Schools' perspectives on the creation of professional learning communities: A case study of three primary schools in Pinetown District.

By

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ABSTRACT

Professional learning communities refer to groups of professionals, who collaboratively learn together with an aim of improving their practice and learner performance. A requirement in the creation of professional learning communities (PLCs) is a harmonious working together of the teachers, with the school principals taking full responsibility in the developmental programmes within the school. Taking into cognisance that teams are more effective than individuals, this study explores what school principals do to create professional learning communities in three primary schools in Pinetown District. The objectives of this study were to investigate what schools which have principals who completed Advanced Certificate in Education School Leadership (ACE: SL) Programme are doing regarding the creation of PLCs. This study will also determine what those school principals regard as barriers in the creation of PLCs. Finally, the study will examine how school principals who completed ACE: SL Programme overcome the barriers that they encounter when trying to create or facilitate the creation of PLCs.

The study employed an interpretive qualitative approach with a case study research design. For the purpose of this study, purposive and convenience sampling techniques were used. The study was conducted in three primary schools in Pinetown District of the eThekwini Region. The research participants sampled comprised of three primary school principals who successfully completed ACE: SL programme. Three Heads of Departments (HODs) and three Post Level One (PL1) educators (one per each school) who were willing to participate in the study were also selected. Data was elicited by means of semi-structured interviews. Elicited data was analysed and categorised into themes that emerged. The key findings that emerged from the research were that PLCs have a positive impact on the improvement of teachers' daily practices and learner performance. To ensure the creation and sustainability of PLCs, school principals are expected to be at the forefront, share leadership with School Management Team (SMT), involve teachers in decision making like crafting or reviewing the vision and mission statements of the school and to ensure that every stakeholder understands clearly the purpose of any programme at the school to avoid negativity. School principals can alleviate interpersonal conflicts in schools through talking to the teachers in staff meetings and by encouraging them to collaborate in PLCs. School principals play a vital role in the creation of PLCs and they need to fully participate in such communities without dominating.

DECLARATION

I, Edith Nosipho Bhengu, declare that

(í)   The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise stated, is my original work.

(íí) This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

(ííí) This dissertation does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and passed from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the dissertation and in the references section.

(ív) This dissertation does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:

(a) Their words have been re-written but the general information attributed to them has been referenced;
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(v) Where I have produced a publication of which I am an author, co-author or editor, I have indicated in detail which part of the publication was actually written by myself alone and fully referenced such publications.

Signed: _____   Date: _____

Statement by Supervisor:

This dissertation is submitted with/ without my approval.

Signed: _____   Date: _____

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated:

Firstly, to My Supreme Lord (God Almighty), without whom nothing is possible.

Secondly, to my late parents: Mr T. & Mrs MaKhoza Cele (my mother, who passed on in October 2014), my late siblings especially Simthembile Cele (brother, who passed on in May 2013) and my late daughter Simangalisiwe Bhengu.

Thirdly, to my sister: B. J. Cele for giving me basic tertiary Education.

Fourthly, my family: Mduduzi Bhengu (husband), Siphesihle Bhengu (son), Sindiswa Bhengu (daughter) and Sandisiwe Bhengu (son) for their encouragement, support and unconditional love.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABBREVIATIONS	
PLCs	Professional learning communities
ACE: SL	Advanced certificate in Education (School Leadership)
DoE	Department of Education
HOD	Head of department
SMT	School management team
USA	United States of America
SA	South Africa
GET	General Education and Training
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
SBMs	School business managers
SBDs	School business directors
HIV	Human immuno-deficiency virus
AIDS	Acquired immune deficiency syndrome

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13 May 2014

Mrs Edith Nosipho Bhengu (213571349)
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Protocol reference number: HSS/0393/014M
Project title: School's perspectives on the creation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs): A case study of three primary schools in Pinetown District

Dear Mrs Bhengu,

Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application dated 14 April 2014, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted FULL APPROVAL.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

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

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

Yours faithfully

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Dr TT Bhengu
cc Academic Leader Research: Professor P Morojele
cc School Administrator: Mr Thoba Mthembu

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND AND ORIENTATION TO THIS STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This is a report on a qualitative study that was conducted in three primary schools in Pinetown District. This study seeks to explore school principals' perspectives on the creation of professional learning communities (PLCs). It does not refer to school principals in general but it specifically focuses on those school principals who attended and successfully completed an Advanced Certificate in Education School Leadership (ACE:SL) programme which was offered to aspirant school principals by higher education institutions in conjunction with the Department of Education (DoE) from 2007. The creation of professional learning communities does not occur in a vacuum but involves educators at various levels within a school. It therefore, makes sense to include other stakeholders in the school such as teachers in trying to understand how principals establish PLCs. That is why this study included teachers as participants, they possess invaluable information about how the principals create structures for collective learning and whether he or she offers support to the teachers when developing themselves or not.

This chapter is an orientation to the study, and therefore sets the scene for the discussion of key issues pertinent to the study. It presents the introduction, background, the rationale, the statement of the problem, focus and purpose of the study, the research questions that guided it as well as the significance of the study. Moreover, this chapter presents an explanation of how professional learning communities can be understood, demarcation of the problem and finally, the layout of the study, which clarifies what each chapter of the dissertation entails, is given.

1.2 Background of the study

Mestry, Moonsammy-Koopasammy and Schmidt (2013) postulate that the Education Laws Amendment Act of 2007 (Republic of South Africa, 2007) stipulates that principals are accountable to the Head of Department at provincial sphere of government for the academic performance of their schools. These scholars further affirm that effective leadership from principals improves teaching and learning. Hence; the transition of South Africa (SA) from

apartheid regime to a democratic regime, meant that school principals had to change the way they led and managed schools in the new dispensation (Bush, 2007; Maistry, 2008; Taylor & Fratto, 2012; Steyn, 2013). Furthermore, recent curriculum policy change has necessitated teachers' continual professional development in SA (Maistry, 2008; Lunenburg, 2010). There seems to be an agreement among many scholars and education department officials that school principals should promote life-long learning for all stakeholders through staff development programmes, clustering and creating Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) (Middlewood, Parker & Beere, 2005; Robertson, 2008; Hord, 2009).

According to Christie (2008) and Mohabir (2009), principals are responsible for building organisations where people continually learn new skills in order to nourish their capabilities in order to understand organisation related complexities, clarify the vision and improve shared mental models. Maloney and Konza (2011) share the same sentiment when saying that it is the duty of the schools' principals to encourage the staff to get involved in PLCs.

As leaders and managers, it is important that school principals develop capacities to be able to carry out their duties efficiently and effectively like any other profession. To this end, Harris (2008), Botha (2012), Bhengu, Naicker and Mthiyane (2014) advocate that this fundamental change requires school principals who are knowledgeable and open to distributive roles and responsibilities in order to promote educational improvement. Harris (2008) further asserts that the most effective schools and school systems are the ones that invest in developing the leaders. At times the under-development of leadership capacity makes it difficult for schools to increase their proficiency to facilitate professional learning communities (Botha, 2012). Hence, a number of leadership development programmes have been embarked upon, and these include workshops, seminars and short courses. However, these methods had been criticised by different teachers saying they are not effective as there is no follow up. As a way of addressing this shortcoming, the higher education institutions in conjunction with the Department of Education (DoE) embarked on training principals and aspirant principals on various leadership and management skills (Chikoko, Naicker & Mthiyane, 2011). It was believed that such skills would enable them to transform their schools to institutions where learning among professionals can occur (Chikoko, Naicker & Mthiyane, 2011; Bush, Kiggundu & Moorosi, 2011).

Fullan (2005) argues that the importance of redefining professional development is to create capacity building and a daily habit of collaboration rather than only using learning from

workshops or courses. Emphasising this point, Williams, Brien, Sprague and Sullivan (2008) proclaim that organisational into professional learning communities. Seo and Han (2012) aver that the creation of PLCs could be more difficult in schools since traditionally, tended to work in insulated and isolated environment of their own classrooms. That is why introducing a new culture that will move away from their traditional approach to leadership would be difficult. Andrew and Lewis (2007) emphasise that successful transformation of a school culture into a professional learning community requires a shift from ineffective teaching to outcomes-based learning where teachers reflect on their practice.

1.3 Rationale and motivation for the Study

Having been in the teaching profession for the past 15 years, I have not seen school principals creating any structures and time for teachers or other stakeholders like school governing body (SGB) and helping staff to learn from one another. Instead, I have noted that novice teachers seem to struggle to align themselves with the expected level of teaching. This happens against the backdrop of school management team (SMT) that does not seem to be providing adequate support, for instance by providing mentorship programme for them. Teachers do not share their experiences with one another since such a platform is not created for them by SMT. This scenario tends negatively affect teaching and learning thus poor performance by learners (Hord, 2008; Blackburn & Williamson, 2010). It is believed that if teachers are given time and structures to learn from each other their expertise can increase, resulting in increased learner performance (Hord, 2009; Maloney & Konza, 2011).

The school principal is expected to provide an environment where life-long teaching and learning takes place (Middlewood, Parker and Beere 2005; Robertson, 2008; Christie, 2008; Hord, 2009). It is believed that PLCs and teachers ensure that learners are efficiently learning and this positively influences learners' results (Harris, 2008; Blackburn & Williamson, 2010). Middlewood, Parker and Beere (2005) as well as Bush (2007) argue that success in developing an education fit for the 21ˢᵗ century requires the working in partnership of all stakeholders. Some school principals do not create PLCs. When the Department of Education in conjunction with higher Education institutions introduced Ace School Leadership Programme (ACE: SL) as one of the interventions for capacity building among school principals, the assumption was that school principals would create PLCs in order to ensure lifelong learning among their staff members (Chikoko, et al., 2011; Bush, et al., 2011; Bhengu, Naicker & Mthiyane, 2014). This study therefore focuses on those school principals

who had successfully completed the ACE: SL Programme in order to find out if they facilitate the creation of PLCs in their schools.

I have also observed many changes in education since South Africa (SA) became democratic in 1994. The DoE declared that school leaders are not capacitated therefore suggested a need for institutional capacity building programmes to intervene (Chikoko et al., 2011; Bush, et al., 2011). Mathibe (2007) shares similar sentiments when emphasising that South African principals are not appropriately skilled and trained for managerial and leadership positions. The creation of PLCs would be crucial to improving the quality of learning and teaching (Hord, 2009; Chikoko et al., 2011; Seo & Han, 2012). The DoE promised to build leadership and management capacity among its school-based management teams by first providing structured learning opportunities that it hoped would promote the quality of education in SA schools (Chikoko et al., 2011; Bush, et al., 2011; Steyn, 2014).

The DoE then piloted Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) School Leadership Programme (offered by selected Universities including the University of KwaZulu-Natal since 2007) Chikoko, et al., 2011; Bush, et al., 2011). Such a programme was aimed at empowering school leaders to lead and manage schools effectively in a time of great change, challenge and opportunity (Chikoko, et al., 2011; Bush, et al., 2011). One of the assumptions of the ACE School Leadership Programme was that students who would have been exposed to it would be able to create PLCs in their schools. PLCs promote collaborative work whether in clusters, where teachers learn from one another and for schools to become learning organisations (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006; Harris, 2008). Aims and principles of ACE School Leadership Programme are in line with current literature on collaborative learning (Harris, 2008; 2009; Harris & Jones, 2010). PLCs encourage constructivism by providing the setting and the working relationships demanded of constructivism learning (Stoll, et al., 2006; Harris, 2008; Hord, 2009).

1.4 Statement of the problem

The problem is that some school principals who completed ACE School Leadership Programme did not seem to even know what is happening in their schools regarding teaching and learning. They do not seem to facilitate staff development programmes. They seem to have a problem with transforming their schools to become learning organisations. This research is therefore both timely and worth doing, as it may assist scholars understand the schools' perspectives on the creation of PLCs as it is expected that school principals promote

the creation of such communities. In addition, the fact that my experience tells me that school principals are not doing what is expected of them is not sufficient in that my experience is not research. Therefore an empirical research is still necessary to establish, first if principals are meeting the expectation, secondly to establish the barriers that they encounter when trying to create PLCs and possible strategies to overcome them.

1.5 Focus and purpose of the study

The main focus of this study was to investigate what schools, which had principals who had completed ACE: SL Programme, were doing regarding the creation of PLCs. This study also sought to determine what those school principals regard as barriers in the creation of PLCs. Finally, the study also examined how school principals who had completed ACE: SL Programme did to overcome the barriers that they encountered when trying to create PLCs.

1.6 Research questions

Collectively, this study sought to answer the following critical questions:

- What do school principals who completed ACE: SL Programme do to create professional learning communities?

- What do school principals who completed ACE: SL Programme regard as the barriers to the creation of professional learning communities?

- How do school principals who completed ACE: SL Programme overcome barriers to the creation of professional learning communities?

1.7 Significance of the study

The findings of the study might benefit the school principals in that it may point to arrears that need attention in order for them to better understand the expectation in terms of their roles in the creation of PLCs. The study may also contribute in the generation of knowledge regarding effective creation of PLCs and their benefits on teachers' daily practices and learner achievement.

1.8 Defining key concepts

This section focuses on the definition of key concepts and how they are used in this study.

1.8.1 Professional

According to Hord, (2009) a professional is an individual who is responsible and accountable for delivering an effective instructional programme to the learners so that they can each learn. DuFour, DuFour, Eaker and Many (2006) concur that a professional is someone who has not only undergone training on a specialised field but it is someone who has knowledge and experience and is also expected to continuously develop in order to remain current in their chosen field. A professional refers to an educator engaging in the professional development of their professional practice (Britton, 2010). In this study, the term professional draws from all of the above authors' sentiments to refer to a professional as an individual who has knowledge and experience in a specialised field whose responsibility is to deliver effective instructional programme to the learners so that they learn and who is also willing to learn more in order to enhance practice.

1.8.2 Learning

DuFour, DuFour, Eaker and Many (2006) proclaim that learning is an on-going action and perpetual curiosity. On the same vein, Hord (2009) posits that learning is an activity in which professionals engage in, in order to enhance their expertise. Britton, (2010) further suggests that learning focuses on both the educators and their learners. In this study, learning refers to an on-going action in which professionals engage in for the purpose of enhancing their expertise and student learning.

1.8.3 Community

Hord (2009) contends that a community refers to individuals coming together in a group in order to meaningfully learn from each other through activities that are identified by colleagues and clearly discuss the purpose of each topic. Britton (2010) emphasises that a community is a group of individuals who have a common vision, goals, purpose, and a shared sense of trust as well as collaborative work.

1.8.4 Professional Learning Community

A professional learning community is a group of people who are qualified in a specialised field, who have knowledge and experience who are eager to develop their expertise with an aim of improving their practice which will eventually benefit leaners (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2006; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace & Thomas, 2006; Hord, 2009;

Britton, 2010; Harris & Jones, 2010). Bullough, (2007); Vescio, Ross & Adams, (2008); Sargent & Hannum, (2009) advocate that professional learning communities are environments in which teachers regularly talk to each other about the issues of teaching and learning and share expertise that would improve their daily practices and student learning. Harris and Jones, (2010) elaborate on this by emphasising that in PLCs people share a common interest of developing themselves and driving change and improvement that will eventually benefit learners. For the purpose of this study, I work from the premise that professional learning communities are environments in which teachers talk to each other regularly about issues that concern their practice for the purpose of developing themselves and student performance.

1.9 Demarcation of the problem

This study was conducted in three primary schools in Pinetown District in KwaZulu-Natal. It was acknowledged that participants did not represent the whole population of primary schools principals in Pinetown District. Hence, findings are not generalisable (Yin, 2009). The study was only limited to school principals who completed ACE School Leadership Programme since they were the primary sources of data (Cohen, et al., 2011).

1.10 The structure of the study

This section is an outline of the study on how school principals created PLCs, the barriers they encountered in the process of creating PLCs and the strategies they enacted in trying to overcome those barriers. It is divided into five chapters where each chapter deals with a different aspect of the research process.

Chapter One

This chapter is an overview of the study. It provides a background and an orientation to the study, rationale and motivation for conducting the study. Three research questions that guided the study are also outlined and the significance of the study. Furthermore, this chapter provides an explanation of what PLCs can be understood to be. An overview of the literature that was reviewed in the process of conducting the study, as well as the theoretical framework that underpins this study is also provided.

Chapter Two

This chapter provides a review of literature on current state of knowledge about PLCs and the links that PLCs have on teachers' daily practice and learner performance. The theoretical framework that underpinned the study is presented in this chapter. Furthermore, a critical review of local, national and international literature that is relevant to the research topic was done.

Chapter Three

In this chapter, an explanation of research design, methods and procedures that were followed in carrying out the study and research instruments that were used to elicit data are presented as well as justification for methodological choices.

Chapter Four

This chapter presents and discusses data that was elicited through semi-structured interviews with participants and document analysis.

Chapter Five

This chapter presents a summary of the whole study, a synthesis of the key research findings and the recommendations for future improvements on the creation of PLCs in schools.

1.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented an introduction and an orientation to the study, the background to the study, the rationale, statement of the problem, focus and purpose of the study, research questions and the significance of the study. The concepts professional, learning, communities, professional learning communities were defined and finally the demarcation of the problem was also presented. The next chapter reviews literature on PLCs and the theoretical framework that underpins the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focussed on the background and orientation to the study. In this chapter the focus is on the relevant literature that was reviewed in three geographical spaces: internationally, nationally and locally. First and foremost, the review focussed on the empirical studies on PLCs as well as key elements of effective professional learning communities. Subsequently, the study focuses on the characteristics of school principals who can lead professional learning communities, roles of school principals in the creation of professional learning communities. This is followed by the discussion of the barriers that they encounter, as well as, the strategies they use to overcome those barriers. Furthermore, the chapter will focus on the key issues such as the theoretical framework that underpinned the study which drew on Hord's Five Dimensions of professional learning communities. Finally, a summary of the whole chapter is given.

2.2 Review of related literature

This section focuses on reviewing related literature from local (South Africa), continental (Africa) and international (worldwide) perspectives. The purpose of reviewing literature is to provide some insights about major trends and critical issues relating to professional learning communities and the role played by school principals on the creation of PLCs. Furthermore, in reviewing related literature the following will be unpacked: the benefits of PLCs, impact of PLCs on teachers' daily practices and learner achievement and barriers that are encountered on the creation of PLCs and a theoretical framework. Review of literature on professional learning communities will therefore be discussed under three various geographical spaces: internationally, nationally and locally.

2.2.1 International literature on professional learning communities

The notion of professional learning communities is not new since several studies have been conducted on PLCs internationally (Thompson, Gregg & Niksa, 2004; Hord, 2008; Sargent & Hannum, 2009; Blackburn & Williamson, 2010; Maloney & Konza, 2011; Seo & Han, 2012). These scholars agree on the fact that there is a correlation between the teachers' daily practice and an improved learner performance where the PLCs are in existence. However,

there is less information on how school principals develop and support teachers to implement PLCs in their schools.

There is an increased interest internationally in leadership development and coaching (Robertson, 2008). Robertson (2008) declares that leadership development by school principals should follow certain principles that underpin effective teacher development. Moreover, he accentuates that professional development should be a lifelong process. Middlewood, Parker and Beere (2005) and Hord (2009) also share similar sentiments when they say that one of the school principals' roles now is to promote lifelong learning among their staff members which was not the priority before education transformation came into being in most countries world-wide. Robertson (2008) affirms that school principals' roles had been expected to change direction. Adding to that, he attests that these new expectations of school principals' roles have been necessitated by the continuously inevitable changes in education. Furthermore, Robertson (2008) argues that school principals as educational leaders, are expected to focus on educational leadership that improves learning, one of which is coaching. Middlewood, Parker and Beere (2005) and Hord (2009) also share similar views when they argue that school principals' roles have changed since many countries are engaging in major educational reform in order to meet the needs of economy and society.

Coaching is one of the important determinants of professional learning communities since PLCs are about the community of professionals learning from each other in a PLC (Bullough, 2007; Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008). Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinback (1999) concur with the view that coaching practices are essential for the development of a leadership culture that would produce educational leaders that are able to contribute collectively to the sustained and on-going improvement of their respective institutions. They further expostulate that while educational leaders in educational institutions are people who continually search for more effective ways of facilitating learning, they are not, they should not be content with less efficiency and would act on as often as they can within the system to redesign education. Educational leaders take education transformation as their important task; they encourage considered risk taking from their colleagues and have a strong set of values and beliefs that focus them firmly on social justice (Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinback, 1999). Additionally, they advocate that educational leaders are people who stand out from others as people who want to make a positive difference in the lives of others who are enthusiastic, energetic and believe that promoting shared leadership practices is their task. This is congruent with what Robertson (2008) suggests when saying that educational leaders are expected to lead by

example, by modelling the types of behaviours that they believe are important in the education community and who develop critical reflection and seek opportunities to develop this skill with others.

Blasé and Blasé (1999) conducted a study in USA, where over 800 American teachers responded to questionnaires by identifying and describing characteristics of school principals who supported them in order to improve their classroom practice. These researchers wanted to investigate amongst other things what characteristics (strategies, behaviours) of school principals that positively influenced teachers' daily practice and what effects do such characteristics have on teachers' daily practice. The findings revealed that effective school principals concentrated on conferencing, fostering teacher reflection and giving feedback and lastly by promoting professional growth. This is echoed by Fullan (2009) when he talks of reflective inquiry as one of the important task of the school principal when trying to foster PLCs. Price Waterhouse Coopers' study (2007) on leadership in London revealed that education reform called for changes in a way school leaders used to enact their work. School leaders were therefore, expected to ensure that leadership is shared by all teachers, staff is increased especially support staff in the classrooms and new leadership models and structures are put in place. This is congruent with what is expected of a PLC. Moreover, Southworth (2008) conducted a study in Wales (United Kingdom) where he focused on the changing role of school leaders in primary school. His study revealed that there was an urgent need to upgrade the roles of school leaders by deploying school business managers (SBMs), and school business directors (SBDs) so that they would lessen the burden from school leaders. Southworth (2008) further advocates that this would therefore give school leaders a chance to concentrate on matters that relate to teaching and learning.

In the studies conducted in the United States of America (USA), (Doolittle et al. (2008); Sudeck and Rattigan (2008) on the relationship between the creation of PLCs and learner performance, it was found that PLCs enhance teachers' effectiveness resulting in an improved learner performance. This is echoed by Sargent & Hannum (2009) in the study they conducted in a resource-constrained primary school in China on PLCs. In that study they found that PLCs had a positive impact by improving learner performance. On the other hand, Seo and Han (2012) conducted a study in which they investigated PLCs in Korean schools. They wanted to explore the extent to which schools in Korea exhibit the characteristics of PLCs and the correlations between PLCs and teacher, learner and parent satisfaction with schools. The findings revealed the differences in PLCs between school levels and that shared

values and vision, shared leadership and collaboration are each correlated with teacher job satisfaction and improved learner performance. Thompson, Gregg and Niksa (2004); Hord (2008); Blackburn and Williamson (2010); Maloney & Konza (2011) share similar views when they emphasise that there is a correlation between the improvement of teachers' daily practice with an improvement in learners' performance because of the PLCs.

In another study that was conducted by Avalos (2011) in Chile on PLCs, the findings revealed that on-going interventions to improvement are more effective than shorter ones and that reflecting on practice is a better method to ensure improvement. Harris (2009) advocates the notion that distributed leadership and shared decision making can be associated with positive changes in teaching practices and learner performance, and also that this can be achieved through the establishment of the PLCs. In a study conducted in Wales (Harris & Jones, 2010) the progress and impact of PLCs within, between and across schools was investigated as part of the implementation of whole system reform. Findings were that there is evidence of more job satisfaction, high morale, and lower rates of absenteeism among teachers where professional learning communities work best.

2.2.2 African literature on professional learning communities

Much has been written on professional learning communities in an African continent (Monyatsi, 2005; Pansiri, 2008; Maistry, 2008; Wanzare, 2012; Steyn, 2013; Bhengu, Naicker & Mthiyane, 2014). However, the not much has been written in the literature about the perspectives of school principals and teachers on the creation of professional learning communities, the barriers that are encountered when creating professional learning communities and strategies that could be useful to overcome the barriers that are encountered. I must, nevertheless, mention that, I have come across one study in South Africa that addresses this particular concern. The study was conducted by Bhengu, Naicker and Mthiyane (2014) focused on the barriers that were faced by school principals who completed ACE: SL programme and how they overcame those barriers.

Monyatsi (2005) declares that schools in Botswana are still organised along the authoritarian-bureaucratic models. Africa was once colonised by European countries. It is possible that Europe transported its authoritarian-bureaucratic model to Africa during the colonial period in order to inculcate the skills and values that were necessary at that time. However, global societal change demands that all professionals and organisations develop in order to meet the

challenges and cope with the changes that are rapidly taking place in the environments (Retna, 2007).

The findings from a quantitative study conducted in Botswana by Monyatsi (2005) revealed that the introduction of democratic structures, values and principles in the secondary schools education system resulted in an improvement in secondary management development programme. The results also revealed that resources were used cost effectively as structures like school based workshops and clustering of schools for the purpose of sharing ideas were cost effective when compared to workshops that took teachers out of schools for a long time and where the department of education would be expected to pay for transport and hotel accommodation. Monyatsi's (2005) study further revealed that school based workshops centred on clusters meant that they would be held in the afternoons without taking too much of the learners' learning times. Moreover, this clustering led to the end of isolation that had previously characterised teaching.

Steyn (2010) upholds that the fact that teachers are expected to learn throughout their professional lives should not be argued. In studies conducted in Nigeria by Ikoya and Onoyase (2008) and Osunde and Izevbigie (2006), it was revealed that principals as managers lack suitable expertise to effectively and efficiently manage school facilities. These scholars further emphasise that school principals in Nigeria lack commitment to providing efficient school infrastructure and management (Ikoya & Onoyase, 2008; Osunde & Izevbigie, 2006). Hence, teachers could not adequately fulfil their teaching responsibilities and this has negatively affected the quality of teaching and learning.

2.2.3 South African literature on professional learning communities

The roles of school principals have changed from bureaucratic to democratic since South Africa became a democracy in 1994 (Mncube, Naicker & Nzimakwe, 2010). School principals in South Africa are expected to be instructional leaders and have to participate in programmes that allow them to meet the challenges of the 21st century (Mncube, Naicker & Nzimakwe, 2010). Hence, the creation of professional learning communities could be the key to addressing transition of school principals' instructional roles. The discussion of literature in this section is very relevant because the study that is reported in this dissertation focuses on the schools' perspectives on the creation of professional learning communities. The establishment of PLCs is one of the expected roles of the school principals who completed ACE: SL programme. They were exposed to the skills that would enable them to support the

creation of professional learning communities. Mncube, Naicker and Nzimakwe (2010) adduce that it is only through continuing professional teacher development (CPTD) that principals can further enhance their professionalism. This therefore, illustrates the need for professional learning communities because continuing professional teacher development is better facilitated in PLCs.

Bhengu and Mthembu (2014) conducted a qualitative study in Umlazi Township where they identified a huge learner achievement gap between two schools that are located in the same poverty stricken community. The findings of that study revealed that leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping and sustaining school cultures that promote effective teaching and learning, which included collaborative management and teamwork in PLCs. Similar ideas are echoed by Ngcobo and Tikly (2010). Drawing from their research findings, they suggest that the role of the school principals is pivotal to changing the fortunes of the schools.

In a qualitative study conducted by Grant (2009) in a rural community in KwaZulu-Natal on HIV/AIDS as a barrier to learning, the findings revealed that SMT members were not creating safe and secure spaces for people to connect with each other and learn together. The study emphasised the importance of SMT in providing environments where effective learning could happen. Similarly, in my research, I want to get evidence from school principals who completed ACE: SL regarding what they do to create PLCs and the barriers that they encounter and the strategies that they use thereof in order to overcome those barriers since from my observation, I am under the impression that although principals try to facilitate the creation of PLCs on their successful completion of ACE: SL programme, some struggle to fulfil this expectation.

Gunter (2005) argues that authentic leadership requires that school principals create safe and secure spaces for people to connect and learn from each other. According to (Moloi, 2002; Gunter, 2005, Grant, 2005), South African schools' leadership is still bureaucratic with principals who use autocratic style of management to run the school. This scenario persists despite policy imperatives to the contrary (Department of education, 1996).

Grant (2009) further posits that any educator has a potential to lead even if they are not in managerial positions at a school. Grant (2009) emphasises the need for the creation of PLCs in schools so that the novice teachers can learn from their colleagues who have expertise, through active participation in PLCs.

Bush, Kiggudu and Moorosi (2011); Chikoko, Naicker and Mthiyane (2011) contend that on completion of ACE: SL, South African school principals were expected to work and learn together in networks or clusters as networking and clustering are regarded as powerful tools for school development. The research that they conducted revealed that school principals particularly, those who completed ACE: SL only bothered to network or cluster with others in order to complete the assignments as part of their studies. However, after completing their studies, they continued doing their own thing at their schools not even bothering to know what other schools were doing (Bush, Kiggudu & Moorosi 2011; Chikoko, Naicker & Mthiyane, 2011)). This clearly suggests that some school principals do not create PLCs even after receiving capacity building training. Such a conclusion has clear relevance for my research.

2.3 Key elements of effective PLCs

As much as scholars worldwide have written and presented their findings on PLCs as stated above, the following scholars present what they found to be the key elements of the effective facilitation of PLCs. Blackburn and Williamson (2010) posit that effective professional development can support efforts to increase rigor in ones' school. The two scholars further give the following key characteristics that were apparent in staff development in the successful United States' Department of Education:

- **Clear purpose**

They posit that as teachers get involved in PLCs, they should determine areas that need attention and come up with strategies that are suitable for the targeted goals. This idea is echoed by Gorton and Alston (2009) when they emphasise the need for school leaders to clearly communicate the purpose of making any changes in an organisation and ensuring that all stakeholders understand the needs and benefits thereof, in order to avoid resistance.

- **Accountability**

Firstly, teachers should be held accountable for using new ideas in their classrooms that increase learner achievement. This can be assessed through improved test scores and through the increased learner engagement and an increase in the number of learners choosing high levels of course work.

- **Shared decision-making**

Teachers should be given a chance to share governance that incorporates teacher participation in decision-making processes.

- **Relevant, practical, hands-on activities**

Educators want to be involved in relevant and practical activities that are also motivating and engaging for them and their learners. Steyn (2013) shares similar sentiments when proposing that school principals are expected to guide and encourage teachers to participate in PLCs and make provision for active learning with necessary follow-up and feedback.

- **jFollow-up and application**

    A quick, one-time activity will not produce lasting results. Follow-up at every stage should be incorporated.

- **Strong leadership and a positive, collegial atmosphere**

Strong leadership is a key part of any effective professional development.

Hord's (2009) idea of what a PLC should be like is congruent with the previously mentioned Blackburn and Williamson's (2010). Hord (2009) suggests that an essence of a PLC is a focus on learners' learning which is characterised by a collaborative culture of teams whose members work interdependently to achieve common goals which are quality learning for all. Hord (2009) further emphasises that a PLC has its foundations on a shared mission, vision, values and beliefs; shared and supportive leadership; supportive conditions and finally collective intentional learning.

2.4 Characteristics of school principals who can lead PLCs

Among other things, Deventer and Kruger (2003) declare the following as characteristics of leaders who can lead PLCs: the ability to provide direction by finding a way forward, identifying new aims and structures, to be an inspiration to others by articulating thoughts that motivates them. Teamwork building is also the role of leaders where they encourage collaboration and see shared leadership as a most effective form of management, and spends time building and encouraging the collaboration (Deventer & Kruger, 2003). Furthermore, Deventer & Kruger (2003) suggest that a leader sets a good example, shows that leadership is not only about what leaders do to have positive effects on others in the organisation, but it is

also about how they do it. The two scholars further assert that leaders are expected to gain acceptance because of their performance based on daily informal observation by colleagues, to work hard by empowering others through working with them, to initiate and orchestrate change (Deventer & Kruger, 2003).

DuFour (1999) suggests the following as characteristics of school principals who can lead PLCs: principals who lead through shared vision and values (Hord, 2009; Sargent & Hannum, 2009). Principals who involves teachers in decision-making processes and empower them to act, principals who make provision for teachers' training in order for them to make informed decisions and who are results oriented.

Lunenburg (2010) asserts that principals are expected to perform certain roles in order for them to be effective instructional leaders in PLCs by forming collaborative structures (Gregg, Niksa & Thompson, 2004; Hord, 2009) and processes that ensure collaboration in order to improve instruction and on-going professional development that focuses on school goals. Furthermore, Fullan (2009); Lunenburg (2010) suggest that principals can accomplish the above mentioned through the five dimensions that they believe provide a compelling framework for accomplishing sustained district wide success for all children that is: focused on learning, encourages collaboration, (Hord, 2009) using data to improve learning, providing support and aligning curriculum, instruction and assessment. Furthermore, Lunenburg (2010) suggests that principals can accomplish the above-mentioned values by drawing from the Five Dimensions that they believe can provide a compelling framework for accomplishing sustained district wide success for all learners. The Five Dimensions entail focus on learning, encouragement of collaboration, using data to improve learning, providing support and aligning curriculum as well as instruction and assessment (Hord, 2009).

One popular collaboration structure that is highlighted by Lunenburg (2010) is teacher teams. Prestine (1993) elaborates on this by suggesting that there are three factors that are necessary to create teacher teams in schools. Prestine (1993) posits that school principals as managers at school level, must share authority, facilitate the work of the staff, and should participate without dominating. Similar to Prestine's (1993) views, Sargent and Hannum (2009) as well as DuFour (1999), contend that a school principal's leadership is an important factor that can support or impede teacher professional learning communities.

2.5 The roles of school principals on the creation of professional learning communities

A school principal is one of the necessary human resource for schools to become a PLC (Fullan, 2009). This is because school principals' roles have changed in response to the South African education system's transition into a new dispensation (Bush, 2007; Maistry, 2008; Taylor & Fratto, 2012; Steyn, 2013). Arguing along similar lines, Middlewood, Parker and Beere (2005); Robertson (2008) and Hord (2009) highlight that a school principal is expected to create conditions where life-long learning among staff members take place. According to Christie (2008) and Mohabir (2009), principals are responsible for building organisations where people continually learn in order to enhance their expertise; to understand complexities related to organisational leadership; clarify vision and to improve shared mental models.

Maloney and Konza (2011) express similar sentiments when they say that it is the duty of the schools principals to encourage the staff to get involved in PLCs. Viewed from this perspective, it is therefore becomes the duty of the school principal to influence the teachers by explaining to them a clear purpose for the creation of such communities and the benefits thereof. It is expected that the principal makes teachers see the need for the creation of a professional learning community and be willing to be part of such communities without the school principal having to force them to do so.

School principals need to acknowledge that they have to relinquish their perception of themselves as a privileged locus of learning, understand that the school is not a self-contained and closed world, but are a part of a broader learning system (Botha, 2012). Fullan (2009) emphasises that school principals are expected to create a learning culture in a school at all levels by creating the conditions for growth in teachers' professional learning. Mestry et al (2013) suggests that school principals are expected to establish high quality relationships and trust among staff members before they can embark on the creation of professional learning communities. Similar views are also expressed by Hilty (2011).

Teacher Preparation

Sherrill (2011) in Hilty (2011) contends that school principals are expected to ensure that teachers are prepared for any kind of change in a school. These scholars further say that principals are also expected to be clear about induction and on-going professional development before they can start to involve teachers in PLCs. School principals can do this

by doing among other things the following: poses and share knowledge of teacher preparation curriculum, value school collaboration in particular,, facilitate conferences with pre-service teachers, analyse their approach to work via adult learning theory and provide feedback (Sherrill, 2011, cited in Hilty, 2011). I believe that this information on how to prepare teachers in order for them to agree on taking part in PLCs is of utmost importance and is necessary for school principals to possess.

On-going Professional Development

Regarding on-going professional development school principals are expected to demonstrate an ability to assess, prioritise teachers' concerns and establish positive relationships amongst colleagues and possess suitable skills for effective facilitation of workshops and presentations.

Bush and Middlewood (2005) emphasise that teamwork is practised in schools and colleges in many countries. They further affirm that teams outperform individuals acting alone especially when performance requires multiple skills, judgements and experiences. Many scholars such as Hilty (2011); DuFour, DuFour and Eaker and Many (2006) contend that a school principal in a school setting could provide encouragement and support professional development programmes that are related to the profession. Moreover, Southworth (2002) and Hilty (2011) further postulate that requirements for leadership roles that focus on the on-going professional development of teachers in the school setting should include the following knowledge domains: knowledge of classroom instruction and school effectiveness, knowledge of interpersonal and adult development, knowledge of instructional supervision, observation and conferencing. This therefore requires that school principals be clear about teachers' classroom practices and their development so that they can be able to foster on-going professional development which could be in a form of a PLC.

Harris (2002) highlights that if schools are to operate as learning communities, then they need the effort of everyone in an organisation to be involved and the leadership strategy for an individual will not be effective, hence distributed leadership. Shared leadership is imperative to the success of any school reform (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001, Murphy, 2005; Hord, 2009). In addition, Angelle (2011), cited in Hilty (2011), share similar sentiments when they embrace the notion of teacher leaders as part of a vision for improvement and school success.

Southworth's model (2002) to improve teaching and learning does not differ very much from what other scholars such as Blasé and Blasé, (1999) and Robertson (2008). These scholars mention that leadership includes modelling, monitoring and professional dialogue. By modelling Southworth (2002) means that school principals as leaders are always expected to model the good behaviour that they expect teachers to copy and dress code. Monitoring involves principals visiting classrooms, examining learners' work, implementing school policies and analysing the tests results of the school. By professional dialogue and discussion Southworth (2002) simple refers to teachers communicating with other colleagues. This can be developed through staff meetings, preparing curricular policies, reviewing practice, examining pupils' data, planning meetings and teamwork (Southworth, 2002).

Fullan (2009) posits the following as roles of school principals: ensuring learning at all levels, creating the conditions for growth in teachers' professional knowledge, reflective inquiry and collaboratively set assessments that are frequent and regular. Lunenburg (2010) emphasises that the role of the school principal in the creation of PLCs is the ability to share leadership and the ability to participate without dominating and encouraging teachers to pursue personal professional development. Lunenburg (2010) further asserts that the HODs have to be involved in classroom teaching, ensure effective functioning of their departments, organise related extra-curricular activities, to jointly develop the policy for their departments, to coordinate and evaluate homework, written assignments of all learning areas providing guidance to novice teachers and controlling the work of educators and learners.

Seo and Han (2012) advocates that teacher leaders are expected to plan together, present the work, reflect then plan again. I tend to agree with Angelle (2011), cited in Hilty (2011) when saying that PLCs give teachers opportunities to share leadership with each other and with their superiors (HODs, deputy principals and school principals). She further advocates that school principals' roles in ensuring the development and management of PLCs include giving other teachers an opportunity to exercise leadership roles as lead teachers in the PLCs. Angelle (2011) in Hilty (2011) further posits that collegiality, collaboration and communication are skills that are said to be necessary for school principals. As PLCs in a school can be developed by any teacher whose main focus is student learning, they therefore, seek life-long learning for themselves, engage others in shared vision and meaning and maintain relationships with other organisation members. Angelle (2011), cited in Hilty (2011) suggest that school principals are expected to understand the roles of those teachers and be involved in them. Roles of school principals, according to Angelle (2011), cited in Hilty

(2011) are to teach learners, provide demonstrations and feedback to colleagues, attend conferences to re-deliver knowledge to their peers, and curriculum development. Schools that embrace teacher leadership are successful (Hord, 2009; Angelle, 2011, cited in Hilty, 2011). Harris (2002) shares the similar sentiments when he says that in schools that are improving in terms of learner achievement, leadership tends to be flexible rather than fixed. Bush and Middlewood (2005) affirm that all stakeholders in a school or a college for an example, teachers, parents, sponsors need to be recognised and treated as important by leadership and management personnel for the success of the learning environments for children and students. School leadership and management need to clearly articulate a vision of the school (Bush & Middlewood, 2005).

Bush and Middlewood (2005) assert that schools and colleges require both visionary leadership and effective management. Kydd, et al. (2003) share the similar views when emphasising that teachers should be able to participate in decision-making because involving teachers in decision-making provides an opportunity for professional development. Department of Education (2000) articulates that it is the role of the Senior Management Team (SMT) to share management tasks more widely in the school.

Bush and Middlewood (2005) articulate that a school principal is expected to be transformational so that the staff and the wider school community can be inspired to share and implement the principal's vision. It is also expected that the Senior Management Team encourages professional staff to participate in the professional learning communities, despite the hierarchical structures within which they all fall (Bush & Middlewood, 2005). Davidoff and Lazarus (2002) posit that the way the school operates as a whole can contribute significantly to the development of leadership and management capacity. Respect for one another, openness, affirming the contributions made by people, structuring meetings in such a way that maximum participation is facilitated, showing interest in others, transparency and accountability and ultimately, the recognition that every person makes a valuable contribution which needs to be fostered, are all part of the process (Davidoff & Lazarus, 2002).

Bush and Middlewood (2005) declare six roles as being of a school principal in the development and management of PLCs. These roles include being a role model as a learner, encouragement of collaboration, development of a culture of enquiry and reflection and also the effectiveness of staff learning. These roles are discussed below.

Be role models as learners

According to Bush and Middlewood (2005), leaders and managers need to be personally committed to their own learning. If they are to lead their schools and colleges into the future and unknown environments, they need to continuously develop themselves as self-aware people, constantly reassessing their own behaviour, emotions and reasoning in the light of new experiences, both their own and others (Bush & Middlewood, 2005). Leaders are expected to encourage behaviours in the organisation which demonstrate learning and discourage non learning (Bush & Middlewood, 2005). For an example, if a teacher brings a problem to a senior management team member, an SMT member should not come up with a solution to a problem, rather that SMT member ask from a particular teacher what they think would be a suitable solution to that problem (Bush & Middlewood, 2005). By so doing teachers are taught to come up with solutions to problems other than senior management team solving problems for them. In this way, SMT members can play a vital role in PLCs by assisting teachers to share with each other and to learn from one another through being encouraged by SMT members to find solutions to problems that teachers encounter on daily basis in their practice.

Encourage the sharing of learning

It is expected that the school principal facilitates the sharing of knowledge and experience both formally and informally. This can be done formally through scheduled internal workshops or seminars where SMT members and subjects coordinators train and assist teachers in their areas of concern or experts from outside of school can be called in to intervene. The sharing of learning can also be done informally where the school principal encourages and ensures that novice teachers choose their mentors from the experienced teachers in order to share learning.

Develop a culture of inquiry and reflection

Leaders and managers are encouraged to motivate teachers to continuously reflect on their practice. This can assist by ensuring the continuous existence of PLCs because teachers will always be reminded of their ultimate goal of the initial development of PLCs, that is, to enhance their knowledge content (Harris, 2008) and improved learner performance (Hord, 2009). Teachers need to collectively work with the SMT in order to effectively achieve the

objectives of the school, namely, effective teaching and learning. They need to ask themselves questions in order to assess if the PLCs still work towards the desired goal and contribute towards the effectiveness of the organisation.

Assess the effectiveness of staff learning

In assessing the effectiveness of staff learning, it is expected that a school principal checks if there are any changes in a way things are done by the teachers prior to the development of PLCs or not. Bush and Middlewood (2005) argue that the ultimate task of leaders and managers is to ensure that the teaching staff learns in order to be able to face new and complex challenges in this rapidly changing world. According to Bush and Middlewood (2005), school principals have the responsibility to promote shared leadership. Davidoff and Lazarus (2002) maintain that leadership and management is a cyclic and sensitive rhythm of opening and closing, stopping and going, creating and receiving, acknowledging and confronting, observing and shaping, breathing in and breathing out. They further contend that good leaders need to be perceptive, so that they know when to push, and when to hold back, when to direct, and when to let go and when to leave the situation unchallenged. Byrne-Jimenez and Orr (2007) advocate that leadership development can be enhanced through three strategies which are the creation of a variety of developmental experiences, enhancing the ability to learn from experience, and integrating various developmental experiences and embedding them in the organisational context that enables the leaders to examine existing frames of reference and develop new frames of reference or modify existing ones. Byrne-Jimenez and Orr (2007) also maintain that leadership development must facilitate a variety of knowledge and adult learning needs, given principals' often novice status but varied prior experience.

Secondly, leadership development needs to be context based depending on the challenging conditions they seek to address and therefore, should be more localised also depending on the needs of the district. Thirdly, leadership development must foster in a learning community commitment to reduce principal working in isolation and strengthen commitment. Finally, leadership development must be structured in such a way that it becomes a means to reflective on practice so as to diagnose problems, explore complexities, manage ambiguities, and multi-framed problem solving skills, particularly in facilitating organisational change. Kydd, et al. (2003) emphasise that allowing teachers to facilitate leadership roles enhances their willingness to participate in PLCs.

Fullan (2001) declares that leadership must come from many sources. The school principals' understanding of the previously mentioned point would assist them in supporting any developmental structures in a school. A school principal is expected to coach teachers who are involved in any kind of professional development in a school (Robertson, 2008). Steyn (2013) declares that the creation of a clear understanding of PLCs, identification of suitable facilitators for PLCs, and the provision of necessary support as well as encouragement of networking with other schools remain the key roles of the principal in a school .

2.6 Barriers to the creation of PLCs

Literature (Gorton & Alston, 2009; Bush, Kiggundu & Moorosi, 2011) suggests that many school principals and educators do not want to work beyond their contracted hours, hence they are rarely available after hours for services. However, Botha (2012) expostulates this view, arguing that the underdevelopment of leadership capacity on the side of school principals makes it difficult for schools to increase proficiency to facilitate PLCs. Adding to that, Botha (2012) advocates the notion that by allowing teachers to collaborate without the purpose of working together can result in meetings that are not productive and time wasting. Yukl (2006) declares that a basic reason for resistance to any change process in an organisation could be due to distrust of people who propose it. Similarly, Bush and Middlewood (2005, cited in Govender, 2011) also emphasise that interpersonal conflict can be one of the reasons for the failure of collaborative work. Behfar, Kern and Brent (2006, cited in Govender, 2011) mention sarcasm, aggressive and bullying behaviours as examples some of verbally expressed portraits negativity towards collaboration in the school. Steyn and van Niekerk's (2007) sentiments are congruent with those expressed above. Steyn and van Niekerk (2007) suggest the following as barriers to the creation of PLCs: lack of individual commitment among teachers resulting in lack of participation, lack of information to make informed decisions, lack of resources, unclear objectives, lack of confidence, lack of interaction between members, lack of experience, lack of interest as well as lack of integration.

Yukl (2006) further contends that loss of status and power could also be a barrier to the creation of PLCs since we all know that major changes in organisations results in some shifts in relative power and status for individuals and subunits. In many occasions new strategies often require expertise not possessed by some of the people currently enjoying high status as problem solvers. More often than not, this result in people who are responsible for specific

activities, pulling back or getting eliminated and losing status and power. Such people tend to become barriers as they are more likely to oppose the creation of PLCs (Yukl, 2006). Adding to that, Steyn (2013) concurs with this view saying that effective teacher learning in PLCs can also be impeded due to the lack of high quality support.

South Africa is a country of diversities of various kinds. Similarly, PLCs comprise teachers who hail from vastly diverse teaching context. Steyn (2013) maintains that there is a possibility of teachers from a middle class school to be dominant in PLCs. This may result in them dictating the agenda by focussing on curriculum issues that could only be relevant to middle class schools. Such tendencies may be detrimental to the learners from socio-economically deprived contexts. Resentment of interference is therefore bound to happen (Taylor & Fratto, 2012). If PLCs comprise teachers from different socio-economic backgrounds, success of such communities are likely to succeed since plans of what could be done in order to achieve certain goals could not be congruent with the ideas of individual schools from which the teachers originate, and this could possibly result in the lack of sympathy and support from their own schools (Steyn, 2013).

2.7 Strategies to overcome barriers

As previously noted, sometimes the creation of professional learning communities in most schools become a failure because of poor relationships amongst staff members. The principal is therefore expected to ensure that good relations are developed and maintained in a school (Mestry et al, 2013). Literature (Bush & Middlewood, 2005, cited in Govender, 2011; Steyn & van Niekerk, 2007) reveal that unclear objectives, lack of information, the underdevelopment of leadership capacity on the side of school principals as well as the shortage of resources are some of the barriers to the creation of professional learning communities. One of the possibilities of fostering PLCs in educational institutions can be through the effective utilisation of resources, improving the quality of educational programmes and creating suitable learning and working environments (Steyn & van Niekerk, 2007, cited in Govender, 2011).

 Fullan (2009) and Steyn (2013) further suggest that school principals are also expected to ensure that the purpose of the creation of professional learning communities and or any other development programme is clearly communicated to teachers in other to influence its success. In terms of this view, school principals need to clearly explain to the teachers what is expected of them and how they are going to be supported and how such communities would

be of assistance to them and their learners. This is based on the assumption that this would increase productivity, improve morale and motivation and enhance job satisfaction (Govender, 2011). Steyn (2013) further posits that by allowing teachers to take control in the creation of PLCs; allowing access and facilitation to people with expertise on different content areas in such communities; collegiality; addressing the issue of isolation between teachers and active learning, as well as the need for long term programmes could be useful in order to overcome barriers to the creation of PLCs.

2.8 Theoretical Framework

Vithal and Jansen (1997) propound that a theoretical framework could be described as a well-developed, coherent explanation for an event. They further opine that researchers may specify a theoretical framework for the following reasons: to locate their research, to test a theory and to apply a theory. This study is located in an educational leadership and management discipline, and focuses on schools' perspectives on the creation of professional learning communities. Due to such a focus, it is underpinned by Hord's Five Dimensions of professional learning communities' model. Hord's model focuses on leadership and management of the school and its influence on learners' learning, teachers' daily practices, their professional growth, as well as, learner achievement. The next section provides a detailed discussion of this model.

2.8.1 Hord's Five Dimensions of professional learning communities

This study is underpinned by Hord's Five Dimensions of professional learning communities and the five dimensions are supportive and shared leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions and shared personal practice. With regards to the first dimension, supportive and shared leadership, Hord (1997) argues that a school whose staff is learning together and participating in decision-making about its operation requires a school principal that can let go of power. When school principals adopt such an approach, their own sense of omnipotence dissipates and they engage in genuine shared leadership of the school. This is an important attribute of a PLC because in a PLC power and leadership is shared by all members who are involved in it. If school principals understand their roles and expectations in a PLC, the creation of such communities are likely to succeed.

Hord (1997) further opines that school principals who support and encourage continuous learning among their staff will not have a problem of sharing power and leadership roles with

their staff members. This is echoed by Robertson (2008) when proclaiming that the school principal is one of the necessary human resources for schools to become PLCs and that one of the factors that is necessary to create PLCs is the school principal's ability to share authority. Adding to that, Robertson (2008) further posits that the school principal is expected to facilitate the work of the staff and finally, to participate in PLCs without dominating. Similarly, Southworth (2002) holds the view that school principals as instructional leaders are expected to focus mainly on teaching and learning including the professional learning of teachers. He then declares three strategies as his model of improving teaching and learning as being modelling, monitoring and professional dialogue and discussion. However, some of the key elements of Southworth's model are subsumed in Hord's Five Dimensions Model and therefore, it is discussed in this dissertation.

The second dimension of Hord's (1997) model is collective creativity. By collective creativity, Hord (1997) refers to instances where school principals together with the teachers engage in reflective dialogue. They do this collaboratively and they continually enhance their capacity to create things they really want to create for the benefit of learners (Hord, 1997). Such collaborative work, in which staff conduct conversations about students and teaching and learning, identifying related issues and problems is referred to by many scholars as a reflective dialogue (Hord, 1997; Bush & Middlewood, 2005; Robertson, 2008). This collaborative inquiry and reflective dialogue by teachers is seen by Hord (1997) and also by Robertson (2008) as a tool to bring together staff members in the discussion about what achievements have been made by some of the members. As part of that engagement, questions about what worked or did not work, what more needs to be done by who and or how are crucial. This is also echoed by Stoll and Fink (1996) when they suggest the notion of collegiality as characteristic of 'we're working on this together'. By such a characterisation, Stoll and Fink (1996) highlight that joint work is inclusive of many concepts such as team teaching, mentoring, peer coaching, planning and mutual observation and feedback. Participants in such conversations learn oneness, become a community of learners and also learn to apply new ideas and information on how to solve problems. PLCs give a suitable platform for such practices to happen (Hord, 2009).

The third dimension is about shared values and vision (Hord, 1997). By shared values and vision, Hord (1997) advocates that teachers are always expected to maintain teaching and learning as the main focus for which the schools exist. By so saying, she emphasises that a PLC is expected at all times not to deviate from its core function and for which it exists.

Moreover, Hord (1997) declares that in PLC, each staff member is responsible for their actions. This is echoed by Stoll and Fink (1996) in their framework of cultural norms underpinning successful school improvement when they talk of shared goals- 'we know where we're going. Such a shared sense can only be derived from on-going talk among participants about what is important. Steyn (2013) also share similar views that school principals are expected to create a clear understanding of PLCs and that other staff members have a same vision as them.

Fourthly, according to Hord (1997), there are two types of supportive conditions that are necessary in a PLC namely physical or structural setup and human qualities or capacities. Hord (1997) explains that supportive conditions determine when, where and how the staff should regularly meet to do learning, problem solving, creative work and decision making which is a part of a PLC. Fullan's (2009) idea on supportive conditions, that are necessary for a PLC, is congruent with Hord's model. Similarly, Steyn (2013) posits that it is a role of the school principal to create a learning culture at a school by creating the conditions for growth in teachers' professional knowledge. Physical conditions are characterised by the time to meet, interdependent teaching roles, communication structures, school autonomy and teacher empowerment. Concurrently, people capacities are characterised as the willingness to accept feedback and work toward improvement. This can be achieved through reflective inquiry which happens in PLCs when the school principal and teachers inquire together on their practice (Hord, 1997). For instance, assessments could be set by collaborative teams which could be frequently and regularly done. This would be one of the tools to measure learners' progress and evaluating whether the PLCs do manage to bring about improvements in learners' achievements and teachers' daily practices.

The fifth and last dimension entails, sharing personal practice in PLCs (Hord, 1997). In this dimension, teachers' practices are reviewed on a regular basis with an aim of encouraging and adapting to good and productive practices of others as a learning community. Stoll and Fink (1996) as well as Steyn (2013) share similar sentiments regarding the need for a continuous improvement, they use the adage 'we can get better', where collectively, teachers in a PLC look for better methods that can assist them to improve their practice by sharing personal practices. Through this study, it could be determined whether teachers' practices are reviewed on regular basis with an intention of developing them.

2.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has reviewed literature related to PLCs in three geographical spaces: locally, continentally and internationally. Firstly, the study focused on empirical studies on PLCs as well as key elements of effective professional learning communities. Subsequently, the study also touched on the characteristics of school principals who can lead professional learning communities, the roles of school principals in the creation of professional learning communities. This was followed by the discussion of the barriers that principals encounter, as well as strategies that can be used to overcome those barriers. Furthermore, the chapter focussed on the theoretical framework that underpinned the study. The next chapter provides a detailed description of the research design and methodology that was used to generate and analyse data in this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focussed on the literature that was reviewed on issues of professional learning communities and the discussion of the theoretical framework that underpinned the study. This chapter focuses on and explains the methodological processes that were employed in eliciting and analysing data. Methodology according to Briggs and Coleman (2007) and Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), is the theory of how researchers gain knowledge in research context and why. Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004) concur with the above mentioned scholars. Henning et al. (2004) describe methodology as a coherent group of methods that complement each other, that are fit to give data and findings that will reflect the research question and suit the research purpose. These scholars further contend that methodology is about reasoning what the value of data elicitation methods is, and why they have been chosen using the rich literature on methodology to inform the argument. In addition, Henning et al (2004) postulates that each study stands or falls on its methodological qualities. Maree (2011); de Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2011); Creswell (2011) define a research design as a plan that a researcher uses in conducting a study.

This chapter begins with an account of the research paradigm that is employed. I then discuss methodological approach of this study, give an account on the data elicitation methods and data analysis techniques. Subsequently, I give a discussion on ethical issues, trustworthiness, limitations of the study and lastly, chapter summary.

3.2 Research Paradigm

The purpose of this section is to enlighten the reader on different research paradigms that are out there and that the researcher has taken time to read on and to understand different research paradigms before choosing the one that is of relevance to this study. Bassey (1999) cited in Briggs and Coleman (2007) define a paradigm as a network of ideas that have coherence about the nature of the world and the function of researchers which adhered to by a group of researchers' conditions, the patterns of their thinking and the underpinnings of their research actions. Christiansen, Bertram and Land (2010) describe a research paradigm as a representation of a particular world view that defines, for the researchers who carry this view, what is acceptable to research and how. There is no agreement among various scholars about

the number of paradigms out there or what the main dominant ones are. For instance, Christiansen *et al* (2010) posit that there are three main paradigms in social sciences and these are the post-positivist, the interpretivist and the critical paradigm. However, according to Creswell (2007), there are four main paradigms, namely, the post-positivist, the interpretivist, the critical and the post-modernism paradigm. This shows the controversy on the paradigms that underpins research in education.

This study is located in an interpretive research paradigm. Interpretive research paradigm is about understanding human behaviour and foregrounds the meaning that individuals or communities assign to their experiences (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004; Maree, 2007; Cohen, *et al.,* 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This study is about understanding schools perspectives about the creation of PLCs. Therefore, an interpretivist research paradigm is appropriate for this study. Ontologically the interpretive research paradigm is based on the assumption that there are multiple truths (Travis, 1999; Burton, Brundrett & Jones, 2008; De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2011). In terms of epistemology, in this paradigm knowledge is socially constructed (Travis, 1999; Maree, 2007). In this study, it is expected that meaning about the creation of PLCs will be by different participants and such meaning and/ or knowledge is unique to each of the participants. This is consistent with the epistemological positioning that there is not just one single reality that exists outside of the comprehension of the researchers or the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This study uses a qualitative approach. Henning, et al. (2004); Creswell (2007); Maree (2007); Cohen, et al. (2011); Creswell (2011) contend that qualitative study focuses on the lived experiences of people.

3.3 Methodology

A case study methodology, focusing on three primary schools in Pinetown District was followed. A case study is a systematic enquiry into an event or a set of related events with a purpose of describing and explaining the phenomenon of interest (Dooley, 2002; Maree, 2007; Cohen et al*.,* 2011; Rule & John, 2011). In this study, the case was three primary schools which had principals who completed ACE: SL Programme that were investigated and the unit of analysis was the creation of PLCs.

3.4 Methods of data elicitation

Maree (2011) argues that numerous methods of data elicitation, instruments as well as sources can be used in a qualitative research for example, observation, surveys, interviewing, document analysis, questionnaires, artefacts and voice recording and many others. Any method used in eliciting data should be clearly explained for its fitness to the study (Maree, 2011). However, in this study, the initial plan was to use semi-structured interviews and documents review in order to elicit data.

3.4.1 Sampling

Neuman (2006), as well as Maree (2011) declare that sampling is the process that is used to select a portion of the population for the study. Teddlie and Yu (2007) and Cohen et al (2011) further declare that purposive sampling simple means that participants are selected because of the characteristics that they possess in order for them to be suitable to participate in a particular study. Drawing from these scholars' definition of what sampling is, a combination of purposive and convenience sampling techniques were used to select schools. Having this in mind, three schools in Pinetown District were selected. These were purposively selected because their principals had been ACE: SL students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal between 2007 and 2010. The sampling was convenient in the sense that among the schools that qualified for selection, I chose those schools that were not far from my workplace. The area was easily accessible in terms of distance and this helped to keep the cost minimal, especially considering that the study was not funded.

Schools with principals, who completed ACE: SL Programme, were the primary sources of data and therefore were the main participants. Principals were interviewed since they were suitable for this study as it aimed at exploring their perspectives on the creation of PLCs. In each school, I asked for permission to address the teachers during their free time so that I could introduce the study. I then asked those Heads of Departments (HODs) and teachers who were interested to participate to inform me and so that we would make arrangements to meet individually. I thought that I needed to talk to a variety of stakeholders about the views and experiences of PLCs in the schools. In that way I had sought to enhance trustworthiness of the findings. Briggs and Coleman (2007); Maree (2007); Cohen et al. *(*2011*)* posit that triangulation is a device for improving validity by checking data through involving a range of participants.

3.4.2 Access to the research sites

Firstly, I requested a list of school principals who successfully completed ACE: SL Programme from Pinetown district. Secondly, I created my own list looking at the feasibility to communicate with those school principals. Thirdly, I phoned those school principals requesting to meet with them and briefly explaining my intention to want to meet them as being to request that they participate in the research together with their subordinates. Fourthly, I wrote letters to them formally requesting permission to conduct a research at their schools and also requesting them to be part of the research. Fifthly, I made appointments with them. Sixthly, I went to the schools with letters for all participants. In that meeting with school principals, I explained the purpose of my research and the kind of participants I needed for my research which were one HOD and one PL1 educator per each school. After having explained everything to their satisfaction, I therefore requested the school principal to select other participants and to write a permission letter to me allowing me to conduct a research at a school. Finally, I took the letters to research office as required by the UKZN where I studied.

3.4.3 Profiling the participating schools

A brief background of the selected schools, Ntokozweni Primary school, Bidvest Primary School and Nkiyankiya Primary School (pseudonyms) and that of the research participants are provided.

3.4.3.1 Ntokozweni Primary School

Ntokozweni Primary School is located at the semi-urban area in the Hammarsdale area west of Durban. It was built in 1959 by the missionaries with an intention of teaching learners from the vicinity but also to foster Roman Catholic Religion in the community. Through educational and societal reform over the years, the school now caters for a multicultural society from grade R to 7. In terms of phases within the General Education and Training Band (GET), the school offers three phases namely: the Foundation Phase, Intermediate Phase and Senior Phase. Ntokozweni Primary School has an enrolment of 1 300 learners, most of whom are from poverty stricken families. Classes are overcrowded as there are about 46 learners in each class.

There is one staffroom that is shared by teachers as well as SMT members as they do not have offices. It is only the school principal who has an office which is also full of various

tools and equipment such as wheelbarrows, learner teacher support material (LTSM), cleaning material *etcetera*. There is electricity and running water. The school yard is large, dusty in winter and muddy in summer. The school is ranked as Quintile 3 in terms of the National Norms and Standards for School Funding. It falls under section 21 and it is also a no fee paying school. There are 43 teachers at the school of which all are post-graduates, comprising of the principal, two deputy principals, 4 HODs (2 for foundation phase, 1 intermediate phase and 1 senior phase) and 36 PL1 educators. There is 1 security guard whose job entails controlling of late coming, controlling of visitors coming in and out of the school as well as gardening.

3.4.3.2 Bidvest Primary School

Bidvest Primary School is situated in a semi-urban area not very far from Pinetown, west of Durban. It was built in 1964 by the then Department of Bantu Education. It serves learners from economically disadvantage families who mostly depend on government grants for financial support. There is one security guard who controls late coming and visitors coming in and out of the school gate. Most parents of the learners at this school are either not working or working as casual workers or deceased. The school starts from grade R to 7. In terms of phases within the General Education and Training Band (GET), the school offers three phases namely: the Foundation Phase, Intermediate Phase and Senior Phase. Bidvest Primary School has an enrolment of 1 250 learners. Classes are overcrowded as there are about 48 learners in each class.

There is one staffroom that is shared by teachers. There is electricity and running water. The school yard is very small, dusty in winter and muddy in summer. The school is ranked as quintile 3 in terms of the National Norms and Standards for School Funding. It falls under section 21 and it is also a no fee paying school. There are 38 teachers at the school of which all are post-graduates, comprising of the principal, two deputy principals, 4 HODs (2 for foundation phase, 1 intermediate phase and 1 senior phase) and 31 PL1 educators.

3.4.3.3 Nkiyankiya Primary School

Nkiyankiya Primary School serves a rural community on the outskirts of Hillcrest called KwaNyuswa. This rural school was built in 1980 by the then Department of Education for teaching formal schooling to the community. This school is built in a steep uneven land. Walls are neatly painted. The yard is dusty in winter and muddy in summer. Classrooms

floors are not tiled with limited furniture equipment. It is electrified but there is no running water. The parents of the learners are mostly not working or working as casual workers. The school is fenced. There is a security guard at the school whose job entails controlling of the visitors coming in and out of the school as well as controlling late coming of the learners. In terms of phases within the General Education and Training Band (GET), the school offers three phases namely: the Foundation Phase, Intermediate Phase and Senior Phase.

The school has a learner enrolment of 400 learners. There are about 39 learners in each class. There is no staffroom, library or laboratory. One classroom was then converted to a staffroom. SMT members do not have offices. It is only the school principal who has an office which is also full of school tools and equipment such as a photocopier, learner teacher support material (LTSM), cleaning material *etcetera*. The school is ranked as quintile 3 in terms of the National Norms and Standards for School Funding. It falls under section 21 and it is also a no fee paying school. There are only 10 teachers at the school some of which are post-graduates and part time studying diploma students, comprising of the principal, 2 HODs (1 for Foundation Phase, 1 for Intermediate and Senior phases).

3.4.4 Profiling of the participants

A brief background of the selected research participants (pseudonyms) is provided below.

3.4.4.1 Mr Mbhele

Mr Mbhele (pseudonym) is a principal of Ntokozweni Primary School. He has 39 years of teaching experience, 21 of which as a principal. His highest qualification is an Honours Bachelor of Education Degree which he obtained from the University of Natal. His specialisation was Mathematics and Science. However, he does not teach any subject in any Grade. In managing the school, Mr Mbhele works closely with the SMT members.

3.4.4.2 Mr Ramarela

Mr Ramarela is an HOD from Ntokozweni Primary School. He has 22 years of teaching experience, 14 of which as an HOD. His highest qualification is Masters in Education Degree which he obtained from the University of South Africa. His major subjects were History and English. He teaches grade 7 English and Social Sciences. He works very close with Mr Mbhele in managing the school.

3.4.4.3 Ms Cele

Ms Cele is a PL1 educator at Ntokozweni Primary School. She has 12 years of teaching experience. Her highest qualification is Advanced Certificate in Education with specialisation in life orientation which she obtained from the University of South Africa. She teaches Grade 3 Mathematics, English and IsiZulu.

3.4.4.4 Mr Mabaso

Mr Mabaso (pseudonym) is a principal of Bidvest Primary School. He has 29 years teaching experience 8 of which as a principal. His highest qualification is Honours Bachelor of Education Degree which he obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. His major subjects are History and IsiZulu. However, he does not teach any subject in any Grade.

3.4.4.5 Mrs Khoza

Mrs Khoza is an HOD from Bidvest Primary School. She holds a Higher Diploma in Education which she obtained from Umlazi Further Teachers' College. Her major subjects were IsiZulu and Mathematics. She has 20 years of teaching experience, 8 of which as an HOD. She teaches Grade 3 Life skills and English.

3.4.4.6 Mr Bhengu

Mr Bhengu is a PL1 educator from Bidvest Primary School. He has 14 years teaching experience. His highest qualification which he obtained from the University of Durban Westville is Honours Bachelor Degree in Education with specialisation in Mathematics and Science. He is currently studying towards a Master's Degree in the University of South Africa. He teaches Grade 6 Mathematics, Economic Management Sciences and Natural Science.

3.4.4.7 Mr Mkhize

Mr Mkhize is a principal of Nkiyankiya Primary School. He holds a Master's Degree in Education which he obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. His major subjects were Technology and English. He teaches these subjects at his school (grade 7). He has 19 years of teaching experience, 9 of which as a principal. He works very close with the SMT members in managing the school.

3.4.4.8 Mrs Madlala

Mrs Madlala is an HOD from Nkiyankiya Primary School. She has 14 years of teaching experience, 6 of which as an HOD. Her highest qualification is Higher Diploma in Education which she obtained from Umlazi further teachers' college. She specialised in Geography and Afrikaans. She teaches Grade 5 and 6 Social Sciences.

3.4.4.9 Mr Thabethe

Mr Thabethe is a PL1 educator from Nkiyankiya Primary School. He has 12 years of teaching experience. His highest qualification is Senior Primary Teachers' Diploma which he obtained from the University of South Africa. His major subjects are Natural Science and English. He teaches Natural Science to Grade 5 and 6, English Grade 6, Life Orientation Grade 5 and 6.

Table 1.Diagramatical representation of the participants and schools

Ntokozweni Primary school		
Rank	Gender	Teaching Experience
Principal	**Male**	**39 years**
Head of Department	**Male**	**22 years**
PL1 Educator	**Female**	**12 years**

Table 2.Diagramatical representation of the participants and schools

Bidvest Primary school		
Rank	Gender	Teaching Experience
Principal	**Male**	**29 years**
Head of Department	**Female**	**20 years**
PL1 Educator	**Male**	**14 years**

Table 3.Diagramatical representation of the participants and schools

Nkiyankiya Primary school		
Rank	Gender	Teaching Experience
Principal	**Male**	**19 years**

| Head of Department | Female | 14 years |
| PL1 Educator | Male | 12 years |

3.4.4.10 Semi-structured Interviews

An interview is a conversation between two or more people in which the interviewer asks the interviewee(s) questions to elicit data and to learn about the ideas, views, opinions and behaviours of the participants (Maree, 2011). The type of the interview that was used to elicit data in this study was semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews require a participant to answer a set of predetermined questions on an interview schedule as a guide for an interview (Bell, 2010); de Vos et al., (2011); Cohen et al., (2011); Maree (2011). Moreover, semi-structured interviews allow for probing, giving enough space for expansions where new avenues can be included (Singleton & Straits, (1999). Participants were required to answer a set of predetermined questions (Maree, 2011) from an interview schedule that was used to guide the discussion. That is why this data elicitation method is referred to as semi-structured, there are questions that have already been designed, but also there are questions that arise during the course of the conversation with the participants. This method was deemed suitable for this study as it aimed at an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

All interviews were voice recorded using a battery charged digital voice recorder. Recording the interview assists to ensure that the researcher does not alter the data elicited from participants (Briggs & Coleman, 2007; Bell, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011; de Vos et al., 2011; Maree, 2011). These scholars further advocate that it is important to keep the flavour of the original data through voice recording the interviews. Direct phrases and sentences were reported through the use of the voice recorder (Briggs & Coleman, 2007; Cohen et al., 2011).

3.4.4.11 Document review

Initial plan of data elicitation methods included the use of documents' review. I sought to specifically look at staff meetings minutes, 2007- 2014. I also wanted to check if there was anything that was discussed relating to the creation of PLCs; barriers and possible strategies to overcome such barriers and the progress thereof. During the discussions about what would be required from the participants during data elicitation process, all three school principals agreed that they had minutes books and that I was at liberty to review these documents whenever I felt it necessary to do so. Surprisingly, when the time came for me to undertake

this exercise, principals had a different story to tell. For instance, Mr Mbhele, principal of Ntokozweni Primary School asked me to come back some other time for such a document. He mentioned that his personal assistant had taken the document home the previous day (11 May 2014) to update work and she forgot it at home. When I made follow-up on this, the principal gave other stories, in the end, this exercise never happened. Similarly, other principals had some excuses which dissuaded me from accessing these documents. After several attempts, I abandoned asking to review these documents.

3.5 Data Analysis

Having completed the interviews with participants, I transferred raw data from a voice recorder to a computer system with an aim of manually transcribing the data. From the computer, I transcribed the data into Microsoft word documents before printing them for analysis process. For analysis, I used the technique commonly known as qualitative content analysis. Content analysis refers to grouping participants' responses using pre-determined codes (Struwig & Stead, 2001; Newman, 2006). During analysis process, the voice recorder was repeatedly played for the purpose of capturing the exact words used by the participants. All digitally voice recorded interviews were transcribed *verbatim* (Struwig & Stead, 2001; Henning, et al., 2004; Maree, 2007; Creswell, 2011).

In analysing the data, I had to read across all questions and interviews, logging similarities and differences, writing grounded descriptions of participants and constructing thematic statements (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Singleton & Straits, 1999; Newman, 2006; Cohen *et al,* 2011). Themes were created as subtopics to the main questions. Participants' responses were grouped accordingly using partially predetermined codes and key issues emerging across the individuals were amalgamated (Singleton & Straits, 1999; Briggs & Coleman, 2007; Maree, 2007; Cohen, et al., 2011). I am saying these codes were partially predetermined because the concepts drawn from the theoretical concepts, for instance, were deployed in this study. In other words, they were used in the analysis but had been borrowed from the literature review section of the study. Data analysis allowed for the sense making of accumulated information (Vithal & Jansen, 1997).

3.6 Trustworthiness of the findings

Ensuring trustworthiness of the findings is an important key to effective research (Cohen, et al., 2011). To ensure trustworthiness, I used the framework developed by Lincoln and Guba,

(1985) which entails four criteria to ensure trustworthiness of the findings and these criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These are discussed in the section below.

3.6.1 Credibility

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985); Golafashni (2003); Carlson (2010); Cohen, *et al* (2011) credibility is an evaluation of whether or not the research findings represent a credible conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants' original data. To ensure credibility of the findings, I used a number of techniques. For instance, to ensure accuracy of the story that emerged from each research site, the accuracy of the data given by school principals was cross-checked by what emerged from the HODs and the teachers from the same school (Vithal & Jansen, 1997; Creswell, 2011; Cohen et al., 2011). In addition, I ensured that all participants were aware that there were no false promises on my part about what they would benefit if they participated in the research; their participation was voluntary and no coercion or deception of any kind was done. To address credibility, I employed more than one technique to elicit data.

3.6.2 Transferability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) transferability refers to an extent to which the research can be transferred to other similar contexts. To address transferability, I provided a detailed description of all steps I took in carrying out the study. I provided the context of the schools and the participants and the detailed description of the selection methods, how I gained access to the research site and how I did the analysis of the data. All these steps were taken in order to ensure that the researchers, who want to conduct similar study in the same context, would understand the context of this particular research and thus enhance the opportunities of credible replication.

3.6.3 Dependability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend that dependability is an assessment of the quality of the integrated process of data elicitation and analysis. In order to ensure dependability of the findings, scholars such as Cohen et al (2011), recommend that an audit of all activities that were conducted should be kept. In addressing dependability, I ensured that I described any action that I embarked on, including the manner in which I introduced the study to potential participants, providing the description of the schools and the participants' contextual factors,

sharing my thoughts of what was emerging from the research sites with my peers and cross-checking for various inconsistencies that might exist, and even utilising the services of a critical reader in order to ensure that ultimately emerge and the finding has undergone scrutiny of various people.

3.6.4 Confirmability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) declare that confirmability is a qualitative investigator's concern to objectivity. However, in qualitative research, objectivity is not the ultimate goal, what is of concern to us as qualitative research is to ensure that our biases do not interfere with the phenomenon being studied. One of the way is to ensure that, during the inter process, I do member-checking. In this process I check with my participants if my interpretation of what they are telling me is accurate. The other method that I deployed during the study is that I used a digital voice recorder to keep an accurate record of the content of the interviews and I transcribed them *verbatim* (Maree, 2007; Cohen et a., 2011). In addition, I asked for permission from them to use it and I had to explain that the main purpose of using it was to ensure that I do not misrepresent their stories, for example, if I try to recollect from memory what they had told me. After doing transcriptions, I also gave them the transcripts for them to read and they confirmed that the transcripts were the true record of our conversations.

3.7 Ethical Issues

The UKZN Research Ethics Policy applies to all members of staff, graduate and undergraduate students who are involved in research on or off the campuses of University of KwaZulu-Natal Policy (www.nu.ac.za). In addition, any person not affiliated with UKZN who wishes to conduct research with UKZN students and/or staff member is bound by the same ethics framework. Each member of the University community is responsible for implementing this Policy in relation to scholarly work with which she or he is associated and to avoid any activity which might be considered to be in violation of this Policy (www.nu.ac.za).

To comply with the ethics policy requirements of the University, I started by applying for ethical clearance to conduct the study. In that application I explain every step and every detail about the nature of the study, the type of questions I would pose to research participants and how I would deal with them. I also wrote letters to gatekeepers seeking permission to conduct a research in the identified schools. I also wrote letters to individual participants, requesting

them to participate in the study. The purpose of the research was clearly explained to the participants and that the content of our discussion would remain confidential. Moreover, all participants were given assurance that their real names and that of their schools were not going to be disclosed, instead, *pseudonyms* were to be used in order to hide their identity (Briggs & Coleman, 2007). As an example of how the identities of the participants were hidden, schools in the study were given false names or *pseudonyms*, for instance, the first school was given the name Ntokozweni Primary School; the second was given the name Bidvest Primary school and the last one was given the name Nkiyankiya Primary School.

The participants were also informed of their rights as research participants. For instance, they were informed that their participation is voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw at any point when they wish to do so without any negative consequences. The nature and purpose of the study had been fully explained to them; in addition, they signed a declaration of informed consent where they declare that they understood their rights and they gave permission to have their interviews audio-recorded. Again, for ethical reasons, I promised them that after the interviews have been transcribed, they would get a copy for them to read and confirm if what appeared in the transcript was a true reflection of what they had told me. I kept that promise.

3.8 Limitations of the study

'Limitations are those factors or conditions beyond reasonable control of the researcher that impinge either on the execution of the study or the validity of the findings or both' (Moyo & Mumbengegwi 2001, p. 9). Participants might feel uncomfortable to express themselves freely since they will be voice recorded. It is important that such issues are addressed. In the context of this study, I attempted to overcome this hindrance by assuring the participants that their identities would never be disclosed to anyone. I ensured them that *pseudonym* would be used as a technique of hiding their identities. I informed them that codes were going to be used to ensure that their identity and that of their institutions' would be hidden (Terr Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006).

Language could also limit the richness and in-depth of data elicited. This was overcome by allowing the participants to use the language that they were comfortable with during interviews. Yin (2009); Neale, Thapa and Boyce (2006) suggest that case studies have limited generalisability. Therefore the findings of this study could not be generalisable to the wide population of primary schools with principals with principals who completed ACE: SL

Programme in Pinetown District. Nevertheless, I had to ensure that I provide a thick description of each and every step that I took in conducting this study. In that way readers and other researchers are able to obtain clear understanding of both the findings and the context in which the findings are made. This will ensure credible extrapolation of the findings.

3.9 Chapter Summary

In this chapter an account of the research paradigm that is employed is given. It is then followed by the discussion of the methodological approach of this study, an account on the data elicitation methods and data analysis techniques. Furthermore, a discussion on ethical issues, trustworthiness and limitations of the study were presented and lastly, chapter summary. The next chapter provides a detailed discussion of data that was elicited through the use of semi-structured interviews.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the research design and methodology that was employed in this study. The main purpose of this chapter is therefore to present data that was elicited in relation to schools' perspectives on the creation of professional learning communities. The data was elicited through semi-structured interviews as discussed at length in the previous chapter. In addition, I wanted to ensure that participants' voices are not lost hence *verbatim* quotations are used in the data presentation (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004; Creswell, 2011; Maree, 2011). Moreover, I present a discussion of the data by infusing the theoretical framework that was discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

4.2 Discussion of themes emerging from the data

The data from the semi-structured interviews was grouped into themes to address the main critical question (Briggs & Coleman, 2007; Maree, 2007; Cohen *et al*., 2011). A list of themes that emerged from the analysis is as follows: professional development of the teaching staff, participants' understanding of coaching, monitoring the work of the teaching staff, participants' understanding of modelling, support towards part time studying teachers, promotion of leadership and collaborative culture, barriers to the creation of professional learning communities:, strategies to overcome barriers to the creation of professional learning communities.

4.2.1 Professional development of the teaching staff

All the participating school principals were asked the question about how they provided professional development to the teaching staff in their respective schools. Their responses indicate that they had one common approach to staff professional development. This approach entailed networking and organising workshops within the school. Such workshops were either conducted by the structure known as Staff Development Team (SDT) or by inviting experts outside the school as part of networking. Emphasising the need for the staff's professional development, Mr Mkhize, the principal of Nkiyankiya Primary School (not the real names), had this to say:

Here at school we've got staff development team whose main task is to organise developmental programmes or workshops on a continuous basis with the intention of improving the work of the teachers **(Mr Mkhize).**

The view expressed in the extract above was also shared by Mr Mbhele, the principal of Ntokozweni Primary School (not real names). According to him, such initiatives were targeted at particular subjects where the teachers experienced difficulties. Subjects such as Mathematics and Natural Science are the ones that usually presented difficulties for the teachers. This is what the principal of Ntokozweni Primary School had to say:

We do run workshops for them. We have recently invited people from the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) called CASME who actually workshopped teachers especially those in Mathematics because this is where we needed to develop our teachers. We as the SMT initiated workshops after seeing that after 3 years we did not do well in the ANA tests **(Mr Mbhele).**

Agreeing with the views of Mr Mkhize and Mr Mbhele respectively, Mr Mabaso the school principal of Bidvest Primary School had this to say:

We do conduct workshops. We even call people from outside to come to lecture us in those intervals when we get time. And also together here we do not undermine each other, if a person has knowledge in some sphere we encourage the person to prepare something and deliver to us **(Mr Mabaso).**

From what these school principals mentioned in the extracts above, it appears that they understood the importance of school initiated and school-based workshops in addition to those that are organised by the provincial Department of Education. They also viewed networking as one of the important tools to continuous professional teacher development. These school principals were also of the view that school-based workshops can be initiated and facilitated by any other teacher at a school other than the school principals and that the ability to network with other teachers within the school as well as with teachers from other schools make things easier for teachers' professional development to take place. This is in line with the views expressed by a number of scholars who argue that on-going workshops can be initiated by any member of the staff and that workshops have a positive impact in an improvement of teachers' daily practises and learner performance (Middlewood, Parker & Beere, 2005; Robertson, 2008; Hord, 2009).

While all three school principals were unanimous in their views about the type of professional development activities they provided to their teaching staff, the views expressed by the Heads of Departments (HODs) as well as Post-Level One Educators (PL1 Educators, also referred to as teachers and or educators in this report), differed. The terms 'educator' and 'teacher' are used interchangeably in this report to mean the same thing. According to this category of research participants, some school principals initiated and or facilitated school-based workshops whereas some did not. The views expressed by the principal of Ntokozweni Primary School were corroborated by those of Mr Ramarela, the HOD from the same school. This is what this HOD had to say:

> *The principal initiates workshops which I may call in-service training. Sometimes the principal exposes the staff to workshops which have been organised by the Department of Education or he may expose his teachers to workshops that have been organised by other stakeholders* (**Mr Ramarela).**

Furthermore, the views expressed by the principal of Nkiyankiya Primary School (Mr Mkhize) were also corroborated by those of Mrs Madlala, the HOD from the same school. This is what the HOD said:

> *Ok, our principal or let me say we as the SMT office usually give the educators a chance to development by conducting workshops which are usually done on Fridays at about half past one but the school usually closes at three o'clock conducting those workshops to develop our educators* (**Mrs Madlala).**

However, the same cannot be said about the school principal of Bidvest Primary School whose HOD Mrs Khoza (not her real name) contradicted the views of the principal. This HOD maintained that their school principal did not initiate or facilitate any school-based workshops, and that he had not in any way tried to capacitate them as the teaching staff, nor did he delegate the facilitation thereof to other School Management Team (SMT) members. Clearly, such a position is a stark to that of Mr Mabaso, the school principal. The HOD had this to say:

> *At present he has done nothing. We do not have workshops here at school* (**Mrs Khoza).**

Since teachers were also interviewed on the same subject of professional development of staff and the role that is played by school principals, it was noted that participants from

different research sites had different views to express which is well understandably. Surprisingly, at some schools, participants from the same research sites had different views to express which then left much to be desired. For instance, the school principal of Bidvest Primary Schools' views that he initiates and facilitates school-based workshops and networks with other schools were in contrast with the views of his HOD (Mrs Khoza) who maintained that there are no school-based workshops at the school as well as Mr Bhengu (PL1 Educator) who suggested that the school-based workshop at the same school are initiated and or facilitated by the deputy school principal.

As previously mentioned, some teachers maintained that the school principal initiated and/or facilitated school-based workshops, whereas some teachers mentioned that their school principal did not. For instance, Ms Cele, a teacher from Ntokozweni Primary School mentioned that their school principal did initiate and or facilitate school-based workshops. This is what she had to say:

> *The principal helps us. He invited the EduPack facilitators to come and help us. They helped us on how to prepare for Annual National Assessment (ANA) and how the learners did in ANA. So we were well developed* **(Miss Cele).**

This is congruent with what was mentioned earlier on by the school principal as well as HOD (Mr Ramarela) from the same school (Ntokozweni Primary School). However, Mr Bhengu (PL1 Educator) at Bidvest Primary School articulated that the workshops at his school are initiated by the deputy principal but not the school principal as such. This information contradicted with what was mentioned by the School Principal earlier on when he suggested that the workshops at his school are facilitated by the HODs and outsourced expertise. This is what he had to say:

> *Fortunately, we have the deputy principal who is also our curriculum manager who initiates the workshops taking into account what she has noticed as areas that need development. She conducts the workshops taking into account the arrears that need to be developed* **(Mr Bhengu).**

This is in contrast with what the school principal articulated that he delegates the facilitation of workshops to HODs. Interestingly, the HOD from the same school argued that there are no school-based workshops at the school at all, whether initiated by the deputy principal or the school principal.

In this particular school, there is an interesting scenario whereby all participants expressed divergent views about the same thing which they all claim is happening in the school. The school principal of Nkiyankiya Primary School (Mr Mkhize) concurred that he initiates and or facilitates school-based workshops. This is what he had to say:

> *One workshop that I've initiated here in my school I would say It was that of School Discipline. We were talking about school discipline where we incorporated learners as well as teachers. So, the main emphasis of that workshop was school discipline.* **(Mr Mkhize).**

Mrs Madlala, an HOD from the same school (Nkiyankiya Primary) suggested that they as the SMT decided to make a provision for teachers to develop each other on Fridays. This is what she had to say:

> *We as the SMT office, usually gives the educators a chance to attend professional development by conducting workshops which is usually done on Fridays* **(Mrs Madlala).**

Mr Thabethe's views, an educator at the same school was that his school principal did not initiate school-based workshops but waited for the Department of Education to initiate them. Then he sends teachers to such workshops and then he allows those teachers who attended the departmental workshops to give feedback to other teaching staff members. This is what he had to say:

> *We do go to workshops depending on the subject or category. The principal make it a point that a person who goes to the workshop is a right person for that particular workshop. He asks the teachers who attended the workshops to bring the feedback. If it is something we need to implement in the school he allows that person to lead that part* **(Mr Thabethe).**

When I asked the participants to tell me more about the kinds of workshops that took place at their school, they expressed different views on that aspect. For instance, Mr Mbhele, the school principal of Ntokozweni Primary school affirmed that most of the workshops at his school intended to improve teaching and learning. Their focus as a school was to improve learner performance in Mathematics and in English as well as other areas. This is what he had to say:

> *It's on-going, because after that one we also called another one that was conducted by EduPack for the whole staff from grade 1 up to Grade 7 Mathematics teachers. And after that we saw that their problems were resolved regarding ANA problems.* **(Mr Mbhele).**

Mr Mkhize, the principal in the same school concurred saying that the workshops were continuous and were aimed at improving teaching and learning. This is how he put it:

> *We do have a school improvement plan. It is the main task of the Staff Development Team to ensure that developmental programmes or workshop are organized and participated here in my school on continuous basis with the intention to improve the work of the teachers so that teachers can become competent when they do their work* **(Mr Mkhize).**

Mr Mabaso, the principal of Bidvest Primary School affirmed what Mr Mbhele has articulated that the workshops sometimes focused on learning areas that gave them problems.

With regards to the focus of the school based-workshops, Mr Mkhize, the principal of Nkiyankiya Primary School mentioned that one workshop that he initiated at the school focussed on discipline for both teachers and the learners. He argued that discipline was part of improving teaching and learning. This is what he had to say:

> *One workshop that I've initiated here in my school I would say it was based on School Discipline. On the issue we incorporated learners as well as teachers. So, the main emphasis of that workshop was school discipline. Everybody has to be disciplined for the school to be able to achieve its own intended objectives because there is no way that you can talk about discipline and exclude either teachers or learners* **(Mr Mkhize).**

Another item that I considered important was the question of time when the workshops are to be held. So, the question was about how the schools decided on the times that are to be used for workshops as part of teachers' professional development. Mr Mbhele advocated that they as the SMT and staff collectively decided on the suitable times to be used for school-based workshops which happened to be after teaching hours. This is what he said:

> *"We have specially arranged times. We normally start at 14:30 to 16:00 forth nightly* **(Mr Mbhele)."**

His views were corroborated by the HOD from his school (Mr Ramarela), who said that he assumes that it was a collective agreement since it is a norm at his school to collectively agree on something before it is implemented. This is what he had to say:

> *I came here in 2011; it has been a practise way before I came here that such workshops would take place from 14:00 to 15:15. I wouldn't really know how they came about that. I would assume that they had a meeting where everybody voices their ideas and arrived at that particular time period* **(Mr Ramarela).**

Mr Mabaso, the school principal of Bidvest Primary School articulated similar views that were expressed by Mr Mbhele when suggesting that they observe teaching times. He had this to say:

> *No, here we are very much observant when it comes to the contact hours. We normally stage these workshops or meetings towards the end of the day. Perhaps we will only steal about 30 minutes of the contact hour if it is needed; if it is not needed we prefer to do them after school* **(Mr Mabaso).**

Mr Bhengu, a teacher from Bidvest Primary School corroborated the views of his school principal when he said that they as the school respected teaching times; hence they conduct workshops in the afternoons after teaching hours. This is what he had to say:

> *We arrange time so that we don't disturb teaching and learning. We always take into consideration that we do not have to disturb the learners. We arrange the afternoons for the workshops and we also have the mini workshops which will not take a lot of time but will tackle the very same issues that have been identified for addressing* **(Mr Bhengu).**

Other participants had contrasting views regarding this matter. They contradicted what the previously mentioned participants from the same research site had mentioned. For instance, Miss Cele, a teacher from Ntokozweni Primary School argued that the school-based workshops were conducted during teaching times. What can be deduced from this conversation is that professional development workshops took place and the main difference between the participants is about the times during which these workshops are conducted. This is what she said:

During the working time and we also go to Seda Ridge (false name) where we have the Department workshops **(Miss Cele).**

Mrs Madlala, an HOD from Nkiyankiya Primary School mentioned that the workshops are conducted on Fridays from 13:30, stealing from teaching times. This is what she had to say:

We as the SMT office usually gives the educators a chance for professional development activities by conducting workshops which are usually done on Fridays at about half past one **(Mrs Madlala).**

These views are not in line with those of Mr Thabethe, a teacher from the same school as Mrs Madlala. He argued that workshops are conducted on any given days after teaching times, not disturbing teaching hours. This is what he had to say:

We usually use from 14:30 to 15:00; luckily we have teachers from the area and there are teachers that come from far. So we manage to be there on time and do a lot of improvement **(Mr Thabethe).**

Middlewood, Parker and Beere (2005); Robertson (2008); Steyn (2010) suggest that professional development is bound to be successful if it is a lifelong process. It is the expectation that school principals initiate the facilitation of professional teacher development programmes in their schools (Bush & Middlewood, 2005; DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2006, Fullan, 2009; Mncube, Naicker & Nzimakwe, 2010, Hilty, 2011). Mr Mbhele, the principal of Ntokozweni Primary seemed aware of such an important task of facilitating continuous professional teacher development as a school principal. Other participants at his school confirmed the existence of CPTD. However, the same cannot be said about participants from other schools since there was no correlation between what was said by the school principal, the HOD and PL1 educator from the same school.

The culture of working together of teachers has proven to bear fruits in many countries as many scholars have done research in this area and their findings reveal that continuous professional teacher development (CPTD) enhance teachers' daily practice and learner performance (Thompson, Gregg & Niksa, 2004; Hord, 2008; Sargent & Hannum, 2009; Blackburn & Williamson, 2010; Mncube, Naicker & Nzimakwe, 2010; Maloney & Konza, 2011; Seo & Han, 2012).

Since this study is underpinned by Hord's (1997) model of Five Dimensions of Professional Learning Communities, the first of the five dimensions talks about 'supportive and shared leadership'. Through this model, Hord (1997) emphasises that for possible continuous professional teacher development (CPTD), school principals are expected to share leadership by allowing other teachers to take lead even if they are not in managerial positions. Data elicited for this study revealed that opportunities for this happening at Ntokozweni Primary School were high. For instance, there was congruency between what emerged from different participants from the same school.

4.2.2 Participants' understanding of coaching

The participating principals as the main sources of data for this study were all asked the question about their understanding of the term 'coaching' and share their views and experiences about how coaching occurred in their respective schools. Their responses indicated that they had an idea of what coaching is all about. They also expressed awareness of their expected tasks as school principals in providing coaching services for their teaching staff. They gave practical examples of the things that they did at their schools as part of coaching. For instance, they demonstrated how lessons are conducted, they also delegated the task of coaching and mentoring to their HODs and experienced teachers as these possessed expertise in specific subjects. Mr Mbhele, the principal of Ntokozweni Primary School, what he and his HODs did as part of coaching to develop teachers in his school explained that coaching is what he and the HOD do to develop teachers in his school, especially novice ones. He further mentioned that he ensured that teachers knew what was expected of them by even doing demo lessons for them. This is what he had to say:

> *Coaching entails working with the teacher and showing him/her on how they should teach. It starts with classroom management to subject management and employment of different teaching techniques and assessment as well. When we employ a new teacher we sit with them and give them the teaching policies of the school. We also show them how they should prepare for their lesson. We will go with them to see how they present a lesson and I will also present a demo lesson to show them how they should teach, how they should set their papers.* **(Mr Mbhele).**

Mr Mabaso, the principal of Bidvest Primary School concurred with the view that a school principal is expected to be at the forefront of coaching. Adding to that, he also suggested that

it is important that they (as school principals) diagnose their staff's weaknesses with the intention of supporting them. He also gave examples of the things he did as part of coaching activities. This is what he had to say:

> *Coaching means you as a person who is a coacher you need to diagnose the weaknesses of the person you are going to coach. Well as part of coaching, I emphasise cleanliness. If a classroom is not healthy and clean there is no good teaching that can take place in that classroom. Secondly, punctuality is one of the things that I emphasize here* **(Mr Mabaso).**

Mr Mkhize of Nkiyankiya Primary School defined coaching as giving guidance. Agreeing with the views of Mr Mbhele and Mr Mabaso, Mr Mkhize believed that they are expected to be at the forefront of coaching in a school environment. This is what he had to say:

> *To me the word coaching is about giving guidance. It is about giving direction so that we can be able to achieve a particular objective. One thing that I've done here in my school is the issue of ensuring that the school environment that we are in is always clean. The other issue that comes to mind is the issue of assessment. I have noted that our teachers are not that keen to ensure that our environment is clean. So in the meeting I have told them about the importance of ensuring that we are working in such a good nice working environment.* **(Mr Mkhize).**

Since HODs as well as teachers were also participants in this study, they unanimously seemed to understand what coaching entailed. They were then able to give examples of some of the things that their school principals do as part of coaching in their respective schools. Mr Ramarela, HOD from Ntokozweni Primary School suggested that coaching is similar to mentoring where a novice educator is assigned to an experienced educator for continuous coaching purposes. This is what he had to say:

> *Coaching is similar to mentoring, where a lesser experienced somebody would be given to somebody more experienced for that lesser experienced somebody to gain knowledge or skills about some aspect within or outside of the curriculum which they feel they need improvement on* **(Mr Ramarela).**

Mrs Khoza, HOD from Bidvest Primary School shared the views of the participating school principals when suggesting that coaching is about giving guidance. She further mentioned

that at her school the principal does not do anything as part of coaching nor delegates such a task to HODs. This is what she had to say:

> *There are some principals and SMT that coach their staff, by guiding them. They organise workshops or call someone with expertise to develop the staff or the principal does this job himself. Unfortunately, our principal does not do that at all nor delegates to SMT members* **(Mrs Khoza).**

Emphasising the need for outsourcing is Mrs Madlala, an HOD from Nkiyankiya Primary School when she defined coaching as finding someone to do coaching if one battles with how certain things are done. She also mentioned that at her school the SMT does coaching for teacher development purposes. This is what she had to say:

Coaching means if there is something you cannot do well for example in sport, you get an external coach to help you. If someone does not do well in class, the SMT tries to visit that educator to develop him/her in order to teach well **(Mrs Madlala).**

Ms Cele, a teacher from Ntokozweni Primary School defined coaching as being given advice on how to do things, emphasising that their school principal as well as the HODs help them. This is what she had to say:

Coaching is when someone tells me how to do something. They give me advice. The HODs help us a lot. If we have a problem we talk to the Principal and the Principal says we must go to the HOD **(Miss Cele).**

Sharing the same sentiments as the previously mentioned participants is Mr Bhengu, a teacher from Bidvest Primary School when he defined coaching as being mentoring and giving guidance. Disagreeing with the views of his HOD (Mrs Khoza) who said that their school principal does not do coaching at all, Mr Bhengu mentioned that their school principal sits with the SMT to discuss departmental circulars and how things should be done. This is what he had to say:

Coaching is about mentoring, giving people direction as to what is expected of them and giving them guidelines. As part of coaching when the principal comes back with the information from the circuit office he sits down with the SMT on how to address the issues, for example, he comes with the circulars he sits down with his team and they discuss how to address those circulars **(Mr Bhengu).**

Mr Thabethe, a teacher from Nkiyankiya Primary School seemed unable to give a definition of the word coaching but he managed to give examples of what he thought entailed coaching when I explained to him that it refers to leaders' trials to teach others what is expected of them in a school environment. This is what he had to say:

> *I am familiar with the word coaching regarding sport. Our principal teaches Technology. He leads by example. If some teachers want to watch him teaching in class, he allows that to happen. So he does help, he gives people courage/motivation. So he is a good leader* **(Mr Thabethe).**

Middlewood, Parker and Beere (2005); Robertson (2008) attest that global education reform has necessitated school principals to develop their teaching staff members through different developmental programmes. One of which is coaching. Moreover, coaching is also regarded as one of the important determinants of a PLC (Bullough, 2007; Clarke, 2007; Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008). The theoretical framework underpinning this study is Hord's (1997) Five Dimensions of Professional Learning Communities. The fifth dimension emphasises the importance of sharing of personal practice in a PLC. This basically means that the work of the teachers is expected to be reviewed by educational leaders on continuous basis to ensure development. If educational leaders do coaching at their schools they are therefore likely to diagnose problems that teachers encounter when preparing and delivering lessons in class. Such problems are likely to be eliminated during coaching sessions where educational leaders would share their expertise with teachers.

4.2.3 Monitoring the work of the teaching staff

All participants were asked their understanding and experiences of monitoring in terms of the manner in which monitoring is done at their respective schools. Their responses indicated that they understood it to be the process whereby the SMT checks the work of the teachers and that of learners. According to the participants, the purpose of monitoring is to get some insights about what is taught and what is learnt and also to assess compliance with the DOE curriculum guidelines. Different participants mentioned different frequencies in terms of the actual times during which monitoring activities are done. In some schools, monitoring is done quarterly while in others it is done weekly.

Mr Mbhele, for instance, said as a member of the SMT, they monitor the work of the teachers by analysing their files. He said that his school policy stipulates that teachers

should submit their teaching files to their HODs every Thursday. In addition, the HODs do class visits and use the departmental monitoring tool to assess the extent to which what is taught by teachers is in line with the departmental curriculum requirements. This is what he had to say:

> *Monitoring entails checking learners' work and checking the teachers' files. We monitor what is taught. Our policy is that every Thursday each teacher should bring their teaching file with lessons prepared for the week ahead. We check the lessons planned. From Monday onwards, we do class visits to see whether the teacher is teaching according to their plans. We have a departmental tool which we are using to monitor the teachers' work* (**Mr Mbhele).**

Agreeing with Mr Mbhele, Mr Mkhize, the principal of Nkiyankiya Primary School, said the same thing. However, Mr Mkhize was not convincing in the way he talked about what they do to monitor, actually, he talked hypothetically instead of talking about what was actually happening. This is how he put it:

> *Each and every SMT member, the principal, deputy principal or the HOD must have a monitoring plan. This needs to be communicated with the teachers to say that a particular juncture this is what I am going to do in order to monitor the work that you have done. It can either be going to class, looking at the work that has been done by learners in order to ensure that teachers are implementing exactly what is entailed in the curriculum* (**Mr Mkhize).**

Mr Mabaso the principal of Bidvest Primary School differed from other two school principals regarding what he monitors at his school. He mentioned the time book and classrooms as the things that he monitors. However, it was not clear though whether other SMT members monitor what is taught at the school. This is what he had to say:

> *First thing that I check is the time book. Number two, I check the classrooms, I check that everything is in good order* (**Mr Mabaso).**

Literature suggests that school principals are expected to be clear about curriculum requirements. They should be conversant about subject content, lesson preparation, lesson presentation, assessment methods and criteria as they are expected to monitor the teachers', as well as learners' work (Southworth, 2002; Hilty, 2011). Without such understandings they cannot be able to tell whether what is being taught is in line with the departmental curriculum

needs if they do not even know what is supposed to be taught and how. Southworth (2002) further argues that when monitoring the work of the teachers, school principals are expected to do the following: look at the teachers' weekly lesson plans, do class visits to observe teachers whilst teaching and offering support with an intention of developing the teachers. Sometimes, delegating some of the tasks to the HODs, for instance, the monitoring the work of teachers is expected (Clarke, 2007). Monitoring the work of teachers at each school has the potential of bearing fruits since monitoring serves as a tool to ensure that teachers are in class delivering pre-planned lessons in an expected rate (Clarke, 2007).

The notion of sharing of personal practices as it emerged from data is consistent with the fifth dimension of Hord's (1997) Model. The fifth of the Five Dimensions Model highlights the notion of sharing personal practice where teachers' work is reviewed on regular basis with the aim of encouraging and assisting the teachers to make adjustments where weaknesses have been identified. This dimension therefore has direct implications for the monitoring roles of the SMT. For example, in terms of this model; Dimension Five of the model encourages the SMT members to continuously monitor the work of the teaching staff and learners with the intention of improving teachers' practices. It is expected that SMT members not only monitor teachers' work but also have to ensure that development within the school as a learning organisation occurs (Steyn, 2013).

In the context of study, elicited data showed that the SMT members did not only their task of monitoring the work of both teachers and learners, but that they actually acted on it. The data has revealed that time tables are drawn up which assisted the SMTs in scheduling meetings with the teachers and when submissions were to be made.

4.2.4 Participants' understanding of modelling

All participants were asked to talk about their understanding of the term 'modelling' and share their experiences of the concept at their respective schools. They all seemed to be aware of what it is all about. They understood it to refer to demonstrations of good behaviour that other staff members and learners need to copy. Examples of modelling included punctuality, avoiding absenteeism from school without a sound reason, good manners and dedication towards work, to mention just a few. However, their views differed when talking about what is practically happening at each school.

Mr Mbhele, the school principal of Ntokozweni Primary School was of the view that the SMT is expected to be at the forefront of modelling good behavioural practices that they as the school management expected of their teachers and learners to copy. This is what he had to say:

Modelling refers to good behaviour that is supposed to be displayed by the SMT in order for the staff as well as learners to copy for instance; you cannot expect teachers to come early to school if you as the SMT do not model that good behaviour. The SMT should also show dedication towards school work (**Mr Mbhele).**

These views were also shared by Mr Mabaso, the principal of Bidvest Primary School who affirms that SMTs were expected to model good behavioural practices that they expect the staff and learners to display. This is what he had to say:

The moral good behaviours should always be shown and should be the first thing that is prioritised at the school. The way the person dresses is one of the good things that are expected from all members of staff; the way the person talks to another person and respecting even the community (**Mr Mabaso).**

Mr Mkhize, principal of Nkiyankiya Primary School shared the same sentiments as those of Mr Mabaso and Mr Mbhele when suggesting that good behaviour should be reinforced especially by the SMT. This is what he had to say:

I would say the principal together with his HODs are expected to be at the forefront of modelling good behaviour that is expected from all staff members as well as learners. We try not to come late to school also the way we dress. Using the morning assembly, we do talk about the good things that are expected of the learners (**Mr Mkhize).**

The views expressed in the above extract were shared by all three principals. While it seemed that most SMT members are aware of their task of modelling good behaviour and living up to that expectation, Mrs Khoza, an HOD from Bidvest Primary School had a different experience at her school. She argued that their principal did not model any good behaviour as he used to absents himself from school without even informing them as members of the SMT. This is what she had to say:

He has done nothing to model good behaviour. Sometimes he comes late to school. Sometimes he does not come at all and he does not tell anyone where he is going and why. He is not a good example (**Mrs Khoza).**

Literature suggests that school principals are expected to model good behaviours that they believe are important in the education community (Southworth, 2002; Robertson, 2008). This is important because principals are expected to make a positive difference in the lives of others (Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinback, 1999). Southworth (2002) further accentuate that school SMT members as well as the whole teaching fraternity are people who are always watched by the community. Therefore, it is imperative that they always model good practices for instance the way they dress, the way they talk to others etcetera.

4.2.5 Support towards part-time studying teachers

Participating school principals were asked if there were any teacher development programmes in which the teachers were involved, what kind of support they offered to them. Two of the three principals boldly stated that they had teachers who are studying on part-time basis as part of their professional development. They further mentioned that they provided support to them. One way in which they supported the teachers was by giving them time-off work when they have tertiary work to attend to. This claim was supported by the HODs and the teachers. The other principal seemed doubtful about what was happening at his school. He was not even able to give the correct number of teachers that were studying at his school and what they were studying.

Mr Mbhele, a principal of Ntokozweni Primary School provided emotional support to his teachers who were studying in tertiary institutions. This principal highlighted some of the benefits of having the teaching staff that was continually improving their skills. This is what he had to say:

> *We have three teachers who are studying part time. One is doing English honours, the other one is doing Maths honours and the third one is doing B Ed. We encourage them to study further because the more you study you will be sharpening your mind and the Department of Education will be happy to have staff that is educated. So we are encouraging them. When they are attending seminars we allow and give them time off to attend freely. We don't complain.*

The views expressed in the extract above were shared by Mr Mkhize the principal of Nkiyankiya Primary School who also confirmed that there were teachers that were studying part time at his school. He prided himself for having played a major role in encouraging them to embark on their post-graduate studies. This is what he had to say:

I played a role in making them want to study further. I emphasise to them that on-going learning opens up greater opportunities and that studying further makes you a better teacher. I am proud to have been part of their life changing experience. I assist them with their assignments, portfolios and the likes **(Mr Mkhize).**

The views expressed in the above extract were corroborated by Mrs Madlala, an HOD from Nkiyankiya Primary School who asserted that their school principal did encourage the teachers to study further and also that he offered them support in the form of giving them time-off from school when they have tertiary work to attend to. Other participants echoed similar stories. The only principal Mr Mabaso, the principal of Bidvest Primary School, who did not seem to be actively involved in supporting his staff and did not even know what they were studying and how useful their studies could be for the school and for the individually.

When looking at the issue of supporting teachers in their professional development activities, literature seems to suggest that school principals are expected to play a prominent role by for example, encouraging their staff members to study further and to offer them support of many kinds. For instance, Southworth (2002) and Robertson (2008) maintain that school principals should first be life-long learners and should also encourage their teachers to pursue part-time studies. Adding to that Blasé and Blasé (1998) argue that school principals as leaders can do all of the above through conferencing and promoting teachers' professional growth.

4.2.6 Promotion of teacher leadership and collaborative culture

The participants were asked if teacher leadership and collaborative cultures were promoted at their schools. They all responded by saying that teacher leadership was promoted at their schools, and it took the form of various committees that existed at their schools which were led by the teachers. According to these participants, the existence of such committees was evidence that collaborative cultures were being promoted because the teachers worked together in these committees.

Participants also highlighted collective nature in which vision and mission statements of the schools were crafted as evidence of the promotion of teacher leadership and collaborative cultures in their schools.

Mr Mbhele, the principal of Ntokozweni Primary School argued for instance, that in trying to promote teacher leadership at the school, they had various committees such as Sport Committee; Entertainment Committee, as well as Subject Committees. Mr Mbhele argued

that all these committees were led mostly by PL1 educators. He further argued that the vision and mission of the school were collectively crafted by stakeholders. This is what he had to say:

We have Subject Committees, Sports Committees and Entertainment Committees which are led by PL1 educators who were elected democratically in the staff meeting. There are also school secretaries in such committees. That is the way we are promoting teacher leadership. The vision and the mission statement of the school were also crafted by all stakeholders at the school as I held meetings with them on different occasions before they were implemented. **(Mr Mbhele).**

Similar views were also shared by Mr Mabaso, the principal of Bidvest Primary School who declared that at his school there were various democratically elected teacher-led committees and structures. In addition, he concurred with the view that he involved teachers and the School Governing Body (SGB) in crafting and reviewing the vision and mission statements of the school. This is what he had to say:

As you can see my policies here at school, we have a lay councillor who is looking after the welfare of the learners at the school but she is not in the SMT. She was chosen democratically by the staff. We have two teachers who are running the kitchen they have all powers to make various decisions regarding the kitchen together. We also have different committees like Sports Committee, Cultural Committee and Special Days' Committee **(Mr Mabaso).**

The views expressed in the above extract were also shared by Mr Mkhize, the principal of Nkiyankiya Primary School. Similarly, he highlighted the view that various committees existed and many were teacher-led. On the same vein he highlights the collective nature of vision and mission statement creation as evidence of the promotion of teacher leadership and collaborative culture. This is what he had to say:

We have different committees in the school such as the Fundraising, Bereavement, Entertainment and Subject Committees. Because the SMT cannot do everything alone, we give teachers such responsibilities and contribute to increase their leadership capacities; I believe that this helps the teachers to be good leaders and learn to collaborate with other teachers in their committees **(Mr Mkhize).**

The views of the HODs from the participating schools corroborated those of the school principals. For instance, Mr Ramarela, an HOD from Ntokozweni Primary School posits that their different skills are utilised at the school as teacher leadership and collaborative cultures are promoted. This is what he had to say:

Here at school we are a bunch of people who have diverse set of skills. Some of us come from the church background, some of us are good at curriculum related issues and others are good at sports. We have people who tutor at different universities and because of the knowledge they have, they do go and help with the various subject committees and that is promoted and encouraged by the school principal. Whoever has certain skills that others do not have is advised to assist for the betterment of the school (**Mr Ramarela).**

While all previous extract paint a positive picture about teacher leadership, collaborative cultures in the schools, Mrs Khoza, an HOD from Bidvest Primary School came up with a negative view about her school. She argued that her principal did not do anything at school relating to issues under discussion. This is what she had to say:

The vision and mission statement was crafted by all of us through the principal's invitation. We as HODs initiated the formation of subject committees as the principal was not doing anything about that. There are teachers who are leaders in their groups where they discuss their subjects and related problems. For example, those who are Maths, Science and Zulu are in their respective groups and within them there are leaders (**Mrs Khoza).**

The views expressed in the extract above were also shared by Mrs Madlala, the HOD from Nkiyankiya Primary School. Similarly, Ms Cele, a teacher from Ntokozweni Primary School echoed the views expressed by the HOD and the three principals from the tree schools. This is what she had to say:

The principal involved us in the crafting of the vision and mission statements of the school. He also emphasises the importance of collaboration as we are asked to assist one another if one has a problem maybe how to introduce a lesson and so on (**Ms Cele).**

The views expressed by in the extract above were shared by Mr Bhengu, a teacher from Bidvest Primary School and also by Mr Thabethe, a teacher from Nkiyankiya Primary

School. The notion of teacher leadership and collaborative cultures in schools is widely written about in educational leadership and management literature. For instance, Price Waterhouse Coopers (2007) advocates the view that education reform called for the promotion of teacher leadership by the school principals. The promotion of teacher leadership is also one of the attributes of PLCs. Southworth (2008) further reveals that shared leadership roles at the school, eases the burden from school principals. In the studies conducted by different scholars on teacher leadership, shared values and vision and promotion of collaborative cultures (Hord, 2008; Harris, 2009; Blackburn & Williamson, 2010; Lunenburg, 2010; Maloney & Konza 2011; Seo & Han, 2012), the findings revealed that there was a correlation between teachers' daily practices, high morale and job satisfaction and as well as, an improvement in learners' performance where teacher leadership practices and collaborative cultures are promoted. In their studies, Ngcobo and Tikly (2010); Lunenburg, 2010; Bhengu and Mthembu (2014) emphasise the fact that teamwork and collaboration as it happens in PLCs results in an improved learner performance.

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is Hord's (1997) Five Dimensions of Professional Learning Communities. The first dimension is supportive and shared leadership. By this dimension, Hord (1997) highlights the importance of the school principals' ability to share leadership with the teachers that are not in managerial positions. Hord (1997) encourages school principals not only to share leadership with subordinates but also to support them when collaborating with others. This is also supported by Southworth (2002) and Robertson (2008) when they suggest that school principals are expected to participate in PLCs, share authority and offer support when needed. The elicited data established that the principals in the study understood the importance of involving stakeholders in decision-making and other important matters. It was revealed that stakeholders were involved in the crafting and reviewing of the vision and mission of the school.

4.2.7 Barriers to the creation of professional learning communities

The participants were asked to declare what they regarded as barriers to the creation of PLCs. Their views were largely similar in that they mentioned resistance to change by some teachers as one of the barriers. It emerged that some teachers did not want to leave their comfort zones as they had enjoyed working in isolation for a long time, and they disliked the notion of sharing their work with others as it was expected. They also mentioned teachers' attitudes as being negative towards being led by teachers that are at the same level as them.

They tended to verbally attack them and adopt aggressive behaviours towards them just because they did not occupy any formal position in the school. Clearly, these teachers seem to be trapped in the past thinking of only respecting the views of people in formal positions of authority. The first two factors seem to have contributed to the lack of commitment and dedication to perform any task beyond normal school hours. The fourth barrier seems to be directly linked to the manner in which their schools were led. For instance, participants mentioned that if the purpose for the creation of committees is not clearly communicated to them, they cannot be expected to embrace such changes. Therefore, the logical consequence is resistance to the proposed change. Concomitantly, other interpersonal issues are bound to arise; participants highlighted the lack of trust, low self-esteem, lack of information and interpersonal conflicts as part of their lives in the schools and were regarded as some of the barriers to the creation of PLCs.

Mr Mbhele, the principal of Ntokozweni Primary School confirmed that some teachers were resistant to change. According to him, they do not want to take leading role in the committees that exist at the school and some of them did not want to be led by others either. This principal also mentioned lack of self-confidence and experience. This is what he had to say:

> *We do face challenges where you find that some teachers do not believe in themselves and; hence resist taking lead in committees. Some teachers do not want to leave their comfort zones; they do not want to share their work with others. The problem of the lack of experience and knowledge as well are also regarded as barriers to the creation of committees* (**Mr Mbhele**).

Mr Mabaso, the principal of Bidvest Primary School corroborated the views held by Mr Mbhele by arguing that teachers were reserved; they did not want to share their work with others and that they undermine each other. This is what he had to say:

> *Teachers are reserved. They also undermine each other and corn collaboration and teacher led activities such as subject committees* (**Mr Mabaso, principal of Bidvest P. School**).

Similar views were also shared by Mr Mkhize, the principal of Nkiyankiya Primary School who claimed that lack of trust amongst educators, lack of expertise and lack of commitment were regarded as barriers to the creation of PLCs. This is what he had to say:

I can tell you, the lack of commitment to change; lack of expertise and lack of trust as well as. unclear purpose for the changes at the school are barriers to the creation of PLCs **(Mr Mkhize).**

The HODs corroborated the views of their respective school principals in emphasising that interpersonal conflicts, lack of trust, lack of commitment and low self-esteem were barriers to the creation of PLCs. For instance, Mr Ramarela, an HOD from Ntokozweni Primary School concurred with the view that lack of expertise, lack of trust, as well as, unwillingness to change are barriers to the creation of PLCs. This is what he had to say:

Unwillingness to try new things, lack of expertise and lack of trust amongst the staff are barriers to the creation of PLCs **(Mr Ramarela).**

Another HOD from another school, Mrs Khoza from Bidvest Primary School, declared that lack of good relationships between staff members has tended to result in negativities around any programme that is introduced at school. The lack of self-confidence was also highlighted as one of the barriers to PLCs. This is what she had to say:

If teachers at the school are not in good terms, the implementation of any programme is opposed, mostly in covert ways but sometimes, overtly. In addition, teachers' lack of self-confidence becomes a barrier to them working together collaboratively **(Mrs Khoza).**

Mrs Madlala, an HOD from Nkiyankiya Primary School shared similar views as those of previously mentioned participants when arguing that lack of good relationships, lack of understating and the lack of commitment and low self-esteem were barriers to the creation of PLCs. This is what she had to say:

I think that the lack of good relationships amongst staff members, low self-esteem, lack of commitment and understanding present barriers to the creation of PLCs **(Mrs Madlala).**

The views expressed by the HODs and principals were also corroborated by the teachers. These teachers highlighted the same issues of lack of self-confidence, lack of understanding and commitment as barriers to the creation of PLCs. For instance, Miss Cele, a teacher from Ntokozweni Primary School mentioned the lack of trust, understanding and commitment as presenting the barriers to the creation of PLCs. This is what she had to say:

Lack of understanding, trust and commitment can be barriers to the creation of PLCs **(Miss Cele).**

Similarly, Mr Bhengu another teacher cited the issue of self-esteem and lack of expertise among some teachers as barriers to the creation of PLCs. This is what he had to say:

I guess lack of expertise and low self-esteem go together in that they create a barrier to the creation of PLCs **(Mr Bhengu).**

Mr Thabethe shared similar views as those of other teachers. In addition, Mr Thabethe mentioned that the issue of superiority complex among some teachers as being a barrier to the creation of PLCs.

The lack of commitment among teachers to work beyond normal school hours is highlighted in the literature (Steyn & van Niekerk, 2007; Gorton & Alston, 2009; Bush, Kiggundu & Moorosi, 2011). It is also highlighted by some scholars that the lack of commitment by teachers could be attributed to the principals' lack of leadership skills, especially skills to communicate the needs to have PLCs in the schools. For instance, Botha (2012) maintains that school principals are not adequately capacitated to manage the creation of PLCs. Botha (2012) further argues that by trying collaboration amongst teachers without having communicated with them on the purpose, the need for such communities can result in barriers to the creation. Adding to the above discourse, Yukl (2006) declares that lack of trust amongst the teachers can also lead to barriers to the creation of PLCs. Lack of good relationships amongst teachers hinders collaboration that is expected in PLCs (Bush & Middlewood, 2005, cited in Govender, 2011). The data that was elicited from all participants highlighted issues of the lack of trust, lack of good relationships amongst staff members, low self-esteem, lack of expertise and lack of commitment and many others as barriers to the establishment of PLCs.

4.2.8 Strategies to overcome barriers to the creation of professional learning communities

Participants were asked to declare strategies used at their particular schools in order to overcome barriers to the creation of PLCs. School principals mentioned that they tried to create good relationships amongst staff members through talking with them in staff meetings, by encouraging teachers (especially those that are not in good terms) to work together in certain committees, by communicating purposes for any changes with staff members before

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implementation, as well as, by advising teachers to mix in committees where those with expertise can share knowledge with novice teachers. It emerged in the data that the HODs had divergent views about this whereas PL1 teachers seemed to have a common view about the need to share knowledge and skills.

Mr Mbhele, the principal of Ntokozweni Primary School maintained that he talked to teachers regarding the importance of collaboration and that he supported them in any form of collaboration. He said that he assigned teachers with expertise to be mentors to the novice ones. This is what he had to say:

> *Here at school I have explained several times to teachers the importance of collaboration and that it bears fruits. We have even adopted the slogan "Together we stand! Divided we fall! This seems to work because now teachers have learnt to work with each other. I also ensure that they are supported in their programmes as I recommended that we put together in each committee teachers with expertise to work with novice ones* **(Mr Mbhele).**

Agreeing with Mr Mbhele is Mr Mabaso, the principal of Bidvest Primary School who had this to say:

> *I encourage novice teachers to work with teachers with expertise in committees. This seems to have worked so far. I also clarify to teachers the need for any changes in order to avoid negativity* **(Mr Mabaso)**

Mr Mkhize Principal of Nkiyankiya Primary School declared that he communicates the purpose of each programme at the school in order to avoid negativity by the teachers. He added that he tried to promote good relationships amongst staff members through ceremonies like the thanksgiving where good work of both teachers and learners is recognised. This is what he had to say:

> *I communicate with teachers regarding the purpose of every programme at the school. I guess this prevents barriers. I also hold ceremonies at the school such as the Thanksgiving Day. This is where good work of both teachers and learners is recognised* **(Mr Mkhize).**

The HODs from three researched schools proclaimed that collaboration is emphasised at their respective schools as they had developed a culture of working together in different

committees. For instance, Mr Ramarela, an SMT member from Ntokozweni Primary School, declared that as a member of the SMT of the school, they mentored novice teachers in all programmes of the school including committees that have been set up in the school. This is what he had to say:

At our school, each SMT member is assigned with the duty of mentoring novice teachers; hence, we work together with them in various committees (**Mr Ramarela).**

Agreeing with the views of Mr Ramarela is Mrs Madlala, an SMT member from Nkiyankiya Primary School who also claimed that they assisted novice teachers in various committees that existed at the school so that these novice teachers can gain confidence in their work and adopt positive attitudes towards work in general and the teaching profession in particular. She further suggested that they communicated the purpose of each and every programme at the school before it is implemented. This is what she had to say:

We as the SMT, work with teachers in committees especially novice ones in order for them to gain confidence. The purpose of each programme that is implemented is also communicated to the staff prior to implementation (**Mrs Madlala).**

Mrs Khoza, an SMT member from Bidvest Primary School maintained that their school principal had not communicated any strategy to overcome barriers to PLCs to them. She argued that they as HODs work with teachers in subject committees. They devised their own strategy to deal with problematic issues that arise in the school relating to teaching and learning. That seemed to be working; they as HODs, encourage, support, initiate and facilitate collaboration at the school. This is what she had to say:

As I have mentioned before, the school principal does not care about what is happening at the school. As HODs, we devised strategies that we think will work. One being to initiate and support collaboration at the school and that teachers are made aware of our task in subject committees (**Mrs Khoza).**

The views expressed by the HODs above were corroborated by the teachers regarding the role played by their principals in addressing the barriers to PLCs. For instance, Ms Cele, a teacher from Ntokozweni Primary School declared that the school principal encouraged them to collaborate and that collaboration is beneficial. She added that the principal even assigned SMT members to be their mentors in committees. This is what she had to say:

The school principal talks to us in staff meetings emphasising the importance of collaboration and teachers with expertise are advised to mentor novice ones in order for them to gain confidence **(Ms Cele).**

However, Mr Bhengu, a teacher from Bidvest Primary School corroborated the views of the school principal by postulating that the school principal communicated with them regarding any programmes at the school and that he encouraged the teachers with expertise to work with novice ones in any programmes. This is what he had to say:

Our principal talks to us regarding the programmes at the school. He encourages teachers with expertise to mentor novice. This is what is happening at our school **(Mr Bhengu).**

Mr Thabethe, a teacher from Nkiyankiya Primary School corroborated the views of his SMT by advocating that the school principal communicated with the teachers regarding any programmes at the school. He added that they are assisted by the SMT in facilitating collaboration. Moreover, he proclaimed that the school principal initiated the celebration of ceremonies like Thanksgiving Day in order to bring the staff together. This is what he had to say:

We always know what is happening at the school and why; this is because the principal explains everything to us and that he emphasises the importance of us working together being assisted by our SMT and experienced teachers. We also have celebrations that were initiated by the principal which assist in emotionally bringing us together **(Mr Thabethe).**

The views expressed by the participants above are in line with those of Sparks (2002) **who** suggests that school principals are expected to ensure the development of good relationships amongst staff members and that they are maintained. Similarly, Fullan (2009) and Steyn (2013) are of the view that school principals are expected to clearly communicate the purpose of the creation of PLCs to teachers. It is crucial that they do this in order to avoid any negativity that might arise and become a barrier to the creation of such communities. School principals are advised to allow and encourage teachers to take lead in PLCs activities, and also, they need to explain to them as to how they are going to be supported in PLCs and what benefits might accrue (Govender, 2011).

Theoretical framework for this study (Hord, 1997) speaks of the importance of supportive and shared leadership where school principals are expected to ensure that teachers in PLCs are supported and that leadership is shared. Secondly, Hord (1997) encourages collective creativity, shared values and vision as well as sharing personal practice. According to Hord (1997), school principals are expected to ensure that collaboration, teacher leadership, as well as, the sharing of personal practices are implemented at their respective schools. The elicited data for this study suggests that two of the three school principals have succeeded in implementing the above-mentioned strategies in order to overcome barriers to the creation of PLCs.

4.3 Chapter Summary

In this chapter the data elicited from semi-structured interviews were presented under themes. This chapter focussed on presentation and discussion of data. In the next chapter, the main conclusions of this study are presented and certain recommendations are made.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has thematically presented and discussed the data that was elicited through the use of semi-structured interviews. This chapter is shifting from just describing the themes that emerged to an analysis and then make the findings drawn from the data. Ultimately, recommendations are made, based on the findings. In presenting the findings, research questions are used. This is done to achieve two main purposes. The first one is to make it simpler to synthesise the findings from eight themes that were presented in Chapter Four to just three research questions. The second one is to ensure that it becomes easier to assess the extent to which the research questions that were posed in Chapter One have been addressed. Before the findings are presented, a summary of the whole study is presented.

5.2 Summary of the study

This study has explored schools' perspectives on the creation of Professional Learning Communities. This was a case study of three primary schools in Pinetown District with principals who successfully completed an Advanced Certificate in Education School Leadership Programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The first chapter has outlined the background to the study, including the discussion of the rationale, research questions and a brief discussion of the methodology. The second chapter has focussed on the review of related literature including the discussion of the theoretical framework. The third chapter provided a detailed discussion of the design and methodology that was employed to produce data that would assist in answering the research questions. The fourth chapter presented a full discussion of the data which was organised into eight themes. The last chapter summarises the study, present the findings as well as the recommendations.

5.3 Research Questions restated

The findings are presented and summarised under each research question that was posed in the first chapter. This is meant to indicate the extent to which the data has successfully answered the key questions that guided the study. As part of the presented findings, the extent to which each research question has been addressed is also discussed.

5.3.1 What do school principals who completed ACE: SL Programme do to create professional learning communities?

The discussion below details findings regarding the schools' perspectives on the creation of professional learning communities. After discussing the eight themes that emerged from the data, it can be concluded that among the school principals who successfully completed ACE: SL programme, it is evident that some principals do facilitate the creation of professional learning communities as it was an expectation when this programme was introduced whereas others do not. Firstly, it must be said that the data has shown that professional learning communities existed in two of the three schools that participated in this study. Having established that PLCs existed in the two schools, we need to know how the two principals did that. Evidence shows that the principals have advocated and promoted the practice of teachers learning from each other in school-based workshops, seminars and from different committees that are available at the school.

While the focus of the question is on what principals do, I can also say that there was one school where no tangible attempt was made to establish PLCs in the school. Data from the other participants from one school established that their school principal did not do anything to create collaborative learning of the teachers, whether by facilitating or encouraging the teachers to team teach or share skills and learning with each other.

The data has also revealed that in the schools where PLCs are in existence, teachers by other participants from one of the three schools established that their school principal has not done anything whether facilitation or encouragement of the creation of such communities at the school. Data revealed that at the schools where PLCs are in existence, teachers work together in subject committees which are intended at improving teachers' daily practices and learner performance especially in subjects that used to be problematic for both teachers and learners for instance, Mathematics and Science. The improvement in these subjects was observed in the improvement in the learners' performance in terms of test results in these subjects. More details about this finding are provided in **Section 4.2.1 of Chapter Four.** While acknowledging that some can cast some doubts about whether such improvement in these subjects can be attributed to PLCs, there is no doubt about the participants' perceptions regarding this issue. Teachers associated the improvement with professional learning communities because it is in these communities where novice teachers learn from experienced teachers through demonstrations, conferencing and reflection. In addition, principals worked hand in hand with SMT members in establishing PLCs by providing time

for internal school based professional development through workshops and seminars as well as the invitation of experts from outside of school. SMT models good behaviours that they expect their staff members to portray. These include coming early to school, showing commitment towards school work etcetera. Lastly, the progress of such communities is also monitored by the SMT.

5.3.2 What do school principals who completed ACE: SL Programme regard as the barriers to the creation of professional learning communities?

The study established that primary school principals are faced with a number of barriers to the creation of professional learning communities. These barriers are largely associated with teachers. These barriers include non-willingness to collaborate which stems from teachers enjoying working in isolation, teachers' negative attitudes when being led by teachers at the same level as they are, lack of commitment, unclear purpose of the creation of PLCs, lack of trust among colleagues, low self-esteem, interpersonal conflicts that exist at the schools and lack of expertise. A detailed discussion of these issues is given in **Section 4.2.7 in Chapter Four.** Hord (2009) postulates that school principals are expected to create PLCs and ensure that teachers are professionally developed.

5.3.3 How do school principals who completed ACE: SL Programme overcome barriers to the creation of professional learning communities?

The data has revealed that school principals have tried to use different strategies to overcome barriers to the creation of professional learning communities in their respective schools. Findings from the data have shown that principals overcame the barriers through talking with teachers in staff meetings; emphasising the importance of collaboration and the importance of working in harmony with others and by encouraging teachers to collaborate. More details regarding these issues can be found in **Section 4.2.8 of Chapter Four.** Another finding is that while principals are expected to engage themselves actively in continuous learning with colleagues in PLCs, principals in this study were not actively involved in the creation of PLCs. The most popular approach used by the principals is that of entrusting development and continuity of PLCs to the SMT members but not them. They also do not act on their role of the active involvement in PLCs where they are expected to coach their staff, model good behaviour, reflect on practice and support teachers (Southworth, 2002; Deventer & Kruger, 2003; DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2006; Robertson, 2008).

5.4 Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested. The first one is directed to primary school principals while the second set of recommendations is directed to researchers.

5.4.1 Recommendations directed at primary school principals who completed ACE: SL Programme

The findings have shown that the notion of PLCs is partially implemented in the case study schools. One of the reasons for this is that school principals do not seem to clearly understand the role that they should be playing in PLCs. It is therefore recommended that principals begin to take seriously the issue of schools becoming communities of learners and this includes principals being learners as well. Once they understand that every educator can and should learn from one another and they too, belong to the category of educators, they stand a chance of preparing themselves for learning.

Another finding is that there are barriers to PLCs in the studied schools. The barriers are squarely ascribed to teacher apathy and reluctance to participate in collaborative learning and any form of team work and collaboration in the school. A concomitant finding is that the principals in the study seem to lack skills to handle these issues of teachers not willing to associate themselves with positive changes in the schools. That is the main duty of the principals to influence the teachers to adopt positive attitudes that will make schools to be institutions of effective teaching and learning. It is therefore recommended that principals need to reconsider their own attitudes in relation to teachers' attitudes and apathy. It does not help to complain about teachers who do not cooperate.

It has also been found that principals in the study have a tendency of delegating most of the responsibility to their assistants (members of the SMT) and they tend to avoid playing a positive and active role in the PLC activities. These principals are at a great risk of relapsing to the past mindset which was dominated by bureaucratic thinking and top-down approach to doing things in the school. It is recommended that principals should make serious attempts to understand the essence of PLCs and its benefits. It is further recommended that school principals should play a more active role in instructional leadership responsibilities. Understanding the Five Dimension Model developed by Hord (1997), as well as that developed by Southworth (2002) could be useful for the principals to begin to think about how they should operate as instructional leaders in schools.

5.4.2 Recommendations directed at researchers

The findings show that some teachers are hesitant to becoming part of PLCs regardless of the benefits thereof. It could be that school principals grossly misunderstand their leadership role. There is growing empirical evidence from various qualitative studies such as that recently conducted by Bhengu, Naicker and Mthiyane (2014) which suggest that principals do not regard themselves as active participants in leading professional development of their staff in their schools as well as teaching and learning. It is therefore recommended that researchers need to investigate this growing phenomenon. We need to know why principals continue to adopt such an indirect approach to leading professional development of their staff as well as teaching and learning in their schools. It would help us for example, to know whether or not principals understand that they can and should play a more direct role in leading professional development of staff as well as teaching and learning in their schools.

5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the findings and recommendations that are directed at two categories of stakeholders, namely, the primary school principals as well as at the research community. The chapter begins by providing a summary of the entire study and concludes by presenting the findings that are organised under the research questions.

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APPENDIX A: PERMISSION LETTER TO THE GATEKEEPERS (SCHOOL PRINCIPALS)

13 Bryant Street

Mariannhill Park

Pinetown

3610

25 / 03 / 2014

The Principal

LETTER TO REQUEST PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH

My name is Nosipho Bhengu. I am currently engaged in a research project towards a Masters' Degree in Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). I am required to do a mini dissertation as part of my studies. My research will focus on **Schools' perspectives on the creation of professional learning communities.**

I request your permission to conduct research at your school. One Head of Department (HOD) and one Post Level One (PL1) educator will be requested to participate in a semi-structured interview at the time and place that is convenient to them. I also humbly request you to participate in the study. To gather the information, I am interested in asking you some questions. Please note that:

> The interview may last for about an hour and may be split depending on your preference.
> Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your inputs will not be attributed to you in person, but reported only as a population member opinion.
> Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and data elicited will be used for purposes of this research only.
> Data will be stored securely in the supervisor's office for five years and thereafter destroyed.
> You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research.

Your involvement is purely for academic purposes, and there are no financial benefits involved.

If you are willing to be interviewed, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
1.Audio equipment		
2.Photographic equipment		

If you have any queries about this study, kindly contact me at:

Cell: 082 439 5451 or Email: bhenguedith@gmail.com

My supervisor: Dr T. T. Bhengu, at:

Tel: 031 260 3534 or fax: 031 260 1598 or Email: bhengutt@ukzn.ac.za

Officials in our research office: Ms P. Ximba, (HSSREC UKZN Research Office)

Tel: 031 260 3587   Email: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za.

I look forward to your response

Yours faithfully

 E. N. Bhengu   ---------------------------------

Student Number: 213571349

APPENDIX B: REPLY FROM THE GATEKEEPERS (SCHOOL PRINCIPALS)

2014/03/28

13 Bryant Street

Caversham Glen

Pinetown

3610

E. N. Bhengu

RE- PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH AT OUR SCHOOL

Your letter seeking permission to conduct a study among teachers and me has reference. Permission is hereby granted provided that the interviews are not conducted during school hours. I fully understand the contents of your letter and agree that my participation and the teachers' participation are voluntary. Your assurance of confidentiality and anonymity is appreciated.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you success in your study.

Yours faithfully

--- (Principal)

SIGNATURE

APPENDIX B: REPLY FROM THE GATEKEEPERS (SCHOOL PRINCIPALS)

2014/03/28

13 Bryant Street

Caversham Glen

Pinetown

3610

E. N. Bhengu

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I would like to take this opportunity to wish you success in your study.

Yours faithfully

-- (Principal)

SIGNATURE:

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2014/03/28

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Caversham Glen

Pinetown

3610

E. N. Bhengu

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I would like to take this opportunity to wish you success in your study.

Yours faithfully

--- (Principal)

SIGNATURE:

APPENDIX C: DECLARATION OF INFORMED CONSENT (SCHOOL PRINCIPALS)

<div align="right">

13 Bryant Street

Mariannhill Park

Pinetown

3610

25 / 03 / 2014

</div>

The Principal

LETTER TO REQUEST PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH

My name is Nosipho Bhengu. I am currently engaged in a research project towards a Masters' Degree in Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). I am required to do a mini dissertation as part of my studies. My research will focus on **Schools' perspectives on the creation of professional learning communities.**

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(by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
1.Audio equipment		
2.Photographic equipment		

Yours faithfully

E. N. Bhengu   --------------------------------

Student Number: 213571349

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SECTION FOR CONSENT OF PARTICIPATION

I --- (Full name of participant) hereby confirm that I fully understand the contents of this letter and the nature of the research project entitled: schools' perspectives on the creation of professional learning communities: A case study of three primary schools in Pinetown District. I agree to participate in the study. I am also fully aware that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any point should I wish to do so, without any negative or undesirable consequences. I am also aware that there are neither any foreseeable direct benefits nor direct risks associated with my participation in this study. I therefore fully understand the contents of this letter and I do give consent / do not give consent to have this interview recorded.

---   -------------------------------

Signature   Date

	Willing	Not willing
1.Audio equipment		

2.Photographic equipment		

Yours faithfully

E. N. Bhengu   ----------------------------------

Student Number: 213571349

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SECTION FOR CONSENT OF PARTICIPATION

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---   --------------------------------

Signature   Date

	Willing	Not willing
1.Audio equipment		
2.Photographic equipment		

Yours faithfully

 E. N. Bhengu   ---------------------------------

Student Number: 213571349

_____

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--   --------------------------------

                 Signature   Date

APPENDIX C: DECLARATION OF INFORMED CONSENT (HODs)

13 Bryant Street

Mariannhill Park

Pinetown

3610

25 / 03 / 2014

Dear Head of Department

LETTER OF REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN A STUDY

My name is Nosipho Bhengu. I am currently engaged in a research project towards a Masters' Degree in Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). I am required to do a mini dissertation as part of my studies. My research will focus on **Schools' perspectives on the creation of professional learning communities**. I therefore write this letter to ask you to participate in this study. To gather the information, I am interested in asking you some questions. Please note that:

- The interview may last for about an hour and may be split depending on your preference.
- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your inputs will not be attributed to you in person, but reported only as a population member opinion.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and data elicited will be used for purposes of this research only.
- Data will be stored securely in the supervisor's office for five years and thereafter destroyed.
- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research.
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes, and there are no financial benefits involved.

If you are willing to be interviewed, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
1.Audio equipment		
2.Photographic equipment		

Yours faithfully

 E. N. Bhengu   -------------------------

Student Number: 213571349

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SECTION FOR CONSENT OF PARTICIPATION

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--   -------------------------------

        Signature   Date

	Willing	Not willing

1.Audio equipment		
2.Photographic equipment		

Yours faithfully

E. N. Bhengu   ------------------------

Student Number: 213571349

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---   --------------------------------

          Signature   Date

	Willing	Not willing
1.Audio equipment		

2.Photographic equipment		

Yours faithfully

 E. N. Bhengu   ------------------------

Student Number: 213571349

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--   --------------------------------

          Signature   Date

APPENDIX C: DECLARATION OF INFORMED CONSENT (TEACHERS)

13 Bryant Street

Mariannhill Park

Pinetown

3610

25 / 03 / 2014

Dear Educator

LETTER OF REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN A STUDY

My name is Nosipho Bhengu. I am currently engaged in a research project towards a Masters' Degree in Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). I am required to do a mini dissertation as part of my studies. My research will focus on **Schools' perspectives on the creation of professional learning communities**. I therefore write this letter to ask you to participate in this study. To gather the information, I am interested in asking you some questions. Please note that:

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- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and data elicited will be used for purposes of this research only.
- Data will be stored securely in the supervisor's office for five years and thereafter destroyed.
- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research.
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes, and there are no financial benefits involved.

If you are willing to be interviewed, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
1.Audio equipment		
2.Photographic equipment		

Yours faithfully

 E. N. Bhengu   ---------------------------

Student Number: 213571349

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---   --------------------------------

     Signature   Date

	Willing	Not willing

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Yours faithfully

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--   -------------------------------

             Signature   Date

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Yours faithfully

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--   -------------------------------
Signature   Date

APPENDIX D: **INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS**

Critical Question One

What do school principals do to create professional learning communities?

> Tell me, how do you professionally develop your teaching staff within the school to improve teaching and learning?
>
> [Possible probes include the following]
>
> **Workshoping**
>
> What kinds of workshops take place in your school?
>
> In relation to what are those workshops? (Please give examples)
>
> Who initiates them?
>
> When these workshops are conducted, during teaching times or specially arranged times?
>
> **Coaching**
>
> What does coaching mean to you?
>
> Whose responsibility is it to do coaching?
>
> What does it entail?
>
> How is it done at your school?
>
> How does it assist in improving teaching and learning?
>
> **Modelling**
>
> Your definition of what it is?
>
> How is it encouraged at your school?
>
> Who do you think should be at the forefront of modelling and why?
>
> Do you think modelling is important for improving teachers' daily practices and learner achievement? If YES/NO please elaborate on your answer.
>
> **Monitoring**
>
> What do you suggest entails monitoring?
>
> How do you monitor what is taught by the teachers at your school?
>
> Why that way?
>
> How does that assist in the improvement of teaching and learning?
>
> **Professional dialogue and discussion**
>
> Please tell me your understanding of what professional dialogue and discussion is.

How is it developed at your school? Please elaborate.

How does it assist in improving teaching and learning?

Reflection on practice

According to your understanding, what does reflection on practice mean?

How is it initiated at your school?

How does it assist in improving teaching and learning?

Support towards part time studying teachers

Are there any teachers who study part time at your school?

What are they studying?

Were you somehow involved in encouraging them to take a decision to study?

How do you support them and when?

Do you think offering support to studying teachers assist in the improvement of teaching and learning? Why?

Recognition of good practise

What is meant by that according to your understanding?

How is it done at your school?

Who initiated it?

Would you say it assist in improving teaching and learning? If YES/NO, please expatiate.

Encouragement of reading of relevant literature

Do you encourage reading in your school?

How do you do it?

Who do you encourage to read?

How do you ensure that they read?

What do you do thereafter?

Does it assist in improving daily practice amongst teachers and learner performance?

Networking

What is it?

How does it occur in your school/ circuit/ district/ region?

Do you think it is important? Why?

Leadership and the promotion of collaborative culture

In what ways do you promote teacher leadership in your school? Please elaborate

How was the vision and mission of the school crafted or reviewed?

Who initiated it?

Do you think that there are better ways of crafting and reviewing the vision and mission of the school?

Critical Question Two

What do school principals regard as the barriers to creating professional learning communities?

Barriers to the creation of professional learning communities

What are some of the barriers that you face in managing change in your school?

[Probes]

Willingness and Commitment

Are the stakeholders willing and committed towards bringing about changes?

Why do you say so?

Teacher leadership

What do you regard as barriers to teacher leadership? Please expatiate

Reflection on practice

What barriers do you encounter when doing reflection on practise?

Professional dialogue and discussion

What are the barriers to professional dialogue and discussion?

Time factor

How do you make time for any other activities in your school other than teaching and learning?

Why?

Resources

Do you think you have adequate resources to carry out activities that you intend carrying out at your school? Please elaborate by giving examples.

Incentives

Are there some kinds of incentives given to teachers for working over time?

Critical Question Three

How do school principals overcome barriers to the creation of professional learning communities?

How do you overcome barriers that you encounter when making changes in the way things have been done before in your school? Please elaborate

[Probes]

Teacher leadership

How do you deal with barriers to teacher leadership?

Commitment

How do you ensure willingness and commitment among stakeholders towards bringing about change in your school?

Reflection on practice

How do you deal with barriers to reflection on practice?

Professional dialogue and discussion

How do you handle barriers to professional dialogue and discussion?

Time factor

How do you deal with issues of the creation of time for further learning among teaching staff?

Resources

How do you handle the issue of resources?

Incentives

How would you like to see the issue of incentives being addressed when teachers work overtime?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

I thank you for making time to take part in this research!

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS (HODs

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS (HODs)

<u>Critical Question One</u>

What do school principals do to create professional learning communities?

Tell me, how does the school principal professionally develop the teaching staff within the school to improve teaching and learning?

[Possible probes include the following]

Workshoping

What kinds of workshops take place in your school?

In relation to what are those workshops? (Please give examples)

Who initiates them?

When these workshops are conducted, during teaching times or specially arranged times?

Coaching

What does coaching mean to you?

Whose responsibility is it to do coaching?

What does it entail?

How is it done at your school?

How does it assist in improving teaching and learning?

Modelling

Your definition of what it is?

Who do you think should be at the forefront of modelling and why?

How does the school principal encourage it at your school?

Do you think modelling is important for improving teachers' daily practices and learner achievement? If YES/NO please elaborate on your answer.

Monitoring

What do you suggest entails monitoring?

How does the school principal do monitoring of what is taught at your school?

Why that way?

How does that assist in the improvement of teaching and learning?

Professional dialogue and discussion

Please tell me your understanding of what professional dialogue and discussion is.

How is it developed at your school? Please elaborate.

How does it assist in improving teaching and learning?

Reflection on practice

According to your understanding, what does reflection on practice mean?

How is it initiated at your school?

How does it assist in improving teaching and learning?

Support towards part time studying teachers

Are there any teachers who study part time at your school?

What are they studying?

Was the school principal somehow involved in encouraging them to take a decision to study?

How does the school principal support them and when?

Do you offering support to studying teachers assist in the improvement of teaching and learning? Why?

Recognition of good practise

What is meant by that according to your understanding?

Does the school principal recognise good practise by both teachers and learners?

How does he/she do it?

Would you say that recognition of good practise by the school principal assist in improving teaching and learning? If YES/NO, please expatiate.

How does that assist in improving teachers' daily practice and learner performance?

Encouragement of reading of relevant literature

Does the school principal encourage reading in your school?

How does he/she do it?

Who does he/she encourage to read?

How does he/she ensure that they read?

What does he/she do thereafter?

Does encouragement of reading of relevant literature assist in improving daily practice amongst teachers and learners' performance?

Networking

What is it?

How does it occur in your school/ circuit/ district/ region?

Do you think it is helpful? Why?

Leadership and the promotion of collaborative culture

In what ways does the school principal promote teacher leadership in your school? Please elaborate

How was the vision and mission of the school crafted or reviewed?

Who initiated it?

Do you think that there are better ways of crafting and reviewing the vision and mission of the school?

Critical Question Two

What do school principals regard as the barriers to creating professional learning communities?

Barriers to the creation of professional learning communities

What are some of the barriers that the school principal faces in managing change in your school?

   [Probes]

Willingness and Commitment

Are the stakeholders willing and committed towards bringing about changes?

Why do you say so?

Teacher leadership

What do you regard as barriers to teacher leadership? Please expatiate

Professional dialogue and discussion

What does your school principal regard as barriers to professional dialogue and discussion?

Time factor

How is the time created for any other activities in your school other than teaching and learning?

What do teaching staff say about that?

Resources

Do you think that the school has adequate resources to carry out activities that the school principal intends carrying out at your school? Please elaborate by giving examples.

Incentives

Are there some kinds of incentives given to teachers for working over time?

Why?

Critical Question Three

How do school principals overcome barriers to the creation of professional learning communities?

How does the school principal overcome barriers that he/she encounters when making changes in the way things have been done before in your school? Please elaborate [Probes]

Teacher leadership

How does the school principal deal with barriers to teacher leadership?

Commitment

How does he/she ensure willingness and commitment among stakeholders towards bringing about change in your school?

Professional dialogue and discussion

What does your school principal regard as barriers to professional dialogue and discussion?

Time factor

How does the school principal deal with issues of the creation of time for further learning among teaching staff?

Why?

Resources

How does the school principal handle the issue of resources?

Incentives

How would you like to see the issue of incentives being addressed when teachers work overtime?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for your time and participating in this discussion!

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

Critical Question One

What do school principals do to create professional learning communities?

Tell me, how does the school principal professionally develop the teaching staff within the school to improve teaching and learning?

[Possible probes include the following]

Workshoping

What kinds of workshops take place in your school?

In relation to what are those workshops? (Please give examples)

Who initiates them?

When these workshops are conducted, during teaching times or specially arranged times?

Coaching

What does coaching mean to you?

Whose responsibility is it to do coaching?

What does it entail?

How is it done at your school?

How does it assist in improving teaching and learning?

Modelling

Your definition of what it is?

Who do you think should be at the forefront of modelling and why?

How does the school principal encourage it at your school?

Do you think modelling is important for improving teachers' daily practices and learner achievement? If YES/NO please elaborate on your answer.

Monitoring

What do you suggest entails monitoring?

How does your school principal monitor what is taught by the teachers at your school? Why that way?

How does that assist in the improvement of teaching and learning?

Professional dialogue and discussion

Please tell me your understanding of what professional dialogue and discussion is.

How is it developed at your school? Please elaborate.

How does it assist in improving teaching and learning?

Reflection on practice

According to your understanding, what does reflection on practice mean?

How is it initiated at your school?

How does it assist in improving teaching and learning?

Support towards part time studying teachers

Are there any teachers who study part time at your school?

What are they studying?

Was the school principal somehow involved in encouraging them to take a decision to study?

How does the school principal support them and when?

Do you think offering support to studying teachers assist in the improvement of teaching and learning? Why?

Recognition of good practise

What is meant by that according to your understanding?

Does the school principal recognise good practise by both teachers and learners?

How does he/she do it?

Would you say that recognition of good practise by the school principal assist in improving teaching and learning? If YES/NO, please expatiate.

Encouragement of reading of relevant literature

Does the school principal encourage reading in your school?

How does he/she do it?

Who does he/she encourage to read?

How does he/she ensure that they read?

What does he/she do thereafter?

Does encouragement of reading of relevant literature assist in improving daily practice amongst teachers and learners' performance?

Networking

What is it?

How does it occur in your school/ circuit/ district/ region?

Do you think it is helpful? Why?

Leadership and the promotion of collaborative culture

In what ways does the school principal promote teacher leadership in your school? Please elaborate

How was the vision and mission of the school crafted or reviewed?

Who initiated it?

Do you think that there are better ways of crafting and reviewing the vision and mission of the school?

Critical Question Two

What do school principals regard as the barriers to creating professional learning communities?

Barriers to the creation of professional learning communities

What are some of the barriers that the school principal faces in managing change in your school?

[Probes]

Willingness and Commitment

Are the stakeholders willing and committed towards bringing about changes?

Why do you say so?

Teacher leadership

What do you regard as barriers to teacher leadership? Please expatiate

Time factor

How is the time created for any other activities in your school other than teaching and learning?

What do teaching staff say about that?

Professional dialogue and discussion

What does your school principal regard as barriers to professional dialogue and discussion?

Resources

Do you think that the school has adequate resources to carry out activities that the school principal intends carrying out at your school? Please elaborate by giving examples.

Incentives

Are there some kinds of incentives given to teachers for working over time?

Why?

Critical Question Three

How do school principals overcome barriers to the creation of professional learning communities?

How does the school principal overcome barriers that he/she encounters when making changes in the way things have been done before in your school? Please elaborate

[Probes]

Teacher leadership

How does the school principal deal with barriers to teacher leadership?

Commitment

How does he/she ensure willingness and commitment among stakeholders towards bringing about change in your school?

Time factor

How does the school principal deal with issues of the creation of time for further learning among teaching staff?

Why?

Resources

How does the school principal handle the issue of resources?

Incentives

How would you like to see the issue of incentives being addressed when teachers work overtime?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for your time and participating in this research!

APPENDIX G: TURNITIN CERTIFICATE

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND AND ORIENTATION TO THIS STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Mestry, Moonsammy-Koopasammy and Schmidt (2013) postulate that the Education Laws Amendment Act of 2007 (South Africa 2007) stipulates that principals are accountable to the Head of Department at provincial sphere of government for the academic performance of their schools. These scholars further affirm that effective leadership from principals improves teaching and learning. Hence, the transition of South Africa (SA) from apartheid regime to a democratic regime, meant that school principals had to change the way they led and managed schools in the new dispensation (Bush, 2007; Maistry, 2008; Taylor & Fuhrs, 2012; Steyn, 2013). Furthermore, recent curriculum policy change has necessitated teachers' continual professional development in SA (Maistry, 2008; Lunenberg, 2010). There seems to be an agreement among many scholars and education department officials that school principals should promote life-long learning for all stakeholders through staff development programmes, clustering and creating Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) (Middlewood, Parker & Bham, 2005; Robertson, 2008; Hord, 2009).

According to Christie (2008) and Mohabir (2009), principals are responsible for building organisations where people continually learn new skills in order to nourish their capabilities

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