the form of circuit meeting has value.

## **2.4 STUDIES CONDUCTED ON PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES**

Literature reveals that the practice of PLC's initially targeted professional development of teachers. In the qualitative studies conducted by Astuto, Read and Fernandez (1993) and Hord (2004), PLC's were formed by colleagues of a given school. Newman (1996); Lambert (2003) and Vescio, Ross and Adams (2007) also show how PLC's improved the practice of teachers. They explain how the model of PLC has developed teachers and improved their teaching practice.

Studies conducted by Helsing and Lemons (2008) have shown the need for continuous professional development of school leaders in order to cope with the multiple leadership and management demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These authors have worked with the Hawaiian educational leaders to indicate the positive impact of leadership practice communities (LPC's) on improvement of professional development. They designed this programme to encourage school and district leaders to cooperate in supporting participants' professional capacity development. According to these authors professional development should be 'on-site, intensive, collaborative and job-embedded' (Helsing & Lemons, 2008, p. 15). These key elements of professional development suggest that school principals themselves should also take the initiative of improving their professional practice.

However the current practice shows that there is hardly time allocated to on-site, intensive collaborative and job embedded professional development of school principals. The question arises as to who initiates this intensive collaboration and on-site professional development when some school principals lack the initiative and assertiveness?

In the studies conducted by Piggot-Irvine (2004) among school principals in New Zealand, critical reflection and collaborative dialogue proved impacting positively on effective professional development for school principals within PLC's. School principals critically reflected on their leadership practice and collaboratively shared information. Critical reflection led to keeping reflective portfolios by school principals. Reflection and dialogue was based on literature and practice.



Studies conducted by Chikoko, Naicker and Mthiyane (2011) among school principals in South Africa revealed that learning through keeping portfolios among these school principals was still at an emerging stage. Be that as it may, portfolios are considered as concrete tools on which reflection can be based and leadership development for professional practice be gradually attained in service.

The success of these studies indicate how school principals can change their leadership style, professionally develop continuously in service, get mentoring and also become mentors. Although these studies indicate success, there are differences regarding human resource and contextual developmental level between the Eastern Cape as a province belonging to a developing country and the first world countries where the PLC traditionally originated. Such differences have to be considered when applying the theory of PLC's in this region. Be that as it may, the PLC practice can still be embraced to support professional development of school principals in service and complement the pre-service qualification.

However, literature does not reveal any studies which have been conducted on PLC's in the South African school context although this seems to be the latest international practice regarding issues of professional development. This is the gap I wish to explore in this study.

## **2.5 SUMMARY**

In this chapter I have presented literature review in relation to the study. I have presented the theoretical underpinnings of the study which are professional learning community theory and adult learning. These were the frame of reference for the study. In the next chapter, I present research design and methodology employed in the study. Motivation for the choice of research design and methodology will also be included in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter dealt with the literature reviewed with regard to this study. It focused on theoretical orientation to this study and related literature. This chapter covers the research design and methodology employed in this study in order to answer the following key research questions generated in chapter 1:

- How and in what ways are school principals trained and continuously developed in a professional learning community?
- What are school principals' experiences of their professional development within a professional learning community?
- How do school principals' leadership and management practice change as a result of participation in a professional learning community?

In this chapter, I initially dealt with the paradigmatic positioning of the study. Thereafter, the qualitative approach which is employed to tackle issues in the study was explained. Data collection methods and instruments that were used during the study have been specified and described. Information on target population and sampling procedures and processes, access to participants has been supplied. In chapter 1, I specified the aim of the study as being to establish how participation in a professional learning community impacts on professional development of school principals. Therefore in this chapter, I have also illustrated the 'fitness of purpose' between the research paradigm and approach and the major theme of the study. Ethical considerations and limitations of the study are discussed.

## **3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM**

Generally, a paradigm is viewed as a ‘set of basic beliefs [which] represent a worldview for its holder and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts,’ (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, pp.107-108). Researchers are further informed that ‘research paradigms define for the researcher what it is they are about, and what falls within and outside the legitimate research’, (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.108). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), there are three main research paradigms namely positivism, interpretivism and critical theory. Within each paradigm there are four concepts [that] characterise paradigmatic orientations, namely: ethics (moral imperatives shaping how one comes to know), epistemology (how knowledge emerges, particularly through relationships between the knower and the known), ontology (how one explains reality) and methodology (the ways and means of producing evidence), (Lincoln and Guba, 2000) cited in (Amin, 2008).

### **3.2.1 Interpretive paradigm**

Deducing from the definitions of a paradigm by Guba and Lincoln (1994), it is clear that every researcher should position their study within a particular paradigm because a research paradigm advances a set of beliefs about the world and thus subsequently provides the philosophical foundations for any study. A paradigm provides the direction during the process of inquiry. A paradigm also provides the lens through which the researcher endeavours to understand, make meaning and interpret particular contexts and phenomena. The choice of methods and research instruments appropriate for the study are determined by the research paradigm within which the study is located. Therefore, in line with the research prescripts of paradigmatic positioning of one’s study suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1994), I positioned the study within the interpretive paradigm. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p. 23) state that within interpretive paradigm, ‘ the researcher begins with the individuals and sets out to understand their interpretations of the world around them...[and] investigators work directly with experience and understanding to build their theory on them.’

Thus, the interpretive paradigm was the most appropriate paradigm within which I could situate the study as the study seeks to elicit the views of school principals on how they experience, understand and interpret professional development of school principals within a professional learning community. In fact dual interpretation comes to the fore as the participants' interpretation and understanding will illuminate the researcher's understanding of professional development in the context of a professional learning community. This is what Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011) refer to as co-creation. The implication is that both researcher and participant work together to create meaning. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) concur with Guba and Lincoln (1994) also advancing three major aspects under which a researcher makes assumptions when investigating a phenomenon. These aspects are ontology which deals with understanding reality; epistemology which deals with knowledge construction and methodology which looks into issues of data collection methods and instruments. Therefore, I have also subsequently spelt out how issues of ontology, epistemology and methodology were dealt with in this qualitative study.

### **3.2.1.1 Ontology**

As I have already explained above, ontology deals with the nature of reality in research. The main principle of the interpretive paradigm is that reality is socially constructed. Due to the fact that reality is socially constructed, subjective multiple realities are usually the outcomes of meaning making (Mertens, 1998; Robson, 2002). Mertens (1998) contends that different meanings can be attributed by different people on the same issue. As these authors suggest, my study sought to establish how different school principals interpret, understand and make meaning of what is entailed in professional development of school principals within a professional learning community which in this study is a circuit in the Eastern Cape. Multiple realities offered by different participants offered substantial information on the study and this in turn enabled the researcher to gain clear insight as to what obtains within a professional learning community with regard to professional development of school principals. A variety of answers were offered to the key research questions, thus issues pertaining to the research questions were clearly spelt out and authenticity about the socially constructed reality was reinforced.

### **3.2.1.2 Epistemology**

One of the basic tenets of this paradigm is that knowledge is socially constructed by those in the research process and that it is the duty of the researcher to understand the complex experience from the point of view of the participants (Mertens, 1998). I think if the researcher perceives the research issue from the participants' viewpoint, researcher bias is toned down and authenticity of the study is enhanced. This helps the researcher to know situations as they are and not as the researcher would perhaps ideally envisage. It is for this reason that I found the epistemological assumptions of the interpretive paradigm suitable for my study, as one of the key research questions is to understand how school principals experience professional development in their PLC. The study illustrated the participants' knowledge and understanding of professional development of school principals while also enhancing the researcher's understanding. Mertens (1998) contends that in this paradigm, interpretations are iterative because understanding of the parts leads to the interpretation of the whole and vice versa. According to this author old understandings are transformed in the light of the new understandings and this occurs against a background of the assumptions, beliefs and practices of which the researcher and participants are never fully aware. This contention assisted the researcher and participants in transforming old understandings of operation in a PLC to a better understanding for improvement and development.

### **3.2.1.3 Methodology**

In this paradigm, researchers use qualitative methods. Qualitative research is conceptually analysed 'as any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification. It can refer to research about persons' lives, lived experiences, behaviours, emotions and feelings; as well as about organizational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena and interaction between nations (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, pp.10-11). This research method is characterised not by the use of numerical values but by the use of text-written words-to document variables and inductive analysis of the collected information (Hatch, 1995, cited in Hittleman & Simons, 2002). Qualitative research falls under interpretivism as a research paradigm. According to Henning (2004) qualitative methods are used to check interpretations and understanding by the participants.

Methods which are widely used are observations, interviews and document reviews, (Mertens, 1998; Robson, 2002 & Denscombe, 1998). Mertens (1998) argues that these methods are used in correspondence with the assumption about social construction of reality. Creation of meaning is central to qualitative research. The use of qualitative methods allowed me deep interaction with the participants. Through the use of qualitative methods I got to the bottom of issues by analysing the content and complexity of multiple meanings as offered by participants. I found case study a suitable qualitative method which would provide in-depth view of my study.

### **3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

This is a qualitative study which uses a case study methodology. Strauss and Corbin (1998, pp. 10-11) define qualitative research as ‘any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification. This implies that qualitative research is made up of verbal and textual accounts and descriptions of persons’ lives and experiences, operational pathways and tendencies within organisations and societal phenomena in various contexts. Hoepfl (1997) states that qualitative inquiry accepts the complex and dynamic quality of the social world and probes for deeper understanding. According to Hatch (1995) cited in Hittleman and Simon (2002), qualitative research inductively answers research questions by examining participants in natural contexts. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2005), Gillham (2000) and Bertram (2004) define a case study as an in – depth study of one particular case, where the case may be a person (such as a teacher, or a learner, or a principal, or a parent), a group of people (such as family or a class of learners) a school, a community or an organisation. Case studies aim to describe ‘what it is like’ to be in a particular situation. The researchers’ aim is to capture the reality of the participants’ lived experiences and thoughts about a particular situation. Case studies are a style of research often used by researchers in the interpretive paradigm. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) case studies fall under the umbrella of ‘naturalistic’ research, which is conducted in real-world context and are used in the interpretive paradigm.

The study aimed at a detailed in-depth analysis of the chosen unit. In line with this, I situated my study within a professional learning community which is my operational ‘naturalistic real’ context. This qualitative and interpretive study aimed at providing insight into the current practice of a professional learning community. My chosen case and unit of analysis was a group of principals who meet within a circuit in the Matatiele district in the Eastern Cape. The qualitative nature of the study enabled me to probe deeper and understand better issues pertaining to a PLC and professional development of school principals, not from my idealised perspective but from the participants’ viewpoint emanating from actual experience.

### **3.4 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

I will elaborate on in-depth interviews and document analysis which were the methods used in the study.

#### **3.4.1 In-depth interviews**

My study was aimed at an in-depth understanding of schools principals’ experiences of professional development within in circuit meetings. I therefore conducted in-depth interviews with my participants. Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011) describe an in-depth interview as a one-to-one method of data collection that involves an interviewer and an interviewee discussing specific topics in depth. These interviews provided the researcher with the space to gain detailed insight into the issue of professional development of school principals from the insider’s perspective. Through in-depth interviews, the interviewee shares his/ her story while the researcher elicits information. Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011) refer to in-depth interviews as a method of co-creation of knowledge and meaning.

According to these authors these interviews firstly allow the researcher to ask questions in an open and empathic way. Secondly, these interviews develop rapport between the interviewer and interviewee. Thirdly, they motivate the interviewee to tell their story by probing. The relevance and benefit of using in-depth interviews which are semi-structured lies in the fact that they helped me to develop sense of trust relationship between the participants and I.

Principals are people who hold a higher leadership position at school and post-democratic school leaders may view themselves so legitimate that they may be power complacent. A researcher may be perceived as a threatening intruder who may be welcomed with suspicious minds. If the trust relationship was established, the participants would be free to talk and share information. The participants had wide latitude to speak their mind without being restricted by structured questions. They could respond to questions differently as their contexts varied from one school to another. Participants' responses allowed the researcher to get contextual information. I also got to understand the values and attitudes attached to the PLC meetings. Semi-structured interviews also allowed me opportunity to ask other questions as interviews allow freedom and flexibility in questioning. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2005); Hittleman and Simon (2002) mention interviews among the methods used for qualitative research. I have chosen interviews for in-depth and better understanding of what happens in PLC as experienced by the directly affected principals. Hall and Hall (2004) explain that qualitative research is about understanding the world of subjects, listening to their voices and allowing these voices to be heard. Interviews afforded me an opportunity for getting direct quotations from the interviewees and this offered rich and deep data required in qualitative research. The participants were notified prior to the interview so as to gain consent, (see Appendix: D, page 97).

### **3.4.2 Document analysis**

Prior (2003) advises researchers to use documents in order to better understand and confirm data gathered during interviews. I skimmed and scanned the available minutes of the meetings of the PLC for the period January 2009-June 2010. The minutes provided information on issues discussed when the members of the PLC met for professional matters. The benefit of analysing these minutes was that deliberations and discussions were conducted in the absence of the researcher and the outsider intruder threat posed by the researcher was eliminated. The researcher bias and subjectivity did not in any way affect the contents of the minutes and authenticity of the information is guaranteed. Although the minutes were a reported form of the school principals' voices, the gist of the discussion was viewed as the original because the minutes had been signed as a true reflection of what had been discussed.

However, document analysis of minutes of meetings held by school principals in their circuit meetings which serve as spaces for professional learning was undertaken as a secondary source of information to verify and confirm what the participants had offered as responses to the interview questions.



## **3.5 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS**

In order to collect the data through interviews, I formulated an interview schedule.

### **3.5.1 The interview schedule**

The interview schedule was structured in such a manner that a number of aspects about the participants would be covered. The aspects covered in the interview schedule were the following:

- biographical details of participants,
- school principals' understanding of professional development in a PLC,
- school principals' experiences of professional development in a PLC,
- school principals' leadership and management transformation after participation in a PLC, and
- school principals' general comments on possibilities and challenges of professional development within a PLC.

The intention was to formulate an interview schedule which could be user-friendly, not complicated and applicable to participants across gender and age spectrum. I also wanted to ensure that the interview schedule was suitable for school principals of both high school and junior secondary schools. The interview schedule was not exclusive to a particular phase, because issues of professional development which the instrument intended to probe, apply to all school principals.

### **3.5.2 The pilot study**

A pilot study was conducted to check the suitability of the instrument. The interview schedule prepared for the participant school principals was tested by involving participation of another school principal who would not be one of the six participants to be interviewed. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) questions have to be clearly understood by participants and questions have to be relevant to the knowledge, experience and expertise of participants. In line with this suggestion, I piloted the interview schedule questions with the principal of the school where I worked.

The intention of the pilot study was to clear ambiguities and streamline or spread the questions according to the key research questions. This would assist the researcher in ascertaining that all areas of the study had been covered. Before starting the pilot process, I asked the pilot participant for an informed consent, (see Appendix: E page, 100) wherein I gave detailed information about the topic and the reason behind the pilot study. After the pilot study, I was in a position to detect redundancy and ambiguities. Therefore, I revised the questions and used the final version of the interview schedule for my study.

### **3.6 POPULATION AND SAMPLING**

The total number of people on which the researcher will draw conclusions is called population (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). School principals from high schools and junior secondary schools within the circuit were the target population for the study. I targeted school principals from both high schools and junior secondary schools because all school principals are responsible for the smooth running of schools. Experiences of school principals pertaining to professional development from all categories of schools would enrich the study. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) advise that the sample should be representative of the population. I thought these two categories of school principals would cover representativeness of both GET and FET bands. Therefore, I did not necessarily have to specifically include primary school principals as their schools belong to GET band and their experiences would be covered by the junior secondary schools principals. I did not exclusively interview high school principals although the current measuring yardstick for effective leadership and management is Grade 12 performance, because the FET band is the foundation for Grade 12 learners. The sample comprised of six principals.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2007) define sampling as a step which involves determining the people, settings and events or behaviours to study. The sample is the unit on which the analysis focuses. Sampling should consider representativeness within the group of people to be researched. The main types of sampling in qualitative research are random or probability sampling wherein the members of the population have equal chance of being included in the sample; purposive or non-probability sampling whereby the researcher makes specified choices about people to be included in the sample and stratified sampling whereby the researcher determines participants according to different groups of the population if the population to be researched consists of different people who may have different opinions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005). Purposive sampling was used in this study.

### **3.6.1 PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY**

In this section I present a general profile of the participant school principals in the study. The profile will reveal the ‘fitness of purpose’ or suitability of the participants in the study.

#### **3.6.1.1 Participant school principal 1: Mr Mile**

Mr Mile is a novice high school principal with four years’ experience as a school principal. He had been a deputy principal for twelve years in a district far away from his home town. When the vacancy was created after the retirement of the previous principal, he was appointed as principal. He holds a master of education degree.

#### **3.6.1.2 Participant school principal 2: Mrs Mano**

Mrs Mano is a novice principal of a junior secondary school. She has only three years experience as a school principal. She had been a head of department in the same school for seven years. She holds matric and National Professional Diploma in Education(NPDE).

#### **3.6.1.3 Participant school principal 3: Mrs Silas**

Mrs Silas is a principal of a junior secondary school and has seventeen years experience as a school principal. Prior to being a school principal, she served as level 1 educator. She holds matric certificate, Primary Teachers’ Certificate (PTC) and National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE).

#### **3.6.1.4 Participant school principal 4: Mr Major**

Mr Major is a junior secondary school principal and has twenty five years experience as a school principal in the same school. He had acted school principal for seven months and proceeded to another school where he was a deputy principal for five years. He was appointed school principal in a school where he had started teaching and had acted as deputy for seven months.

After being rejected by his contemporaries who could not accept his authority, he was transferred to the junior secondary school where he has been principal for twenty five years to date. He holds matric, Primary Teachers’ Certificate (PTC) and is currently enrolled for Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE): School leadership.

### **3.6.1.5 Participant school principal 5: Mr Topo**

MrTopo is a junior secondary school principal and has twenty years' experience as a school principal in the same school where he had been teaching for seven years. Prior to being appointed school principal, he had been a deputy principal for a period of five years. He was appointed school principal when the former school principal retired. He only received elaborate training when he was enrolled for NPDE, eight years after he had assumed duties as a school principal.

### **3.6.1.6 Participant school principal 6: Mr Dani**

Mr Dani is a high school principal and has twenty years' experience as a school principal in the same school. The basis of his appointment was that he was the only highest qualified person then as he holds a BED and was the deputy principal when the former principal retired.

## **3.7 TRUSTWORTHINESS**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) postulate that trustworthiness of qualitative inquiry is crucial to determine the worth of research. According to these authors trustworthiness relies on the four main aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility basically means confidence in the 'truth' of the findings as revealed through the participants' original data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.296). Credibility answers the question 'how congruent are the findings with reality' (Shenton, 2004, p.65). Transferability entails showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts other than the situation in which the current research is undertaken. Dependability is an evaluation of the standard and quality of all employed processes and means of data collection, data analysis and generation of new theory (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Merriam (1998) cited in Maree (2007) advises that dependability can be ensured by also eliminating researcher bias. Dependability implies reliability and showing that the findings are consistent and repeatable.

Confirmability is a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped and supported by data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, the implication is that the results of social research feed off trustworthiness for authenticity.

In line with the aforementioned rigour of qualitative inquiry, I addressed the issues of credibility by first capturing participant school principals' experiences in their PLC by using tape recorder during the interview. I also used semi-structured interviews which are well established research methods. I used iterative questioning and probes to elicit information. After transcribing the voice recordings verbatim, I took the text transcriptions to the participants for member checks. These member checks established accuracy and authenticity of the data. Participant school principals had an opportunity to establish congruence between their voice recordings and transcriptions. The established congruence validated the information as emanating from their 'original data' of voice recordings. I also verified accounts of participants experiences through captured minutes as supporting data.

Transferability would be promoted by using the findings and results of this study to develop PLC's in other geographic spaces other than the context where the research was undertaken. The findings could also be applied in other levels of leadership and management, not only principalship but where ever crucially needed. Dependability was confirmed through the responses of the participants from the interview schedule. I also conducted a pilot study to refine the interview schedule. The interviews were conducted separately for each participant but the participants' responses were similar. These responses could be used in the generation of new theory. The interview schedule was included in the study (see Appendix F: p.102). Further, to ensure dependability and confirmability, researcher bias and outsider influence were eliminated through document analysis as a means of data collection. The PLC minutes analysed had been captured in the absence of the researcher.

Confirmability was addressed by exposing the participants' transcribed responses to the scrutiny of a 'critical friend' and my supervisor to check if there was an alignment between findings and data collected. The independent scrutiny offered by my supervisor who holds a PhD confirmed the dependability of my findings. I also stored both voice recordings and transcribed texts of participants' responses in case these are required for further confirmability.

### **3.8 DATA ANALYSIS**

Miles and Huberman (1994) define data analysis as consisting of three activities that occur simultaneously during data analysis procedure. These are data reduction, data display and drawing conclusion. I conducted data reduction by combining similar responses from various participants so that a consolidated and focused response could be framed. I assembled the interview responses and displayed them in text form. From this, I was able to draw conclusions after noting themes, patterns and possible conclusions. Inductive analysis was done by organising the information or specific several responses from the participants into categories. I thereafter established whether there were any relationships within these responses. I subsequently generated patterns. Interpretive analysis was also done as the researcher gave meaning to the categories which were inductively arrived at. The broader generalisation was done and from this a new theory on professional development of school principals in the South African context would emanate or be developed.

### **3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

After skimming, scanning and reviewing literature on ethical considerations, I have observed that there are two distinct but intertwined aspects in ethical matters of a research study. Firstly, there are ethical issues pertaining to documentation. Secondly, there are ethical issues pertaining to participants. Below, I briefly explain how I handled these ethical issues.

#### **3.9.1 Ethical issues pertaining to documentation**

Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2005) and McNiff and Whitehead, (2005) advise that the researcher must get permission to do research from all those who will be involved as sources of data or validation thereof and otherwise. In keeping with this advice, I began addressing the ethical issues in this study by obtaining Ethical Clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal to conduct my research. Permission was obtained (see: Ethical Clearance Certificate, page v). I also wrote letters and completed the prescribed forms to seek official permission to conduct the study from the relevant parties. A letter of consent with terms and conditions was sought from the Department of Education. Permission was granted (see Appendix: C, p.96).

Hall and Hall (2004) suggest that prior notification for an interview is also necessary for gaining consent. Therefore, I also notified participants in writing before conducting any interview and I requested them to respond in writing indicating whether they agreed or not (see Appendices: B, D & E pp. 93-100).

### **3.9.2 Ethical issues pertaining to participants**

McNiff and Whitehead (2005) identify four main types of people who may be involved in research in different ways. These are firstly research participants; secondly collaborative colleagues; thirdly critical friends fourthly validators and advisers or interested observers; These authors further state that the researcher has ethical and legal responsibilities to participants and other officials who will be affected by the researcher's activities during the study.

These are all the directly and indirectly affected persons who could be the researcher's manager or principal, the participants and the officials under whose jurisdiction these participants operate.

To all these people I pledged good ethical conduct in the form of confidentiality and protection of their anonymity for the participants who so wished. As a researcher, I maintained anonymity by not disclosing the real names of participants. *Nom de plumes* were used for participants and fictitious names for schools. Participants were informed of their right to privacy and their choice to agree to partake in the study as well as their liberty to withdraw if and when they so wished. In line with Hall and Hall, (2004) who suggest that even before the researcher records interviews, participants should be informed about such recordings, I also requested permission for audio recording and indicated to the participants what I intended doing with the recordings. After all the explanation, I confirmed whether the participant was still interested in participating in the research.

### **3.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This is a study of only one PLC (circuit community) employing only two methods of data collection. Hence, the findings cannot be generalised to other PLC's (circuit communities). However, in this study it was not my intention to generalise but rather make meaning of how professional development of school principals occurred in this PLC (circuit community).

### **3.11. SUMMARY**

In this chapter I have dealt with the research design and methodology employed in the study. I contended that since I lodged the study within interpretive paradigm, it was imperative that I choose a qualitative research approach which is based on the tenet of multiplicity of views and subjectivity emanating from various contexts. This approach enabled me to gain an insight into how various school principals interpret, understand and make meaning of their professional development within a professional learning community. I used in-depth interviews which offered the participants a chance to elaborate as they responded to the questions and afforded me the freedom and flexibility to restructure questions as I probed deeper into the subject matter. Document analysis in the form of minutes of meetings of this particular professional learning community which was the case studied, enabled me to have a reflective view of what obtained in the professional learning community. The next chapter focuses on the data presentation, analysis and discussion of findings.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter outlined the research design and methodology employed in the study. In this chapter, I present the data, analyse and discuss the findings in relation to professional development of school principals within a PLC. Data was generated from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with school principals from six schools within a PLC in the Eastern Cape and document analysis of minutes of meetings of the same PLC. In order to address the research questions formulated in chapter one namely:

- What are the methods through which school principals are trained and continuously developed in a professional learning community?
- What are the school principals' experiences of their professional development within a professional learning community?
- How do school principals' leadership and management practice change as a result of participation in the professional learning community?

The data from the in-depth interviews and document analysis is presented. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2008) advise that in case studies, data presentation is written as a descriptive narrative with pertinent issues to the study raised throughout the data presentation as well as analysis. An analysis and discussion of the interview data and document analysis using the conceptual and the theoretical frameworks outlined in chapter two on professional learning communities and adult learning theories, as well as other relevant scholarship in the field will ensue.

## **4.2 DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION**

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), data presentation is a process whereby the collected data is carefully displayed for streamlining into patterns, meaningful categories and themes.

The themes which have emerged from the in-depth interviews and document review are the following:

- Training of school principals,
- Professional development of school principals in a PLC,
- Experiences of school principals of their professional development in a PLC,
- Leadership and management transformation of school principals after participation in a PLC,
- Challenges experienced by school principals in relation to professional development within a PLC,
- Assistance needed by school principals in relation to professional development within a PLC.

### **4.2.1. TRAINING OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS**

With regard to the issue of training of school principals, two sub-themes emerged from the data. The first sub-theme was training of school principals as preparation for school principalship (pre-service). The second sub-theme was training during principalship (in-service).

#### **4.2.1.1 Training of school principals as preparation for school principalship.**

The participants were asked to indicate whether there was any training they received which prepared them for their role as school principals. The responses to this question were largely similar. They all concurred that there had been no special training to prepare school principals for the position of school principal.

The participants commented as follows:

*“...there is nothing specific which you can say. There is no special training for school principals to empower school principals.”* (Mr Mile)

*“No, no, there was no training.”* (Mrs Mano)

*“Before I became principal - No, there was no training.”* (Mrs Silas)

Comments made by participants clearly indicate the lack of pre-service training of school principals. Bush and Jackson (2002) mention that specific preparation before appointing new principals, and training for other leadership roles is often inadequate and uncoordinated. Department of Education (2005) suggests that there is a need for a formal structure for the specialised training and accreditation of school principals according to the set national standards. I think follow up programmes to evaluate the functioning and effectiveness of such specialised training should also be put in place. The programmes need to be consistently reviewed and the school principals need to be continuously supported to prevent any relapse.

#### **4.2.1.2 Training of school principals during the tenure of school principalship**

The participants were further asked if they had undergone any training for school principalship after they had been appointed and assumed duty as school principals. The responses to this question varied. The participants who had been appointed and assumed duties as school principals pre-1994 indicated that some form of special training for leadership and management had been offered to the newly appointed school principals.

The following responses were made:

*“Yes, the then Transkei government was more serious than this one. Immediately after promotion we were introduced in a big meeting as new principals’ package was prepared or set aside and we were told that we would be going for training on leadership. Indeed it happened ...”*(Mr Major)

*“... I was appointed principal during the Transkei era...immediately after I was appointed, that was in 1990, then South Africa took over and we underwent many trainings.”*(Mr Topo)

Some participants who had been appointed and assumed duties as school principals post-1994 indicated that no special training had been offered to school principals.

*“No training. I did not undergo any training.”*(Mrs Mano)

*“There was nothing...”*(Mrs Silas)

Other participants indicated that the kind of training offered to school principals was superficial, short, once-off and inconsistent, not always well structured and even if formal and structured, it did not cover specifics related to the duties, skills, values and knowledge required for the new job of school principal. Although these participants were not explicitly or perhaps even knowingly basing their comments on any given theory, these participants were aligning themselves with and confirming Knowles (1984) assumption that adults want to learn a topic that is of immediate significance and value to them. School principals indicated that training would be of value to them and was necessary for problem-solving just as suggested by Knowles (1984) in andragogy. The problems they encountered, which the participants hoped formal and specific training would assist them in solving, were those related to issues of leadership and human resource management. Recorded information gathered during document review indicated that in the PLC meetings, usually, announcements and policy guidelines around issues such as redeployment were handled.

One participant responded as follows when asked about the training of school principals:

*“Yes there are short types of courses. Let me call them part time trainee courses that are organised by the Department of Education but the only snag is that they do not take all principals. They take only a few. For instance, for the time being I have been able to attend one called monitoring and evaluation. There are other courses like project management that have been sponsored by the Department but even then they don’t take everybody. We cannot say there is a project for all principals because you meet them and you find that one particular principal has undergone training in one area and another one in another area and some have not undergone any training.” (Mr Mile)*

In some cases, the training offered had been delayed and was only offered after a long time had elapsed after the appointment and assumption of duty of certain school principals. Two participants volunteered the following responses:

*“The one that I did undergo was about leadership, sometime ago it was a brief one week long training. Yes it was in Maluti. I remember where we were taken through some types of styles of leadership and within that we were given an assignment which required us to see how we can improve leadership in our schools with that understanding that was given. It was after seventeen years as a principal that is when I received that training-a week long training.”(Mr Dani)*

*“In a certain year it was said that we should attend a short management course run by Fort Hare where we learnt some skills – how to manage the schools. From that course we were awarded certificates. It was done by Fort Hare. Certain principals were selected to attend that course. I remember it was five days course. .”*(Mrs Silas)

It is obvious from the comments made that there are challenges facing training of school principals. Training of school principals does not receive adequate attention it deserves. Training is always elementary, brief, once-off and originated from outside. The responses made by the participants clearly indicated their resentment against brief training programmes.

These responses confirmed Weiss (2006) strong argument against short-circuited developmental programmes in the form of ‘one-day’ workshops and supported Helsing and Lemons (2008) idea of planned, long-term, intensive professional development programmes. The recorded evidence collected through document analysis also confirmed what the participants indicated. The PLC meetings were held once or at most twice *per annum* which corroborates the once-off kind of training mentioned by the participants. There was corroboration between interview responses and evidence captured through document analysis. The participants’ responses confirmed what Bush and Jackson (2002) stated, that specific preparation before appointing new principals, and training for other leadership roles is often inadequate and uncoordinated. These authors further allude that this problem is global as it is not only confined to developing countries but also faces developed nations like England. Su, Gamage and Mininberg (2003) attribute the problem of inadequate training of school principals to the fact that focus of training has mainly been on teachers than on school administrators. This was revealed by research studies they conducted on demographic characteristics and professional development of educators in Australia. Department of Education (2005) suggests that there is a need for a formal structure for the specialised training and accreditation of school principals according to the set national standards.

The theoretical arguments emanating from reviewed literature, that if any positive impact is to be effected on the target audience, the professional development programme should be well-structured, long-term and well planned is confirmed by the participants’ responses.

I would argue that the lack of training of school principals can be attributed to the assumption that because school principals are usually appointed having been serving as post level 1 teachers and or members of the school management team (SMT), the assumption is that they are acquainted with the area of operation and will acquire skills of leadership and management as they practice. The daunting multifaceted task of leadership and management is often underestimated and equated to teaching and other management levels. This assumption is often the grave mistake because the position of school principalship is often a more demanding multifaceted, loaded and mammoth task. In South Africa the situation of lack of training of school principals may also have been exacerbated by the attention to political changes during the period of transition from apartheid to democracy. Policy and legislation emphasized decentralisation and transformation of the demographic make-up of leaders in all spheres that in some areas including the one of school principalship, appointments were made without considering appropriate and thorough training for this specialised field much to the detriment of education leadership and management of schools. The issue of training school principals in South Africa demands more attention than ever before. Like in any developing country, educational leaders particularly school principals are the ones who steer matters of educational development at grass root level. Therefore school principals should be properly trained for their new positions.

Studies conducted by Van der Westhuizen and van Vuuren (2007, p.433) reveal that ‘formal training and professional development (pre-service and in-service training and development) of school principals can only be made real, effective practice if it forms part of a national qualification policy.’ According to Stoll (2004) all those working in schools need to learn continuously to refresh knowledge, understandings and skills, as well as to deal with and take charge of change.

Therefore, the implication is that appointment of school principals should be strictly based on a mandatory special qualification obtained after one has undergone intensive and extensive special training programme on school principalship and a rigorous competency evaluation programme. However, the current problem is that although issues of professional development for school principals are mooted in policy, appointments are sometimes subjective and disregard policy matters. There are also those people who are already in positions of principalship but are reluctant to undergo any further training either because they are complacent or just do not bother.

One would therefore suggest that training and evaluation of school principals should also be ongoing to face the multiple challenges and changing landscapes in school management and leadership. The ‘national qualification’ should not be the end of training but training should be ongoing.

The participants were asked as to how often they underwent training. The following responses indicated elementary, erratic and once-in-a-while off-site training of school principals.

*“Induction occurs sometimes once a year... only if there is a new cohort of newly appointed principals...other than that induction does not occur but there are principals’ meetings. We are not necessarily being developed there other than being cautioned about how to implement some of the departmental policies.” (Mr Mile)*

*“No, there is nothing like induction of the school principal. There is nothing like mentoring...”(Mr Dani)*

The participants’ comments on lack of induction and mentoring clearly indicate their yearning for social learning advocated by Kim (2001); McMahon (1997) Lave and Wenger (1991) in social constructivism which is one of the theoretical foundations of the study and according to which meaningful learning occurs when individuals are engaged in collective learning.

These comments highlight the gap and lack of induction to the newly appointed school principals as part of training for the new job. The comments made by the participants in the study reveal that induction does not occur. What was captured in the minutes were only the announcements and introduction of newly appointed principals. This corroborates with the comments made by participants during interviews. There were no structured formal specifics regarding induction or mentoring as a form of training of school principals.

There is lack of research-based guidance as far as induction is concerned. In the literature I reviewed, Fenwick and Pierce (2002) highlight craft model as a suitable form of training which also promotes induction. Bush and Middlewood (2003); Grobler, Warnich, Carell, Elbert and Hatfield (2006) define induction as an activity which encompasses socialisation of new members in order for them to achieve competent performance and understand the organisational culture.

Bush and Middlewood (1997) define induction as a process which includes practical elements of information giving, but may go beyond introduction and encompass support for development. These authors describe induction as endeavours to help the various categories of new personnel to fit into and adjust to the new working environment as quickly as possible and with minimum disruption so that the goals of the organisation can be achieved as effectively as possible. Literature does not specify who should conduct induction for a newly appointed leader and manager like a school principal as in this case. What qualities and attributes should the one responsible for induction have? Should we not begin to say even the one to conduct induction should meet certain requirements?

One could attribute the lack of induction of newly appointed principals to current system whereby there is usually a gap between the predecessor and the successor. Usually, when the new school principal assumes duty, the outgoing school principal will already have vacated the position. There is usually no initiation period of the successor by the predecessor. The newly appointed principal is usually thrown in the deep end, and must either swim or sink alone in the new situation. In the current practice, the EDO only offers generic introduction for all newly appointed school principals.

There is no proper handover and smooth transition between the previous and the new school principal. I think it is the previous and outgoing school principal who is well acquainted with the nuances of a specific school and therefore could carry out the duty of induction well. Of course there are generic issues for which induction can be jointly handled, but specific matters pertinent to specific contexts of schools need specific attention. Perhaps the system of induction should change from being generic to being specific, formal, well-structured and on-site.

#### **4.2.2. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN A PLC**

In terms of the theme professional development of school principals in a PLC the sub-themes: methods of leadership training, designers of programmes and initiators of leadership training, school principals' contribution to learning in a PLC and becoming a reflective school principal due to PLC meetings emerged.

##### **4.2.2.1. Methods of leadership training**

Participants were asked to talk about the forms of leadership training employed within their PLC. The participants' responses to this question were mixed. Some participants displayed ignorance of any methods of leadership training.



Others slightly remembered some leadership training as an activity of a distant past which had either been mentioned in passing without implementation or partially implemented. This is how one participant commented regarding the nature and essence of PLC meetings:

*“Nothing like methods. All our circulars just specify that the department needs this and that. These meetings are about time frames for submission of information... the department needs this and that and it must be done like that and the time frame is this. They are just like that. These meetings are just like that.”* (Mrs Silas)

*“Well, well other than being conscientised about deadlines, meeting deadlines for this and that, honestly I cannot say I am always a better person when I come out of these sessions. I come to school with a number of deadlines, deadline for this and deadlines for that. It’s all about deadlines, by such and such a date these should be done and dusted.”*  
(Mr Mile)

Knowles (1984) clearly states that adults want purposeful learning which adds value and aims at solving specific problems for them. What surfaces from these comments, is the disappointment that PLC meetings brought to school principals. These meetings were apparently not mainly used as spaces for professional development and solving problems related to leadership and management as experienced by members of a PLC. This is contrary to what literature suggests. Clearly, from the participants’ responses, insufficient learning applied in their case.

These meetings are rather mainly used as gatherings to make announcements and disseminate information from the central office or head office of the department of education (DoE). This may emanate from the bureaucratic tendency within the system of education. School principals may not even consider themselves fit for lateral or horizontal professional development among themselves. School principals seem to be still trapped in the consumer oriented mindset and attitude. There was clear evidence from the dejected tone of the participants that members of this PLC are subconsciously aware of the gap between the reality and what ought to happen which according to Knowles (1984), and Kolb (1984) should be the promotion of learning which relates to day-to-day problem solving for adults. Minutes of meetings also confirm that PLC meetings are used as a platform for policy discussions and announcement forums. Some meetings are impromptu and minutes reflect meetings which occur once or twice a year. It is obvious that school principals hardly hold meetings on professional development and if they do discuss issues of professional development that is very seldom.

This resulted in school principals losing interest in PLC meetings and feeling despondent. It is also apparent that no specific methods of professional development are employed within the PLC to enhance professional development among school principals. When probed to enumerate and elaborate on specific methods of professional development, participants made the following comments:

*“I did not receive mentoring as a new principal... Nothing like mentoring to say okay as a new principal you are coming on. Nothing I have ever received. I do not know these days, may be they are mentoring them I do not know. I do not know whether there is induction for new teachers...”* (Mrs Silas)

*“No there is nothing like the induction of the school principal, there is nothing like mentoring. When the district officials especially circuit managers come from the training in Bisho, they say we are going to get some mentors ... they are going to twin the schools..., but in reality it never happened. They talked about it and that was the first and the last time they ever talked about it and nothing ever happened.”* (Mr Dani)

Middlewood (2003) regards mentoring and induction as indispensable methods for leadership training which is vital in-service professional development of school principals. This author defines professional mentoring as the support offered by a work colleague at the same or higher level than the individual being offered support on work related matters. Daresh (2002) defines mentoring as assistance offered by a professional colleague and critical friend so that the school principal may understand professional norms and job expectations. Mentoring may be conceptualised in a number of ways, including peer support, counselling, socialisation and coaching (Bush, Coleman, Wall & West-Burnham, 1996); (Wai-Packard, 2004). Middlewood (2003) states that mentoring is useful for both beginner teachers and newly appointed principals. The significance of mentoring was further emphasised through the studies conducted by the Leicester University team in Umlazi (Durban). The findings revealed that informal mentoring occurred between newly appointed principals and former retired principals of schools in Umlazi. Succinctly expressed, literature suggests that mentoring whether horizontal (colleague to mentee) or vertical (supervisor to mentee or experienced school principal to novice school principal), mentoring provides essential support for professional expertise and competence. Mullen (2010, p.3) recommends PLC's as appropriate and effective spaces for “collaborative mentoring.”

This author takes the issue of mentoring further by not restricting it between two persons (mentor and mentee) but perceives mentoring as a practice which can occur among many members of a PLC for the professional development purposes. Terry (1999) cited in Botha (2004) suggests that the practice of having a critical friend should be entrenched for developmental purposes. I think a critical friend or peer can complement the mentor–mentee relationship. The gap and tension created by space and power between mentor and mentee can be filled by a critical friend. Therefore, school principals should have both a mentor and a critical friend. Mentoring should however be critically implemented because negative support offered by an experienced principal to a novice principal may be destructive and detrimental to professional development.

Unfortunately, contrary to the value of mentoring placed by literature, suggestions by participants in this study indicate that mentoring and induction have neither been formalised nor institutionalised. This could also be attributed to lack of advice and insight into mentoring and induction. The statements made by the participants, bemoaning lack of induction and mentoring, clearly indicate the significance of social constructivism (Lave & Wenger, 1991) according to which learning best occurs when more than one person are engaged.

South Africa as a nation is still in the emerging stages of development. Issues of professional development particularly for school principals are still attended at formal course qualification and accreditation level only instead of both qualification and continuous practical level to address the surmounting leadership and contextual challenges which demand change management. The official ranking of schools according to Grade 12 results has often resulted in a competitive stance adopted by a number of school principals. The question arises as to whether competing people can sincerely and fully mentor or assist one another for professional development purposes? The spirit of shared vision and co-operation which is the essential element of a PLC still needs to be inculcated and entrenched. Mentoring should be a formal process offered initially on site by the predecessor and externally by both retired and serving experienced school principals. School principals who belong to the same PLC could form mentoring teams and pay support visits to school principals. Smith and Tamez (2006) advise on transformation of professional culture by educational leaders through systematic peer critique and support. Smith and Tamez (2006) also suggest regular meetings of leadership teams to address issues of systemic change.

The current practice regarding support visits is that these sporadic or occasional visits are paid either by the EDO responsible for that school or seldom by district teams composed of EDO's. There are no support visits by school principals to their colleagues for professional development. The purpose of these visits by EDO's is usually to audit or check if schools have certain documents. EDO's as conveners of PLC meetings are conspicuous by their absence from schools. This is how one of the participants commented regarding frequency and nature of supposed support visits by EDO's.

*'... even to get to a school like my school, I sometimes ask him, why can't you come at least three or four times a year? It is impossible, it is impossible. If he comes to a school it is because he has to drop something urgent from Bisho. He does not have a schedule he does not have any schedule which says on such and such a day I have got to be at such and such a school. There is nothing like that.'* (Mr Dani)

Perhaps this could lead to further investigation as to what causes the distance between schools and EDO's. Usually school principals are given on-site support as a response to cases of conflict. The question arises as to whether the adopted support stance to school principals' professional development should be reactive or proactive?

When the participants were asked whether networking occurred, they had mixed responses. Most participants indicated that networking was mainly informal and occurred among friends and buddies but not across the entire PLC.

*"Yes it occurs informally. If I have a colleague across who has a problem, we do come together perhaps two or three of us. We help each other with dealing with some of the correspondence(s) that come in."* (Mr Mile)

*"In fact, if you have a problem or if you lack something you talk to the principal of another school. You approach one of the colleagues to help you with something. It is not organised, it is not organised."* (Mrs Mano)

These responses clearly indicate how participants put significance on social engagement for sharing expertise and learning just as Lave and Wenger (1991) and Hord (2004) suggest in social constructivism and professional learning community theories respectively.

Stoll (2004) and Hargadon (2009) advise that networking is a good method of sharing best practice and eliminating isolation both at school level and externally. Stoll (2004) further suggests networking as 'loose, borderless and flexible' efficient way of moving good practice and innovation around the system quickly and 'particularly well suited to this era of new technology and rapid change.' School principals are viewed as key role players in professional learning communities. Stoll (2004 p.11) states that 'leadership is another important resource for professional learning communities, both in terms of head teacher/principal commitment and shared leadership.' This author suggests that networks can be a success and a tool for empowerment with the initiative of the school principal who can steer the process of networking both internally and externally. Botha (2004) suggests that professionals should become skillful in the use of a range of communication networks and information technology to support teaching and learning and gain access to current information which informs professional practice. Smith and Tamez (2006) suggest that cross - district seminars which enhance professional learning can occur through networking across the districts.

However, school principals have not reached a level of development where they understand that they should also take the initiative where professional development is concerned. The system is so bureaucratic that school principals are still stuck in the paradigm of inertia of being led and depending on external top-down prescripts. Location of schools is one major factor which has been found to inhibit networking in the study. Schools in the Eastern Cape are mainly rural and access, whether physical and online may be challenging in some schools. Gardiner (2008) states that the issue of rurality poses a challenge of development in some areas. What has also transpired from the study is that the narrow-scale communication and networking only occurs among some junior secondary schools. There is apparently rare communication among high schools for professional development purposes. The only time when high schools meet is when they audit continuous assessment tasks prescribed nationally. There is not enough time used to share expertise for curriculum management and implementation. One could therefore attribute disparities in Grade 12 learner performance to the practice whereby expertise in terms of leadership and curriculum management is hardly shared. Cross-district networking among school principals is out of question currently because networking is hardly formally practiced even within the districts.

#### 4.2.2.2. Designers of programmes and initiators of leadership training

The participants were asked as to who the designers of programmes and initiators of leadership training were. They made the following responses:

*“Well for induction it is the department, it is our district. Perhaps one or two circuit managers will meet and decide to invite principals in their circuit.”* (Mr Mile)

*“The EDO organises a circuit meeting. He will bring some pamphlets to share, to see how we can do things. Maybe he will invite one of his colleagues to help him talk to us in a circuit meeting on leave, curriculum issues, IQMS, how to manage the school... .”* (Mrs Silas)

*“Mr X (the EDO) who comes up with these ideas. He is the one who initiates these things. Principals follow the circuit manager. Principals have accepted this. If they have a problem they go to him.”* (Mr Topo)

Knowles (1984) in andragogy theory and West-Burnham (2009) in professional learning community theory both promulgate self-directed approach to learning. These authors further argue that learning for adults should be an effort wherein adults take responsibility for decisions.

However, the observations made are that school principals do not take any initiative in designing programmes for their professional development. The participants seem to have accepted the practice of their lack of involvement in initiating professional development and capacity building strategies with a suppressed concern.

This is how one participant commented:

*“It is a great challenge, great challenge. I mean being asked to attend a forum or a meeting and there you are being informed without you contributing does not mean anything. You end up not even listening to what is being said. But if you are given a chance you get a chance to voice something that the department itself does not even know.”* (Mr Topo)

It is evident that participants envisage a situation wherein they also play an active role in their professional development. School principals want their voice to be heard. School principals need to be recognized as centripetal/ pivotal active role players with some input in matters of their professional development. They are the ones who are hands-on, they have something to give from ‘experience’. School principals need to have professional development strategies ‘worked out with them’ not ‘worked out for them’ by other parties.

Helsing and Lemons (2008) have realized the need for continuous professional development of school leaders in order to cope with the multiple leadership and management demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These authors have worked with the Hawaiian educators to indicate the positive impact of leadership practice communities (LPC’s) on improvement of professional development. They designed this programme to encourage school and district leaders to cooperate in supporting, participants’ professional capacity. According to these authors professional development should be on-site, intensive, collaborative and job-embedded. These key elements of professional development suggest that school principals themselves should also take the initiative of improving their professional practice. However the current practice shows that there is hardly time allocated to on-site, intensive collaborative and job embedded professional development of school principals. The question is who initiates this intensive collaboration and on-site professional development when some school principals have been socialised into submissiveness and lack of assertiveness?

#### **4.2.2.3 School principals’ contribution to learning in a PLC**

The participants were asked whether school principals contributed to learning in a PLC. They concurred that they did contribute but were always limited to the agenda proposed by the education development officer (EDO). They also alluded to the fact that their contributions were stifled by the bureaucratic top-down prescriptive approach in the meetings.

*“Yes I do. I do participate when called upon to do so. If it is in a meeting and there seems to be a problem and I have a solution or perhaps I perceive to understand better than others, I normally take over to assist if they are game with that.” (Mr Mile)*

*“I would say I have contributed to the learning of other principals. For an example last year we had a fincom workshop where we were discussing how to run the finances. I happened to know how, so I conducted the workshop. It was the circuit manager, myself and two other principals.” (Mr Topo)*

*“When meetings are called, which are called circuit meetings, I do participate. I try to help others come to terms with especially the programme of the day... We normally come when there are notices... changes in approaches. During that time I do participate.” (Mr Dani)*

Knowles (1984) argues that one of the basic tenets of andragogy is that adults view the process of learning as a problem-solving technique. The comments made by the participants are a clear evidence of how school principals apply this problem-solving technique to assist one another to learn in the PLC meetings. However, contribution by school principals is minimal. Their potential to generate ideas is underutilized. Limited contribution and participation in PLC meetings as revealed by participants in this study inhibit information sharing for professional development among school principals. Fullan (2002) maintains that creating and sharing knowledge is central to effective leadership. According to this author it is for this reason that relationships and professional learning communities (PLC's) become essential. Fullan (2002) further asserts that sharing one's knowledge is key to continual growth for all. This implies that PLC's should be used as spaces for knowledge and information sharing among school principals. The implication one gets is that knowledge obtained and shared among others for developmental purposes is more useful than knowledge obtained and kept to oneself. Therefore knowledge should be kinetic, co-created and transmitted than kept potential within one person.

Time and duration of meetings lead to poor involvement of school principals in PLC meetings and discussions with subsequent negative impact on information sharing. Meetings are occasional and seldom, held usually once a year. This has been confirmed by the minutes of circuit X wherein minutes are captured once and rarely twice a year. The nature of the PLC meeting is another negative factor to professional development of school principals. The meetings are used mainly for announcements on documents needed by the Department of Education (DoE). Therefore, there should be a change in the conceptualisation and nature of circuit meetings as PLC's if professional development is to be realised and optimised.



The size of PLC's is another challenge, because when many people are gathered there is no follow-up or feedback on changes in practice. The issue of reducing the number of school principals who should ideally form a PLC for effective professional development needs to be considered.

#### **4.2.2.4 Becoming a reflective school principal after participation in PLC meetings**

The participants were asked to comment on whether their participation in PLC meetings had rendered them more reflective as school principals and impacted on their practice. The responses indicate less impact. Some participants commented as follows:

*“No! No! I can't say that because I come back with stress when I return from those meetings because you are told to do this and that. ” (Mrs Silas)*

*“...other than being conscientised about deadlines, meeting deadlines for this and that, honestly I cannot say I am always a better person when I come out of these sessions. I come to school with a number of deadlines. Deadline for this and deadline for that. It's all about deadlines. I cannot attribute whatever I have learnt so far to these meetings because they do not necessarily tackle challenges that we have. We are called to be cautioned about how the policy should go in relation to certain matters. So it is just a matter of policy, policy, policy.” (Mr Mile)*

Critical reflection by adult learners is viewed as a crucial element by Kolb (1984) and Moon (2004) in experiential learning theory. It is important that adults reflect on their practice so that they can learn from their mistakes, improve and be on top of the game Hord (2004). Unfortunately, in this study, participants revealed that there is no time for reflection in the PLC meetings. Lack of reflection is also confirmed by the minutes of previously held meetings where there is no trace of reflective discourse.

In the literature I reviewed, studies conducted by Piggot-Irvine (2004) among school principals in New Zealand, critical reflection and collaborative dialogue proved impacting positively on effective professional development for school principals. School principals critically reflected on their leadership practice and collaboratively shared information. Critical reflection led to keeping reflective portfolios by school principals. Studies conducted by Chikoko, Naicker and Mthiyane (2011) also reveal that portfolios are a concrete tool on which reflection can be based, and therein documented and subsequent leadership development for professional practice be initiated.

Reflection and dialogue was based on literature and practice. This implies that reflection and collaborative dialogue is grounded and informed and its application relates to practice and context. Spanneut (2010) recommends that in PLC's principals have opportunities to play key roles in establishing the conditions within which PLCs can flourish. They can do this by creating the time for such dialogue to occur; open sharing among principals' ongoing conversations.

In the South African context, particularly in remote areas where school principals lack information and skills, they may not have anything to share except moan about challenges hoping that someone must come and rescue them. This situation could emanate from the common understanding and practice that PLC meetings are spaces for professional development through the cascade model whereby EDO's and perhaps a school principal who has received training in a special area disseminates information to other school principals. Reflection on practice is given dismal attention. Insufficient time is allocated for PLC's in terms of duration and frequency. This issue of time for PLC meetings needs attention and improvement so that reflective discourse can be undertaken by school principals. Portfolios can be used as documented and visual evidence to support reflective conversations. Time should be improved both in terms of duration and regularity of PLC meetings for all these things to happen.

### **4.2.3. SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' EXPERIENCES OF THEIR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN A PLC**

#### **4.2.3.1. Professional skills development in a PLC**

The participants were asked to share their experiences of their professional development in a PLC. They all concurred that there was no elaborate training offered and not many professional skills received during PLC meetings.

The following comments were made by participants:

*"There is no training, we only meet and discuss what is on the agenda."* (Mrs Mano)

*"...most of the time we are just addressed as principals of the district. We are told the department needs this. Take this and fill it and bring it back. It is said you must do this, and do this and do that."* (Mrs Silas)

The literature I reviewed state that professional learning communities should be spaces which imbue its members with envisioning, sharing and collaborative skills (Hord & Sommers, 2008); (West-Burnham, 2009); (Piggot-Irvine, 2004); (Mullen, 2010) and (Spanneut, 2010).

However, the study reveals that school principals are aware of the skills gap, but are unfortunately not in a position to distinguish the skills they need in order to run the schools efficiently and effectively. Even those who mentioned leadership and management as some essential skills could not elaborate on these skills. Botha (2004) maintains that the significant and essential skills for a school principal are leadership and management skills. This author advises that school principals should be able to work with and through other people. This implies that school principals should be able to apply persuasive influential skills to have all staff members (academic and non-academic support) execute their duties while the school principal also actively executes his/her duties. Botha (2004) further states that the school principal should understand that there are both human and material resources at his/her disposal. The implication is that school principals should have the professional skill to balance their acts by optimum utilisation of both human and material resources. Professional dovetailing skill of a school principal is essential for effective leadership and management. Specifically put these leadership skills are educational, transformational, facilitative, instructional and distributive leadership skills. Management skills on the other hand are human and material resource management skills.

Fullan (2002) puts emphasis on instructional leadership skills as vital for the learning and improved performance of students. According to Fullan (2002) school principals should participate in systemic improvement whereby school principals should be morally obliged to improve student performance in their schools and other schools within their district and other districts. A school principal should be a cultural change principal who learns to develop himself and other school principals to close the gap between high performing and low performing schools.

Senge (1990) concurs with Fullan (2002) on the idea of learning together as a bigger learning organisation. Senge (1990) refers to this as systems thinking. This is a way of thinking about and a language for describing interrelationships that shape the behaviour of systems such as schools. They help us to see our schools from a 'big picture' perspective that recognises how our individual actions affect everyone else. Hargreaves (2008) defines PLC's as educational leaders working together to improve teaching and learning within specific districts.

Therefore, in line with Fullan (2002) and Senge (1990) PLC's may be used as spaces for school principals' professional development and dialogic discourse. School principals should not perceive themselves limited to their schools but to the bigger picture of a PLC, sharing ideas and concerned with the improvement of his/her immediate school and other schools within the district.

However, the district ranking of schools according high performing and low performing schools entrenches competition among school principals and nullifies the whole idea of sharing and collaboration. School principals whose schools are already performing well may not be willing to share strategies that they use to be successful. The change in mindset and attitude from competition to collaboration and cooperation among school principals can assist in enhancing 'systemic change' patterns within PLC's. School principals particularly in the South African context are still trapped in the docile mode and fear of those in authority. When school principals meet in the presence of an EDO, they may expect hand-outs in the form of information. Some school principals are not assertive enough to display willingness to participate actively and share information.

#### **4.2.3.2. Role of senior principals in professional development of novice principals in a PLC**

Participants were asked about the role played by senior principals towards professional development of novice school principals. Their responses indicate that there is always room for improvement in professional development. Sharing ideas contribute a lot to one's professional development whether he/she is a seasoned school principal or novice. The following comments to this effect were made:

*"Yes we do have that although as I have indicated earlier, it is not policy. It is not institutionalised. It is something like that if I feel that I am a novice I go out of my own volition, I meet them, we discuss problems. They gain something from me being a novice and I gain something from them. There is professional interaction. If a principal of another school has been there for a longer time with good results, I go out on my own volition to find out what it is that he/she is doing that I am not yet able to do in my institution."* (Mr Mile)

*“Education is something very strange. You can think you know, but when meeting or interacting with other people, you find that I am lacking in that corner and that one and so on. Most of them are knowledgeable particularly during these years of politics. They know how to handle political matters. ”(Mr Major)*

The assistance offered by seasoned school principals to novice principals is voluntary. There is no policy that guides or informs school principals on systemic interaction. What is interesting as revealed in the study is that although the intention of the study was to investigate assistance offered by experienced school principals to novice, some principals claimed to have also gained from novice school principals. Therefore, experience whether short or long, provides learning.

As already indicated Fullan (2002) advises that school principals should participate in systemic improvement whereby school principals should be morally obliged to improve student performance in their schools and other schools within their district and other districts. Therefore school principals have a socio-moral obligation towards professional development of one another. According to experiential learning theory promulgated by Kolb (1984) learning is also experience-driven. Adults bring in their experiences to learning. In line with this theory of learning, school principals can share their experiences to assist one another to learn more about management and leadership issues. According to Trotter (2006) adults are motivated to learn as they experience the needs and challenges. Considering Trotter (2006) ideas, the theory of experiential learning applies when PLC's are used as spaces where school principals jointly generate ideas and strategies to solve leadership and management problems, share expertise and subsequently improve their skills. Unfortunately this area of experience is always overlooked when it comes to issues of professional development. What is mostly upheld is theory based professional development. The rich experiences of school principals are often neglected as resource.

#### **4.2.3.3. PLC as a dialogical space for professional development**

Dialogic discourse of school principals was also found to be stifled. Issues of power and bureaucracy seem to linger over this kind of discourse and negatively impinge on school principals' interactions and innovativeness. School principals do understand that PLC meetings should provide space and platform for their dialogue, but due to bureaucratic and hierarchic control, meetings are mostly controlled by and limited to the prescribed agenda.

*“There is no interaction amongst the principals...The main issue is that we are not allowed to hold meetings as principals alone, in this district. They give us opportunity for questions and clarities on the issues they have raised.”(Mrs Silas)*

*“Circuit meetings are convened by circuit managers. If things were going well, I would be saying we need to know about a meeting a week before it takes place so that we could as principals add items and suggest items to be discussed. These meetings are impromptu in the sense that you get an SMS to say there is a principals’ meeting at ten. We do not get a chance to interact with the agenda. In fact you get the agenda when you attend the meeting such that your input in terms of items on the agenda becomes so limited. So ideally, if meetings were called beforehand and you were called to suggest items on the agenda, then I could be saying principals do have a role.”(Mr Mile)*

*”I think during PLC meetings the principals should be given an opportunity to address the forum. Not only should the circuit manager address the forum. Principals should be given the opportunity to address the forum because they have good ideas. They should be given a chance to address the other principals and they should be given the opportunity to discuss in meetings.” (Mr Topo)*

In the literature I reviewed, Hord (1997) and Lambert (2003) traditionally perceive PLC’s as spaces and formations for continuous inquiry where members share and act on their learning. However, this study revealed that school principals are hardly given time to share expertise but expected to consume information disseminated by the DoE through the EDO’s. One participant has actually indicated that school principals should be given an opportunity to address their colleagues and suggest areas for discussion.

Spanneut (2010) highlights that in PLC’s principals have opportunities to play key roles in establishing the conditions within which their professional development can flourish. This author further advises that school principals can do this by creating time for such dialogue to occur. Conversations among school principals should occur on ongoing basis. According to Senge (1990) dialogue and communication enlivens teamwork. The implications made by these authors is that in PLC meeting school principals should create opportunities to jointly generate ideas and share expertise pertinent to their roles as school principals and their professional development.

The question to pose is how can school principals who have not been trained in communication skills engage in effective communication with congruence? This suggests that communication skills should be developed if school principals are to engage in successful engagements during PLC meetings. School principals should be developed in technological and oral presentation skills.

#### **4.2.3.4. Curriculum discourse in a PLC**

The participants were asked whether issues of curriculum management are discussed during PLC meetings. Their responses were mixed. Some indicated that such discussions were limited and reactive.

*“Well, to a limited extent... mostly we talk management issues unless we are in a forum where the principal is there as a subject teacher.” (Mr Mile)*

*“No, no, no, no, no. It is usually a matter of cautioning school principals: make sure you do not have overdrafts, make sure your account for the funds which have been allocated are well spent, nothing really that has got to do with learning and teaching.” (Mr Dani)*

*“It occurs once a year. It does not occur often. It does not really occur quite often. After the matric results, they start now talking about how to teach, because of the results especially to the feeder schools.”(Mrs Mano)*

Only two participants agreed that these discussions were held regularly and formally.

*“I am chairperson or leader. I call meetings after three months and we revive policies e.g. transfer policies, policies on how we fill posts if we run short of teachers. For example in Mathematics can't we organise a teacher to come from school A to this one. .” (Mr Major)*

*“We discuss learning and performance because at schools we have a problem. Our problem does not only lie with learners, it also lies with teachers. Learners do not perform in most cases because the teachers themselves do not perform. ” (Mr Topo)*

It is unfortunate to state that curriculum issues are not always discussed in PLC meeting. If mentioned it is usually in passing or as a reaction to the high failure rate just after announcement of grade 12 results.

At its core, the concept of a professional learning community rests on the premise of collaborative learning aimed at improving student learning through improving teaching practice, (Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2006). Therefore, it is from this premise of placing emphasis on student learning that the interest on curriculum management discourse by school principals is highlighted. Wright (2008) describes the principal as an instructional leader who, directly and indirectly, influences teaching and learning and the one who should have in-depth knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy to ensure that all students have access to quality teaching and have the opportunity to meet the provincial goals of education. According to Lambert (2003) PLC's should eliminate loneliness to the school principal as an instructional leader.

Curriculum is the core business that brings the school community together and it is performance in the curriculum which is the major concern. Curriculum is the critical area which has direct bearing on the product-quality results which prove whether school principals and staff handle issues professionally. The South African education system is inundated with recent and current changes: Outcomes Based Education (OBE), Curriculum 2005 (C2005), National Curriculum Statements (NCS), Revised National Curriculum Statements RNCS and lately CAPS. According to Jansen (1999), Jansen (2006) and Chisholm (2006) changes in curriculum require great insight as there are socio-political undertones within curriculum change policies. At the intersection of politics and educational policies in South Africa, are the mechanisms to drive curriculum delivery in schools because these curriculum changes should be implemented in schools. At the centre of any school is a school principal who should lead by example. As already indicated, Fullan (2002) advises that school principals should be exemplary as instructional leaders. It is through curriculum management that all other abilities are manifested.

Therefore, school principals should set a good example in curriculum management which ensures that learning and good performance are realised as the ultimate result. In the PLC meetings issues of available funds, learning and teaching support materials (LTSM) procurement and delivery are discussed, but as to how the materials should be used to ensure learning by learners is not specified.

It is here that school principals should develop one another in setting examples as instructional leaders to improve learning and enhance learner performance. School principals should not assign curriculum responsibilities solely to the deputy principals and heads of departments. School principals should dovetail into all school activities with great emphasis on curriculum management and delivery.



The current post provisioning policy according to the Department of Education (1998) regards the school principal as one of the teachers within a school who counts to determine the pupil- teacher ratio. Most school principals were appointed into principalship because of their good teaching record. However, some school principals are overwhelmed by management load that they do not have time to teach. Curriculum management expertise is lost to other duties. The contention I make is that paying less attention to or ignoring curriculum issues in PLC's by school principals is not good practice. Curriculum is the centripetal focus for all stakeholders at school. If the curriculum matters are professionally and efficiently handled, good learner performance can certainly be attained.

#### **4.2.4. LEADERSHIP TRANSFORMATION WITHIN A PLC**

##### **4.2.4.1 Change in leadership practice**

When the participants were asked whether their leadership practice had changed as a result of participation in a PLC, they made the following comments:

*"...I cannot attribute whatever I have learnt so far to these meetings because they do not necessarily tackle challenges that we have. We are called to be cautioned about how the policy should go in relation to certain matters."* (Mr Mile)

*"...there is nothing interesting. Somehow there is just no forum, no platform for people to work collectively But I would imagine if somehow people were to have a platform, because I do not think people are all that short sighted. I think people would somehow share, improve and grow in a PLC."* (Mr Dani)

Professional learning communities should ideally promote visionary, collegial and shared leadership (Hord & Sommers 2008). Wright (2008) regards principals' informative voice as significant in school principals' understanding of leadership and its role on school improvement. However, none of the participants mentioned leadership styles they were aware of, the ones they practiced, the ones they had changed to after reflection and for any other reasons and benefits of change or problems arising from not changing. Some of the participants were using PLC's as a space to maintain the bureaucratic status quo instead of professional development. This may be the reason why schools are still experiencing conflict. School principals, EDO's, teachers, parents and learners still do not perceive themselves as communities but as workers and members within a bureaucratic system.

Policy is used to shut people down. It is a matter of yours is just to stick to policy, without interrogating it or participating in developing it. Spanneut (2010) emphasises collegial conversations between school principals and teachers. School principals should also engage in these collegial conversations. It is however unfortunate that a lot of time is spent on conflict resolution meetings than professional development.

#### **4.2.5. CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN A PLC**

The participants identified a wide range of challenges. They made the following comments;

*“A problem which should be of interest to you as a researcher, in our area teacher unions are kind of weary They don’t like it when principals come together into a an association. They say it is going to create another structure that is going to compete with theirs. ... so such things do stifle professional development of principals in our area.” (Mr Mile)*

*“There was a time that when Union X was formed, it was said that there must be no principals’ meetings. We should not hold principals’ meetings.” (Mrs Silas)*

*“New principals must be capacitated first. It is very difficult to become a principal without having been capacitated. It is said go and be a principal in that school, nothing is done for you. You have not been capacitated, no induction, no mentoring – and worst part is lack of monitoring.” (Mrs Silas)*

Trotter (2006) highlights that adults are motivated to learn as they experience the needs and challenges. It is evident from the comments made by the participants that if PLC’s are used as spaces for their learning, school principals can be better capacitated for their professional roles and they can manage some of the challenges they encounter. One such big challenge school principals seem to encounter is micropolitics resulting from unionism which is fairly new in school politics. There is apparent lack of trust between unions and school principals. This has resulted in conflict and distress. School principals are perceived as authoritarians who always put pressure on subordinate teachers. There is always a tug of war and unions do not seem to give school principals the space they deserve in order to discuss professional development matters.

Unionism is a fairly new concept in the teaching profession and managing it still poses some challenges. Kaabwe (2003) states that unions have brought tension in the workplace. There is always some form of militancy and suspicions towards any one in a leadership position.

Chisholm (2005) also states that unions have emerged as powerful bodies which demanded that their voice be heard in education decision-making. Unions are currently recognised bodies in the education system. DoE should educate and empower schools principals about the legal aspect of handling union matters. I think there should be reciprocal understanding by both unions and school principals that they are parallel structures with different functions and that they should co-exist without infringing on one's space. Conflict and stress management skills should be acquired by schools principals to cope with these challenges.

#### **4.2.6. SOLUTIONS TO CHALLENGES AND ASSISTANCE NEEDED IN A PLC**

The participants were asked to come up with what they viewed as possible solutions in areas where assistance is highly needed.

*“... in my view we do need development...professional development... you are not going to gain anything from your colleagues unless, there is a structure that is geared to develop school principals professionally. Everybody should receive induction... Then that could enhance someone's leadership. Induction should happen at the place of work to enhance someone's leadership skills.”* (Mr Mile)

*“New principals must be capacitated first. It is very difficult to become a principal without having been capacitated.”* (Mrs Silas)

*“I think during PLC meetings, the principals should be given an opportunity to address the forum. Not only the circuit manager should address the forum. They should be given a chance to address the other principals and they should be given the opportunity to discuss in meetings...”* (Mr Topo)

*“An area which I think I would emphasise is where school principals on an ongoing basis come together at the beginning of each year to plan as a PLC and see challenges and even invite the people in the department who are knowledgeable in some specific areas ...”* (Mr Dani)

Hord (2004) and Lambert (2003) traditionally perceive PLC's as spaces and formations for collective deliberation on solutions to challenges experienced by members. Participants' comments and suggestions regarding challenges and assistance needed are mixed. Some concur with Hord (2004) and West-Burnham (2009) stating that they should also be given an opportunity to air their views and share experiences. Some school principals believe that they are not in a position to develop one another. What transpires is that sharing best practice and expertise and collegiality should be encouraged. School principals should know various theories that inform leadership and management. Issues of strategic planning among school principals should be encouraged.

### **4.3 SUMMARY**

In this chapter I have presented data, analysed and discussed the findings in relation to professional development of school principals within a PLC. The findings revealed that there are gaps in professional development of school principals. The findings also reveal that professional development of school principals is a complex process which involves obtaining special qualifications for principalship pre-service as well as continuous professional development in-service.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous Chapter dealt with the data presentation, analysis and findings. In this chapter I commence by presenting a summary of the study. Thereafter, I present the conclusions of the study linked to my key research questions, namely:

- What are the methods through which school principals are trained and continuously developed in a professional learning community?
- What are the school principals' experiences of their professional development within a professional learning community?
- How do school principals' leadership and management practice change as a result of participation in professional learning community?

Based on the findings, recommendations are made for the Officials of the Department of Basic Education and school principals. In order to bring this Chapter to a close, I dwell on some suggestions for future research.

#### 5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The study was divided into five chapters.

In **Chapter One** I introduced my study. I motivated and gave the background and rationale for the study by providing a profile of the current school principals and presenting the context that spoke to the need for professional development and community learning among school principals I also explained the aim of the study which was to determine the methods employed in the PLC to develop school principals, to explore experiences of school principals of their professional development within a PLC and the impact of learning from PLC on leadership and management by school principals. In the rest of the chapter, I briefly explained the key research questions, terms pertinent to the study, literature reviewed, theoretical frameworks, research design and methodology.

In **Chapter Two**, I presented literature reviewed in relation to the study. I began with definition of key terms pertinent to the study. The pertinent terms that I defined were professional development and professional learning communities. I further explained theoretical underpinnings to the study. I also illustrated how in studies conducted internationally, PLC's were portrayed as significant spaces for professional development. Adult learning theories were also considered to be suitable for the study because school principals are adults who learn for professional development. I elaborated on andragogy, experiential learning theory and social constructivism. I illustrated how these theories provided frameworks and related to the professional development of school principals within a PLC. I also discussed various methods of professional development employed to develop school principals. Specific methods reviewed were the traditional model, craft model, reflective model, workshop model, cascade model, mentoring and induction. The aim was to explore the benefits and challenges of each method so that I could use these methods as a foil for professional development of school principals in my study.

In **Chapter Three** I presented the research design and methodology of the study. This chapter focused on six key areas pertinent to the research design of the study. These key areas were paradigmatic positioning of the study; description of the research design and methodology; data collection and research instruments; description of target population and sampling, ethical considerations and lastly limitations of the study.

In **Chapter Four** I presented data used in the study, analysis of data and discussion of findings. The findings showed that there is a huge professional development gap among school principals. School principals were also partially aware of the methods which can be used to develop them professionally. Leadership and management were approached reactively and from experience-as-you-practice perspective. There were no clear guidelines as to how school principals could support themselves to develop professionally.

### **5.3 CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY**

The conclusions are presented around each research question.

#### **5.3.1 CONCLUSIONS IN RELATION TO THE METHODS EMPLOYED TO DEVELOP SCHOOL PRINCIPALS PROFESSIONALLY WITHIN A PLC**

Professional development of school principals within a PLC was not structured, not well defined and not institutionalised. Methods were not explicitly explained for school principals so that they could understand these methods, their benefits and challenges so that these could be applied with informed minds. Mentoring, induction, coaching, networking were generic and happened partially only during PLC meetings. Therefore, these methods did not address specific contextual needs of particular school principals. There was neither coaching nor induction of the newly appointed school principal neither by the outgoing principal nor the EDO. There was always a vacuum between the period of departure of an outgoing principal and assumption by an assuming incumbent. There is no clear policy as to how the outgoing principal should formally hand-over to the newly appointed principal and that is where induction on-site and craft modelling which is suggested by Fenwick and Pierce (2002) lack. According to Pierce and Fenwick (2002) in craft modelling, the inexperienced school principal observes as the other one operates in his/her school to gain professional know-how.

Unfortunately this does not happen in the South African context. The current approach to professional advice to school principals is reactive and sporadic. It is reactive in the sense that advice is given as a corrective measure for something that has not been well handled by the school principal. Formalisation and institutionalisation of models of professional development of school principals to suit specific contexts does not occur. There is lack of explicit definitions of the models followed to professionally develop school principals. School principals are not even aware of the essential features of a PLC which are shared values; focus on student performance; reflective dialogue; collaboration and support according to Newman (1996) and Hord (2004). The lack of clarity and insight regarding models and methods used results in PLC's being spaces where there is lack of direction and school principals are also not sure as to what models or methods of professional development they are following during a PLC. Instead of meeting and cooperating as a team within a PLC, school principals simply gather as a group that expects directions from the DoE.

### **5.3.2 CONCLUSIONS IN RELATION TO THE EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND THEIR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PLC'S**

The current operational trends in PLC's do not offer school principals the opportunity to learn as a team or community and professionally develop one another. The PLC's are still used as spaces to maintain the bureaucratic status quo with district officials still disseminating directives from the central office. Policy is also used to maintain bureaucracy. Calls from below in the form of school principals' voices are hardly heard. School principals experience and understand PLC meetings as forums where they are mere consumers of policy documents and deadlines that they must meet. School principals are not offered space to apply their experience for collective construction of knowledge. School principals are not offered an opportunity for proactive creativity and initiative. School principals are not even aware of the fact that as a circuit community they are a professional learning community.

### **5.3.3 CONCLUSIONS IN RELATION TO THE IMPACT ON LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT PRACTICE WITH EMPHASIS ON STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE**

Professional development of school principals is integral to effective leadership and management. This in turn will translate schools into places of learning, heightened performance by all stakeholders and quality school products (excellent students). However, the majority of school principals still lack the essential knowledge, information, skills and expertise in leadership and management required in order for them to be competent school principals. School principals could not differentiate between leadership and management as concepts, let alone illustrating how they applied these concepts in their schools. School principals could not even mention theories that guide them in leadership and management. There was still a selective and partial view as far as areas of competence for school principals are concerned. Emphasis was placed on managerial aspects like putting up structures such as various committees but school principals were not capacitated on the skills to form such committees. Hardly anything regarding student performance is said in PLC's. Curriculum management techniques and instructional leadership skills are overlooked in PLC's. Sharing curriculum management expertise, human resource in specialised areas and best practice are seldom strategically planned and discussed in these meetings. School principals seem to exclude themselves from matters of curriculum management and delivery.



Issues of learner performance are not regarded as the prime reason for existence of schools. A reactive stance is taken because comments on learner performance are only done once just after the announcement of matric results. In this regard, school principals' attitudes, norms and abilities need to be developed. School principals tend to distance themselves from issues of curriculum delivery and management. They regard the other staff members as the people responsible for the core business which is teaching and learning. Although Fullan (2002) advises that school principals should be exemplary instructional leaders, the favourable perception by school principals is that they should lead by authority and influence instead of example. Some school principals do not want to display their expertise in curriculum matters. Were they not trained as subject specialists when they were appointed as teachers before becoming school principals? According to the post provisioning norms (PPN) school principals are also counted when the teacher pupil ratio is determined. Therefore, the issue of curriculum management also directly affects school principals and should get more attention in PLC meeting.

## **5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The context in which the South African education system operates and within which school principals operate is subjected to accelerated changes. Therefore professional development of school principals needs to continuously evolve in order to meet the demands of the accelerated changes. It is in the light of the accelerated professional development of school principals that the following recommendations in relation to the key questions are made.

### **5.4.1 RECOMMENDATIONS IN RELATION TO THE METHODS EMPLOYED TO DEVELOP SCHOOL PRINCIPALS PROFESSIONALLY WITHIN A PLC**

The findings revealed that methods and models for in-service professional development of school principals were not clearly spelt out and formally explained. In order to remedy the situation, the following recommendations are made:

- The DoE should explicitly articulate the institutionalization and formalisation of models and methods that should be used for in-service professional development of school principals.
- Before mentoring occurs, criteria for the selection of mentors should be clearly spelt by both officials of the DoE, school principals and other stakeholders.

The mentors should be both practising and retired school principals and other educational leaders who are credible people of integrity. Mentors should also have a proven impeccable track record before being earmarked for mentoring, because some school principals and educational leaders may have a long service but not a good track record and therefore, no developmental guidance to offer the mentee. School principals should be encouraged by the DoE, through guidance by the EDO's and SA's to attach themselves to mentors who meet specified criteria. Mentoring should not only be partially mentioned but should be viewed as a practicable method for professional development in service.

- An overarching and proactive approach should be adopted through integration and intensification of models and methods of professional development of school principals to cover a wide range of cross cutting areas, skills and knowledge for holistic and well-rounded professional development. All possible areas of practice should always be continuously discussed in PLC meetings so that crises like conflict emanating from reactive and hard approach to human resource management in schools; misappropriation of school funds; poor curriculum management in schools; to name but a few, can be avoided. This approach should be inclusive of models and methods that can be integrated which are among others, induction; mentoring; networking; craft model and reflective model. Integration can be applied by optimum exposure to all methods and intensification implies regular and long duration of meetings for follow ups and reflective evaluations and reviews. Officials of the DoE and school principals of both GET and FET bands should be involved in these processes. The professional development programme should not be fixed, but open-ended and dynamic and substantially content laden and explore various delivery modes and methods to suit various contexts.

#### **5.4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS IN RELATION TO THE EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND THEIR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PLC'S**

The findings revealed that school principals did not have enriching experiences of the PLC. The school principals felt like strangers in their own territory.

- School principals should be formally given space by the district officials to experience the PLC as a space where they are not peripheral but major participants, who have a space to articulate their concerns and challenges and jointly generate ideas as to how such challenges may be addressed in short and long-term.

The district officials should conscientise school principals about the fact that they are an essential local supportive base and an asset to one another as members of a PLC. They are a non-hierarchical inclusive leadership body.

- School principals should experience the PLC as their creation where there is consultation and consensus on issues to discuss, standards of performance and criteria for success. This will foster ownership, change and professional development.
- Frequent PLC meetings with manageable numbers of six to ten should be experienced by principals. PLC meetings should be regular in order to cover all the necessary aspects of professional development, create space for annual strategic planning and have time for frank dialogue and supportive advice. PLC operations should not be *ad hoc*, but strategically well planned, implemented and evaluated.
- School principals should be involved as major participants in the PLC. The DoE should conscientise school principals about the fact that they are an essential local supportive base and an asset to one another as members of a PLC.
- District officials and school principals should complement one another on matters of professional development of school principals. The top-down and bottom-up approaches to management and leadership should meet and find a common ground so that policy making and practice can be informed by inputs from all levels of stakeholders.
- Professional development programmes should be purposeful and research based. The elements of a PLC as theoretically grounded should be explained in advance. Professional learning community as a structure to be used for continued professional development of school principals should be clearly explained to the school principals so that the essence of a PLC is understood. Clear objectives of a PLC as a structure should be set to give the structure purpose and meaning. This will eliminate the problem of establishing symbolic structures which exist but do not meet their objectives because those involved in it are not clear about the essential elements, purpose and the mode of delivery to suit the context. Of course other elements of a PLC can be added or eradicated to customise the PLC structure for a given context.

### **5.4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS IN RELATION TO LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT PRACTICE WITH EMPHASIS ON STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE**

The findings revealed that leadership and management practice of school principals had not reached the ideal standards in schools. Some school principals were still stuck in the traditional authoritarian forms of leadership and management which have a negative ripple effect on student performance, hence the outcry about poor student performance earlier explained.

- Benefits of shared leadership should be highlighted by the district officials so that school principals will realise the importance of team work and vibrant co-operation among team members at any level of leadership and management.
- The DoE should encourage school principals to affiliate with institutions of higher learning so that their development will be based on experience, expertise and action research. This will result in a positive blend between theory and practice which will inform leadership and management.
- A compulsory intensive pre-service qualification programme is essential and should be undergone before one is appointed.
- A professional learning community should place emphasis on leadership and management skills. The skills wherein school principals should be developed can be specified as strategic planning skills, innovative skills, creative skills, reflective skills, facilitative skills, technological skills for networking and information management, knowledge of leadership and management aspects, and values. There should be integration of professional skills and higher order values. The higher order values that could be inculcated are aspirational values, operational and moral values, norms, standards.
- Annual critical evaluation and performance review of school principals within a PLC, critical examination and analysis of each PLC member's performance, will ensure that there is no room for complacency. School principals should depart from competition to collaboration. Reflective portfolios which are annually evaluated should be kept by school principals to continuously review their leadership and management practice and development.

## **5.5 LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The study covered a very small area with only six participants. It also covered only rural schools which had previously been disadvantaged and had poor results in terms of overall pass percentage and quality. One does not know what happens to school principals of better performing school like ex-Model C schools. Time and financial constraints limited me from expanding the study over a wider area for a macroscopic view of what is happening in the other parts of the Eastern Cape and South Africa generally in relation to professional development of school principals. Therefore the study does not meet criteria for generalisations. I suggest that future research be a comparative study to investigate how PLC's in other provinces professionally develop school principals. Such research if it covers a wide scope could provide richness of experience and insights into the complex and multifaceted nature of professional development of school principals.

## **5.6 CONCLUSION**

The study set out to investigate the extent to which school principals are developed professionally by participating in a PLC. Through the study of one PLC, it was established that although the PLC exists as a structure, its potential to develop school principals professionally was not optimally exploited. This also implies that the existence of a structure and its effectiveness are separate issues which should not be taken for granted. This professional learning community exists as a structure but its effectiveness is yet to be seen, because there is still a lot of room for improvement in the professional development of school principals. The study established that there was a still a lot that was not happening which should be happening within a PLC. Be that as it may, PLC's should still be embraced by school principals, as forums where at the confluence of diverse views is the notion of collaboration and joint effort for professional development and capacity building which should translate into action and subsequent tangible results manifested in effective school leadership; school management and quality learner performance across the grades of any school.

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**APPENDIX: A**

**LETTER TO THE DISTRICT EDUCATION OFFICE REQUESTING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH.**

82 Rockdale Avenue

Berea West

Westville

3629

31 July 2011

The District Director

Department of Education

Maluti District

Matatiele

4730

Eastern Cape

Dear Sir

re: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN LETSEMA CIRCUIT MALUTI DISTRICT

I am registered as a Masters student in the school of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood Campus in the current academic year. The programme is a two year degree which involves course work and dissertation. I humbly request that you grant me permission to undertake research in your district in Letsema Circuit during September and October 2011.

The dissertation would entail undertaking research in the area of management. My topic is:

**A case study of the professional development of school principals in a professional learning community in the Eastern Cape.**

The objective of the study is to develop a better understanding as to how continuous professional development of school principals occurs in this area of the Eastern Cape.



It is also to contribute towards the knowledge related to the development of school principals. The study will involve interviews and document analysis in the form of minutes taken during circuit meetings. It is envisaged that the participants will be three principals of high schools and three principals of junior secondary schools. Gender and age variation will be considered when selecting participants.

Participation in the study is voluntary. A participant is at liberty to withdraw from participating at any stage and for any reason. Participants will remain anonymous and the information gathered will be treated with confidentiality.

I hope that the results from this study will benefit school principals and education officers in establishing and maintaining continuous professional development of school principals so that they can be well competent to lead and manage schools efficiently and effectively.

If you have any concern about the study, please contact my supervisor whose contact details are provided below.

Thank you for giving attention to my request.

Yours faithfully

**SUPERVISOR'S DETAILS**

M.M. Ntengwane

Doctor I. Naicker

(Student no. 901357110)

Educational Leadership Management and Policy

Tel. No: 083-7416062

University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood

E-mail: mabente1@gmail.com

Tel. No: 031-2603461/031-2603499

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR THE DISTRICT DIRECTOR**

I.....(print names) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the focus of the research study. The researcher has fully explained to me the purpose and nature of the study. She has also given me opportunity to ask questions when I needed clarity on issues pertaining to the study. I therefore grant permission for the research to be conducted at schools in Maluti district.

Signature: .....

Date: .....

**APPENDIX: B**

**LETTER TO THE EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT OFFICER REQUESTING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH.**

82 Rockdale Avenue

Berea West

Westville

3629

31 July 2011

The Education Development Officer (EDO)

Department of Education

Maluti District

Matatiele

4730

Eastern Cape

Dear Sir

re: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN LETSEMA CIRCUIT MALUTI DISTRICT

I am registered as a Masters student in the school of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood Campus in the current academic year. The programme is a two year degree which involves course work and dissertation. I humbly request that you grant me permission to undertake research in your circuit, during September and October 2011.

The dissertation would entail undertaking research in the area of management. My topic is:

**A case study of the professional development of school principals in a professional learning community in the Eastern Cape.**

The objective of the study is to develop a better understanding as to how continuous professional development of school principals occurs in this area of the Eastern Cape. It is also to contribute towards the knowledge related to the development of school principals.

The study will involve interviews and document analysis in the form of minutes taken during circuit meetings. It is envisaged that the participants will be three principals of high schools and three principals of junior secondary schools. Gender and age variation will be considered when selecting participants. I also request access to the minutes captured during the meetings of your circuit school principals.

Participation in the study is voluntary. A participant is at liberty to withdraw from participating at any stage and for any reason. Participants will remain anonymous and the information gathered will be treated with confidentiality.

I hope that the results from this study will benefit school principals and education officers in establishing and maintaining continuous professional development of school principals so that they can be well competent to lead and manage schools efficiently and effectively.

If you have any concern about the study, please contact my supervisor whose contact details are provided below.

Thank you for giving attention to my request.

Yours faithfully

**SUPERVISOR'S DETAILS**

M.M. Ntengwane

Doctor I. Naicker

(Student no. 901357110)

Educational Leadership Management and Policy

Tel. No: 083-7416062

University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood

E-mail: mabente1@gmail.com

Tel. No: 031-2603461/031-2603499

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR THE EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT OFFICER**

I.....(print names) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the focus of the research study. The researcher has fully explained to me the purpose and nature of the study. She has also given me opportunity to ask questions when I needed clarity on issues pertaining to the study. I therefore grant permission for the research to be conducted at schools in Maluti district. I also agree to release minutes of previously held meetings to the researcher for document analysis.

Signature: .....

Date: .....

**APPENDIX: C PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

**APPENDIX: D**

**INFORMED CONSENT LETTER REQUESTING PARTICIPATION BY THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN THE STUDY.**

82 Rockdale Avenue

Berea West

Westville

3629

31 August 2011

The School Principal

.....

Maluti District

Matatiele

4730

Eastern Cape

Sir/ Madam

**REQUEST FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH**

I am registered as a Masters student in the school of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood Campus in the current academic year. The programme is a two year degree which involves course work and dissertation. The dissertation would entail undertaking research in the area of management. My topic is: **A case study of the professional development of school principals in a professional learning community in the Eastern Cape.** The objective of the study is to develop a better understanding as to how continuous professional development of school principals occurs in this area of the Eastern Cape. It is also to contribute towards the knowledge related to the development of school principals.

I humbly request your participation in the study during September and October 2011. I need to interview you for approximately thirty minutes. You are not compelled to participate in the study.

Your participation will however be highly appreciated because the answers you provide will shed light on how professional development of school principals occurs in a professional learning community. The interview questions will be semi-structured to allow some flexibility. You are at liberty to withdraw from participating at any stage and for any reason. Confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured by not revealing your actual names in the research report.

I hope that the results from this study will benefit you as a school principal and education officers in establishing and maintaining continuous professional development of school principals so that you can be well competent to lead and manage schools efficiently and effectively. I also request that you indicate your response to the request by filling and signing the informed consent form below.

I hope that you will consider my request favourably. I look forward to your reply and thank you for your time and consideration.

If you have any concern about the study, please contact my supervisor whose contact details are provided below.

Yours faithfully

M.M. Ntengwane

(Student no. 901357110)

Tel. No: 083-7416062

E-mail: mabente1@gmail.com

**SUPERVISOR'S DETAILS**

Doctor I. Naicker

Educational Leadership Management and Policy

University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood

Tel. No: 031-2603461/031-2603499



**INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR THE PARTICIPANT SCHOOL PRINCIPAL**

I.....(print names) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the focus of the research study. The researcher has fully explained to me the purpose and nature of the study. She has also given me opportunity to ask questions when I needed clarity on issues pertaining to the study. I am fully aware that participation in the study is voluntary. I have understood everything that has been explained by the researcher to me.

I consent/ do not consent to participate in the interview. (Place a tick on the selected option)

Signature: .....

Date: .....

**APPENDIX: E**

**INFORMED CONSENT LETTER REQUESTING PARTICIPATION BY THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN THE PILOT SESSION FOR THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE.**

82 Rockdale Avenue

Berea West

Westville

3629

30 October 2011

The School Principal

.....

Mpumalanga Township

Hammersdale

3700

Sir/ Madam

**REQUEST FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THE PILOT SESSION OF THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

I am currently enrolled for a Master of Education degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). My research topic is: **A case study of the professional development of school principals in a professional learning community in the Eastern Cape.** I will conduct in-depth interviews and document analysis during the study. I have designed the interview schedule as a tool to interact with the participants. The participants are six principals: three from high schools and three from junior secondary schools.

I therefore humbly request that you participate in the pilot session of the interview schedule. This will assist in eliminating ambiguities and redundancies if there are any. I also request that you indicate your response to the request by filling and signing the informed consent form below. Confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured by not revealing your actual names in the research report.

I hope that you will consider my request favourably. I look forward to your reply and thank you for your time and consideration.

If you have any concern about the study, please contact my supervisor whose contact details are provided below.

Yours faithfully

.....

**SUPERVISOR'S DETAILS**

M.M. Ntengwane

Doctor I. Naicker

(Student no. 901357110)

Educational Leadership Management and Policy

Tel. No: 083-7416062

University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood

E-mail: mabente1@gmail.com

Tel. No: 031-2603461/031-2603499

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE PILOT SESSION FOR THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

I.....(print names) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the focus of the research study. The researcher has fully explained to me the purpose and nature of the study. She has also given me opportunity to ask questions when I needed clarity on issues pertaining to the study. I am fully aware that participation in the pilot study is voluntary. I have understood everything that has been explained by the researcher to me.

I consent/ do not consent to participate in the pilot session of the interview. (Place a tick on the selected option).

Signature: .....

Date: .....

## **APPENDIX: F**

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE PREPARED FOR PARTICIPANT SCHOOL PRINCIPALS.**

#### **SECTION: A**

##### **1. Biographical details of participant school principals:**

- 1.1. **Age:** How old are you?
- 1.2. **Gender:** Are you male or female?
- 1.3. **Qualification/s:** What is your highest qualification?
  
- 1.4. What position/s of leadership within a school did you hold before becoming a school principal?
- 1.5. Is there any special training you have undergone to prepare you for the role of school principal? Explain.
- 1.6. Is there any training and professional development you have undergone after assuming duties as school principal? Explain.

#### **SECTION: B**

##### **School principals' understanding of professional development in a professional learning community:**

##### **2. Professional development of school principals within a professional learning community.**

- 2.1. Explain the methods used to professionally develop you in a professional learning community. (**Probes:** induction, mentoring, coaching, networking, role modelling, reflections, presentations etc).
- 2.2. Who has initiated these methods and tell me why these methods have been initiated? (**Probes:** self, senior or contemporary colleagues, Department of Education).

2.3. How have you as school principal contributed to learning within the circuit community?

**(Probes:** personal learning, inter-personal and peer-learning, critical friendship, cascading information, conducting workshops, mentoring novice principals, presenting papers on topical issues etc.).

2.4. Does participation in the circuit meetings render you reflective and more effective as a school principal? Explain.

**(Probes:** changed and improved handling of issues to be specified by the participant).

### **3. School principals' experiences of their professional development in a professional learning community.**

3.1. Comment on your experiences in the circuit with regard to enhancing the confidence of school principals in a professional learning community.

**(Probes:** skills, knowledge, values, emotional, psychological and social development).

3.2. Explain the role played by senior principals in the professional development of novice principals or vice versa if applicable.

**(Probes:** induction, mentoring, sharing expertise and ideas).

3.3. How does the circuit serve as a forum for dialogic discourse on professional development of school principals?

**(Probes:** collaborative support base, sharing expertise, cascading information).

3.4. Do you consider issues of teaching and student learning during circuit meetings.

(Explain why and how this occurs if ever done).

**(Probes:** discussion of curriculum issues, teaching strategies etc).

3.5. What role do you think school principals should play during circuit meetings? Explain.

**(Probes:** Any form of contribution to professional development, sharing best practice etc).

**4. Leadership transformation of a school principal after participation in a professional learning community:**

4.1. How has participation in a professional learning community impacted on how you lead and manage your school?

**(Probes:** changes in leadership style, understanding leadership and management dynamics).

4.2. Have stakeholders commented on your changed leadership and management style?

Explain the identified changes and mention the stakeholders.

**(Probes:** Department of education, parents, learners and teachers).

**5. General comments by the participant school principal.**

5.1. What comments can you make regarding the current state of affairs within the professional learning community to which you belong?

**(Probes:** challenges - schools still fraught with leadership and management problems possibilities – better skilled workforce, application of professional skills, improved teaching and learning).

5.2. Which areas of professional development of school principals do you suggest should be emphasised during circuit meetings.

**(Probes:** changes in models – from reactive models to proactive models and intensive approach).

*Thank you for your time and co-operation by participating in the interview!!!*

**APPENDIX: G LANGUAGE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**