

**EXPERIENCES OF PRINCIPALS IN IMPLEMENTING THE PROFESSIONAL
LEARNING COMMUNITIES IN UMBUMBULU SCHOOLS**

BY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the experiences of principals in the implementation of the Professional Learning Communities in their schools. The focused on three school principals who had studied and completed ACE School Leadership Programme between the years of 2007 – 2009. This study provides a detailed case study of these principals as they were expected to form communities of learners in their learning process and also in their schools. These principals have been encouraged to build a collegial relationship with educators in order to share leadership, power and decision making as well as to create an environment in which educators can engaged in continuous professional knowledge and work collaboratively with colleagues to improve student learning.

The objectives of this study were to establish whether principals who had been part of ACE School Leadership had established the professional learning communities in their schools. It was also to find out if their participation in ACE School Leadership had brought some changes in the way principals lead and manage their respective schools. Another objective was to establish the extent to which their leadership approaches were promoting cultures which support collaborative among their teaching staffs. This is a case study located within an interpretive paradigm. Interpretive research paradigms are aimed at producing the context's understanding and the way that particular occurrence. Influences the context. This research is a qualitative study that will generate the empirical data from the real context.

The findings of the study were based on the collaboration of the teachers, principals and the community in working together to create the environment that is conducive to teaching and learning. Principals have experienced that the professional learning communities have brought changes in their schools. The findings have explored that sharing of information through learning communities have drastically improved. These findings proved to be in line with the main research question of the study.

DECLARATION

I, Sipho Mhlongo, declare that:

- i. The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, and is my original work.
- ii. This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
- iii. This dissertation does not contain other persons data, picture, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledge as being sources have been quoted, than: (a) their words have been re-written but the general information attributed to them has been referenced.

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Date.....

STATEMENT BY SUPERVISOR

This dissertation is submitted with / without my approval.

Signed.....

Date.....



9 December 2013

Mr Sipho Mhlango 208525038
School of Education
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Dear Mr Mhlango

Protocol reference number: HSS/1464/013M

Project title: The experiences of school principals in implementing the Professional Learning Communities in Umhambulu Primary Schools

Full Approval – Expedited

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

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

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol

Yours faithfully

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late parents Thoko Tryphina Mhlongo (UmaMbesa) and Magxaba Albert Mhlongo (Gxi) for their passion in my education. I also extend my gratitude to my wife Bawinile Hlengiwe Delicia Mhlongo and to all my children and my family at large for giving time to complete the study and giving love and support at all times.

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ABBREVIATIONS	
ACE	Advanced Certificate in Education
ACESL	Advanced Certificate in Education – School Leadership
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CPTD	Continuous Professional Teacher Development
DoE	Department of Education
DP	Deputy Principal
HOD	Head of Department
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
NPFTED	National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PD	Professional Development
PL1	Post Level One
PLC	Professional Learning Communities
PPN	Post Provision Norm
SACE	South African Council of Educators
SASA	South African Schools Act
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team
UKZN	University Of KwaZulu-Natal

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND INTO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The study is about the implementation of professional learning communities (PLC) by principals that had completed an Advanced Certificate in Education, School Leadership (ACESL) programme which was offered at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The principals and schools that participated in the study were located at the Umbumbulu rural area under Umlazi District. This chapter begins by presenting a brief background to the study. The chapter also provides the rationale, aims and the objectives, research questions, the theoretical frameworks, and the research design and methodology. The chapter ends by providing an outline of the study.

1.2 Background and orientation of the study

The research explored the experiences of school principals in implementing the professional learning communities. The study focused on those school principals that had studied and completed Advanced Certificate in Education School Leadership (ACESL) programme between the years 2007 and 2009. These principals were expected to study in a collaborative manner as part of their studies; they were also expected to be a community of learners as they were students at University of KwaZulu- Natal (UKZN). In addition to being a community of learners themselves, they were also expected to introduce this concept to their schools and encourage their teachers not only be teachers but to become a community of learners. These principals were encouraged to build an interconnected association with educators in order to share decision, leadership and power. As part of establishing professional learning communities in their schools, principals had to create a situation that promotes continuous professional development and to work collaboratively with colleagues. The underlying assumption is that if the above environment and qualities can be established, the standard of learning can be improved.

The area of PLCs has received attention from researchers (DuFour & Eaker, 2006; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Lieberman & Miller, 2008). These scholars have also made some recommendations regarding the manner in which PLCs can be created and sustained. PLCs occur in a school where a team of teachers share and collaboratively advance their practice (Stoll & Louis, 2007). Professional learning communities (PLC) concept has been getting

courtesy (Bryk, Camburn & Louis, 1999) as a key component for improving schools. PLCs are closely connected to teacher, student and parents' satisfaction with their schools (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). PLCs can enable deviations in the teachers' practices, leading to improved student attainment (Bryk, Camburn & Louis, 1999). Educators work together in classifying the level of student attainment, instituting an objective to progress the existing level, making effective effort to accomplish the objective, and providing episodic proof of evidence (Stoll & Louis 2007).

The concept of PLCs is defined by various scholars in different ways. Hord (1997) for instance, defines the PLCs as aspects of the learning that constitute all levels collaboratively work together. In this study both the principals and the teachers will develop a professional learning community (Hord, 1997). DuFour (2005), is of the view that PLCs consist three central values namely, guaranteeing that learners learn; the ethos of collaboration and the emphasis on students outcomes. DuFour (2005) further proposes that, teachers change their attention from teaching to learning. PLCs work in groups, classifying the level of attainment, creating goals advancing to the existing standard.

1.3 Rationale of the study

As a principal of a primary school, I have found it difficult to establish PLCs in my school. Although there is much literature on PLCs as an effective structure for providing professional growth among the educators and I have not found any which explains how school effectiveness can be achieved. Self-reports of implementation generally highlights the perceived pros and cons of PLCs (Cranston, 2009). However, the effects of the PLCs on teacher knowledge, skills and practices (Kruse & Louis, 1993), the process of implementing the PLCs including how to overcome the hurdles, are not clarified (Bezzin, 2006). This has contributed to the lack of understanding the way of creating these communities of PLCs. This study therefore attempts to achieve the objectives listed below.

1.4 Aims and objectives of the study

The study aimed to provide empirical findings about the implementation of PLCs in selected schools in the Umbumbulu area.

The objectives of this study are:

1. To establish whether principals who had completed the ACESL in the University of KwaZulu-Natal had established PLCs in their schools.

2. To find out if principals' participation in the ACESL had brought changes in the way they lead and manage their respective schools.
3. To establish the extent to which their leadership approaches were promoting cultures which support collaborative work among their teaching staffs.

1.5 Research questions

The research project sought to find responses to the following questions underpinning the study.

1. What are the principal's experiences in implementing the professional learning communities?
2. How has the participation of school principals in the ACESL brought changes in the way they lead and manage their schools?
3. What leadership approaches do principals apply to implement the cultures which support collaborative work among their teaching-staffs?

1.6 Literature Review

PLCs are regarded by scholars as a valuable structure for delivering teacher development by constructing upon the information and abilities of experienced educators (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2009). Much of the existing information related to the PLCs has tended to put more emphasis on improving the school environment and changing teacher practice. Some structures of the PLCs that are associated with evidence of active professional development are active learning participation and teacher collaboration. Effective PLCs are characterised by common beliefs, values, visions, leadership, and structural relational conditions (Louis, Kruse & Bryk, 1995; Hord, 1997; DuFour, 2004). Bausmith and Barry (2011) suggest that the development of professionals and PLCs assist the teachers in understanding how students learn; this also helps the teachers to understand the subjects deeply. Literature on PLCs (DuFour & Eaker, 2006; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Lieberman & Miller, 2008) documents the organisational settings that make them to develop and prosper in schools.

1.7 Theoretical frameworks

There are two key theories that frame this study, and these are collaborative learning and transformational leadership theories. This is due to the fact that these theories emphasise learning which occurs in a situation where people work collectively. For instance, Gerlach (1994) views collaborative learning as teaching and learning methods that incorporate the grouping of students in solving problems. Gerlach (1994) further indicates that collaborative learning is a learning practice where learning occurs through talking among learners. Similarly, McGregor (1992) highlights that, with collaborative learning, learners have the opportunity to exchange ideas with their peers. Collaborative learning is most relevant for this study because principals and educators will be learning from one another as they will be working collaboratively when implementing the professional learning communities in schools. Vygotsky (1978) views collaborative learning as method that allows for interdependent learning among learners. Collaborative study includes individual specialists in a school choosing to come together to explore and learn more about an aspect of their work in order to advance the learning of the children they teach or the school as an educational community (Bryk, Kruse & Louis, 1994). This theory is relevant for this study because a community where professionals are learning together entails learning collaboratively.

1.8 Research design and methodology

This study is located within an interpretive and constructivist paradigm. Interpretive research paradigms are aimed at producing the context' understanding and the way in the particular occurrence influences the context. Leedy and Ormrod (2001) state that the research design provides process of generating and analysing data. The research design is determined by the purpose of the research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). This research is a qualitative study that will generate an empirical data from the real context. Qualitative research enables researcher to evaluate efficiency of particular performances or policies. Qualitative research enables a researcher to advance original insights about a particular specific occurrence, and to test the credibility of certain expectations (Maree, 2007).

1.9 Chapter Summary

In chapter one, I have offered a rationale as to why I have engaged in this type of study. I have highlighted the research questions that underpin this study and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks in which the study is located. The next chapter describes literature review and theoretical frameworks used in the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1 the overview of the study was presented. The previous chapter introduced the study and highlighted the fact that the study is about the experiences of school principals who had studied ACESL programme during the years of 2007 to 2009 in the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The aims and objectives of the study were outlined, as well as the critical questions that underpinned the study. In this chapter, the review of related literature is conducted. The theoretical frameworks underlying the study are also presented. Towards the end of the chapter a research project that related to PLCs will be discussed with a view to drawing some lessons from it.

2.2 International Literature on Professional learning Communities

The word ‘professional’ suggests that the community’s work is supported by a particular and practical knowledge grounded on service beliefs, concerned with members to meet client needs, strong collective personality through professional commitment, and professional ethics (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1994). Shared or cooperative learning proceeds from traditional methods of professional development, which stress creating spaces for the individuals to refine their knowledge and skills (Bansmith & Barry, 2011). Educators participating in PLCs work collaboratively towards a shared understanding of ideas and practices (Stoll & Louis, 2007).

DuFour and Eaker (1998) acknowledge the elements of PLCS which include (a) vision and values (b) engagement in collective analysis (c) collaborative groups (d) action co-ordination and investigation (e) continuous development (f) result co-ordination. Drawing from such perspectives, PLCs are bound to create shared vision, mission and values and engage themselves in a collaborative learning. The expectations are that these professionals should seek for new methods and test those methods and reflect on the results. PLCs build teams that share a common purpose and collaboration and they are committed to taking action and they are willing to experiment new outcomes since their focus is on continuous growth. Their efficacy is mostly judged on the basis of the outcomes.

After having reviewed literature, on various definitions of PLCs I note that most of them share three main features. The first entails shared values and vision which encompasses

having a sense of common values and purpose and regards that as of absolute importance (Stoll, Bolan, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006). A focus on learning is considered as a basic distinctive feature of the vision of such a community (Louis, Marks & Kruse, 1996; DuFour, 2004; Hord & Sommers, 2008). Most of the researchers approve that formally created workplace groups are more likely to prove procreative for learning if they develop ability for talk about problems and problems of practice (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Efforts to increase PLCs in the schools would benefit from insights about what makes conversations in naturally happening workplace groups (Ball & Cohen, 1999). PLCs occur in a school when a group of educators share and jointly enhance their practice (Stoll & Louis, 2007). These communities have received increasing courtesy as a core element for improving schools. PLCs are closely linked to educator, learner and parent contentment with their schools. PLCs assist educators in improving their teaching practices (Bryk, Camburn & Louis, 1999).

Educators evaluate the effectiveness of learning communities on the basis of outcomes rather than on intentions (Seo, & Han, 2012). Educators work together, classifying the level of learner attainment, establishing a goal to advance the present level. A focus on caring without a clear connection to support for learning is regarded as meaningless and counterproductive (Louis, 1995). The presence of professional community centred on student learning makes a difference to quantifiable student attainment (Louis, Marks, 1989; Bolan, 2005).

2.3 The South African Literature on professional learning communities

South African education policy as embodied in the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development (NPFTED) (Department of Education, 2006), addresses pre-service training as well as continuing professional teacher development (CPTD). The CPTD part of the NPFTED policy encompasses a combination of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and a professional development (PD) points system which is aimed at assisting the administration of continuous professional development (Department of Education, 2006). The points system demands that educators earn 150 professional development points during every three year cycle and no more than 90 points in any given year. Points will be earned from South African Council for Educators (SACE) recognised courses that can be divided into compulsory courses and self-selected courses.

The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development (NPFTED) is not sufficient for the rich continuing professional development of teachers (Department of Education, 2006). Collaboration between the teachers such as that needed in the PLCs seem

to be lacking in teacher professional development policy that existed before the promulgation and the implementation of the NPFTED. The establishment of effective PLCs for the purposes of professionally developing the teachers can assist in the creation of collaborative practices (Stoll & Louis, 2007). PLCs can potentially provide for a more focused and aligned approach based on collaboration that is contrary to the culture of individual professional development that exists within the PD points system (Department of Education, 2006). The relevance of PLCs in South African education needs to be closely interrogated before proclaiming it to be appropriate for the improvement of teaching and learning.

Since the country transformed from an apartheid state to a democratic one, there were moves to create policies that are responsive to the demands of new realities of democracy, transparency, equity and redress (Bhengu, 2012). In 1994, such changes were formalised and a process aimed at deracialisation and redressing past inequalities was set in motion (Keevy, 2006). The promotion of teacher professionalism has increasingly become a priority, particularly with the establishment of the South African Council of Educators (Department of Education, 2000). Effective professional learning communities have been identified as most valuable form of support for teachers to enhance learner achievement (Bolan, 2008). Educators are provided with the support and the learning processes to render their teaching more valuable in improving learning achievement (Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008). PLCs have become central in improving learning through the support that PLCs provide for the educator. Therefore, PLCs need support in order to develop as effective communities of learners (Stoll & Louis, 2006) and both internal and external support for PLC remains crucial (Stoll, 2006). The professional development of the teacher is important if PLCs are to be established and sustained (Bush & Middlewood, 2009; Bush, 2010). Jansen (2004) proclaims that PLCs can address the problem of focusing on achievement, sometime to the disadvantage of learning. Horn (2009) views effective PLCs creating internal consistency in a school community through quality collaborative efforts. These efforts can be located at the level of the school, at the level of educators across schools in a specific subject area, in a department of a school or across schools in a networked learning community. There are similar views in both international and local literature (Louis, Kruse & Bryk, 1995; Hord, 1997; DuFour, 2004; Ngcobo, 2005, Moloi, 2007; Mncube, 2009) that four basic elements are essential for an effective PLC. The elements are as follows: a central focus on student learning; a shared mission vision and values; collective enquiry; reflective dialogue and deprivatising practice; collaboration (Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008). Even if all four characteristics outlined above,

exist in a school, an effective PLC still needs support in order to be sustainable (Hord, 2008). Support for PLC can be categorised into internal support and external support. Louis Marks and Kruse (1996) categorise support for PLCs into structural conditions as well as human aid and social resources. Human and social resources refer to supportive leadership that keeps the focus on the vision and mission and informs change. The second category focuses on individual's alignment to change, group dynamics, school setting influences and external influences. Christie (2001) finds that one of the common elements in all of the schools that are outdoing in similar difficult circumstances is that the robust schools have a firm and central emphasis on teaching and learning.

2.4 Implementation of effective professional learning communities

This study is guided by the main question, 'What are the principals' experiences in implementing the professional learning communities? Further, it explores the implications of PLCs for improved teaching and learning situation in the schools. Much of the existing literature (DuFour & Eaker, 2006; Stoll & Louis, 2007; Hord & Sommers, 2008) related to PLCs focuses on improving school climate and changing teacher practice. Self-reports of implementation generally highlight the perceived pros and cons of PLCs (Louis, 1993; Granston, 2009).

Classroom isolation has given rise to culture off individualism and isolation. This type of organisation meant that each teacher was assigned specific area of responsibility and was expected to teach students the stipulated knowledge and skills without assistance of others. It is evident that as time went on, there has been a shift towards collaboration in teaching. Most of the researchers globally suggest that the implementation of PLC usually start by providing a place for the development of performs including interconnected conversations in which teachers share personal impasses concerning teaching and learning (Talbert, 2001). Kruse, Louis and Bryk (1995) confirm that talking is the most common element in teaching and learning practice. Kruse et al, (1995) further proclaim that developed professional learning community is noticeable by interactions that embrace pedagogy, practice, and student learning.

Talbert (2001) summarises the key conditions that enable the professional learning communities to grow and display in school as standards of collaboration that focus on student's academic enactment. It is difficult to form PLCs but they are so important in the sense that they (PLC) can lead to authentic changes in teaching practices and improve student

learning (Seo & Han, 2012). PLCs bring people into an environment where colleagues work together on the everyday pressures of teaching. These communities lead to a transformation in teacher identity, members move from seeing themselves as just a teacher but to being part of a greater community where new practices are continually being shaped and learned rather than a permanent menu (Lieberman & Miller, 2008). The development of such a community depends upon three important and interconnected components as suggested by Harris and Muijs (2005) are as follows: trust among peers, knowledge of tasks that lead to school improvement. In a learning community there is a central commitment to building a capacity to teach (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001). PLCs can impact on school and classroom improvement. In this regard Harris and Muijs (2003) suggest that PLCs lead to strong and measurable improvement in student's learning. Harris and Muijs (2003) further acknowledge that PLCs create maintainable improvements that last longer. Louis and Kruse (1995) identify the support of principals as one of the necessary human resources for reforming staff into school-based professional learning communities. In schools the PLC is demonstrated by people from multiple communities at all levels, collaboratively and constantly working together (Louis & Kruse, 1995). For the learning community to function productively, the physical or structural conditions and human qualities and capacities of the people involved must be optimised (Boyd, 1992; Louis & Kruse, 1995). Louis and Kruse (1995) identify factors that support learning community: small school size and physical closeness of the staff to one another, co-dependent teaching roles, time to talk, well-developed communication organisations, school independence and teacher improvements.

2.5 Characteristics of professional learning communities

There is no one way of describing what constitutes a PLC and this is evidenced by various definitions that scholars proffer. For instance, DuFour (2004) maintains that a PLC consists of three core principles, namely, assurance of student learning, the existence of a culture of collaboration and a focus on results. According to DuFour (2004), teachers in PLC shift their attention from teaching to learning. Educators work in teams as they identify current levels of learner achievement, establish a strategy to improve the current level, collaboratively make efforts to achieve that goal set and provide periodic assessment of progress made. Educators judge the effectiveness of PLC on the basis of the outcomes rather than on intentions (Seo & Han 2012). DuFour and Eaker (1998) have identified six characteristics of PLC. These characteristics are a joint mission, shared vision and communal values; engagement in collaborative enquiry, collaborative teams, being action oriented and using experimentations,

aiming at continuous improvements and being result orientated. A focus on student learning is considered as basic characteristic of PLCs' vision (DuFour, 2004). Hord (1997) suggest that PLCs are professionals who are involved in an on- going process of seeking and sharing knowledge. Drawing from Hord's (1997) definition, one can argue that PLCs share leadership, power and decision making. PLCs enable educators to apply new ideas and to problem solving and enhancement of student performance. Professional learning communities create collaborative environment and collegial relationships and share personal practice based on mutual respect and understanding.

PLCs seem to focus on learning by adults but for the ultimate purpose of assisting the process of learning by the learners. Therefore, a central focus on student learning shifts the focus from teaching to a focus on learning (DuFour, 2005). A strong and consisted focus on learning should inform the mission and should hold a common view of the PLC (Granston, 2009). A reflective dialogue directed towards problem solving and conversation around significant educational issues as well as the processing of new knowledge make a PLC to be effective (Bansmith & Barry, 2011). The collaboration needed for an effective PLC can take many forms, but the common denominator is that collaboration within learning communities encompasses activities for developmental purposes in which staff members are involved (Hargreaves, 2007). Work-based and incidental learning opportunities are very effective as they are based on experiences in the workplace and self-development (Hargreaves, 2007). It is therefore evident that group learning rather than individual learning characterises PLCs and emphasise learning that leads to the creation collective knowledge.

2.6 Features that constitute effective professional development

There is mounting evidence that certain features of professional development can have impact on student achievement (Ono & Ferreira, 2010). These features include training over an extended time period, a focus on subject matter content and opportunities for educator teams to work collaboratively on students' learning (Saunders, 2009). Several of the features of PLCs that are aligned with evidence of effective professional development have been embraced by practitioners (Stoll, *et al.*, 2006).

The national staff development council (2001) defines PLCs as on-going groups that meet regularly with an intention of learning from one another, collective planning for lessons and problem solving. The group function with an assurance to the norms of constant improvement's investigations.

2.7 Impact of professional learning communities

Various studies have found that PLCs have a constructive influence on teaching practice and learning (Newman, 1994; Kruse, *et al.*, 1995; DuFour, 2005; Ross & Adams, 2009). Some of the impacts of the PLCs include increased efficacy and collective responsibility, greater confidence, greater commitment to changing practices and willingness to try new things (Bryk, 1999). The positive impact of PLCs on the learners include, enhancing motivation and academic improvement (Louis, Marks, 1998). Newman (1994) claims that educators who are participate in the PLCs can provide learners with clear understanding during teaching and learning. According to Little (1990), teacher collaboration takes many different forms such as sharing ideas and materials, giving and receiving aids, assistance and joint work. Teaching and learning is achieved through shared vision and goals for the school; high expectations for students and shared leadership measures. The principal shares decision making with the educators and establishes a relationship based on mutual trust and respect. The principal supports and encourages continuous improvement in instructional practices. Educators share their practices and work together in order to improve their teaching practices.

2.8 Challenges facing the implementation of the PLCs

Hargreaves (1991) argues that collaboration is more difficult in other organisations because of structure and culture of the schools. In traditional culture and structure of the schools, collaboration tends to be distorted and produce contrived collegiality when imposed upon educators. Hargreaves (1991) emphasises the importance of structural and cultural changes in schools for real collaboration.

Watts and Castle (1993) suggested that insufficient time is the most challenge faced by people who are implementing PLCs. Time is a significant issue for faculties who wish to work together collegially and it has been cited as both an obstacle (when it is not available) and a supportive factor (when it is available). Boyd (1992) suggested the importance of resources and policies that foster collaboration during the implementation of PLCs. Therefore, it seems that PLCs and distributed leadership are closely related. Harris and Muijs (2005), highlight that the development of PLCs is closely related to school improvement or school development.

According to Lieberman and Miller (2008) PLCs have two competing agendas that focus on the process and content, namely a push to increase educator's knowledge of subject matter content and related pedagogies and a need to support the processes that promote educator learning and community building. Too much reliance on subject matter may result in a neglect of the means that are necessary to keep a community functional and vital. On the other hand, too much attention to process may result in a neglect of substantive issues and may encourage a move towards generic instructional practices (Lieberman & Miller, 2008). In these communities while members feel a sense of belonging and enhanced learning, they often fail to make a connection to classroom practice.

Bolan (2005) suggests that PLCs have been seen as an integral part of today's educational world. The change of members of the PLCs requires a positive participation on the part of all members in the community of learning. Another challenge facing the PLCs is that "they need to find productive ways of dealing with conflicts and opposing beliefs otherwise group dynamics may impede further development" (Bolan, 2005, pp. 23-24). One of the challenges is the size and the location of the school. This is due to the fact that the school size can influence the creation and development of PLCs as it is more challenging to collaborate in a large school. Bolan (2005) further highlighted that the location of the school influences the school's ability to form links to external partners or networks. Rural schools have more difficulty with travel which impedes meaningful collaboration with other schools. In view of the challenges posed by the location of the school, it may be important that isolated schools strengthen internal collaboration within rather than focusing on external collaboration.

2.9 Community of practice

Wenger (2008) explains that learning does not result from individual cognitive process or from direct teaching, but it is the result of the social interactions that are part of participation in daily life as member of communities of practice. The identity of a community of practice is defined by a shared domain of interest. Wenger further highlighted that the communities of practice are about what matters in terms of shared experiences, shared values and vision. Learning is about what happens in their relationships and conversations with others who are engaged in common work. McLaughlin and Talbert (2001) were the first researchers to document how the technical cultures, professional norms and organisational practices of educator communities directly connect to student learning. PLCs help to build capacity for the educators to improve student learning. To this end, McLaughlin and Talbert (2001)

further indicate that the supreme advantage in student attainment occur in effective educator communities that focus on encouraging learning of educators and learners. Views expressed by the scholars in this section are useful in attempting to understand how communities of professional learn or can learn. This is due to the fact that I have noted close relationship between communities of practice and PLCs.

2.10 Theoretical Frameworks

This study is underpinned by collaborative learning and transformational leadership theories. A comprehensive discussion of the two theories that frame the analysis of this study is presented in the next section.

2.10.1 Collaborative learning theory

Collaborative learning is a theoretical frame that underpins this study. This learning theory is based on the idea that learning takes place through talking among peers (McGregor, 1992). Smith and McGregor (1992) build on the views of Vygotsky (1962) that collaborative learning is an active and constructive process where learners acquire new knowledge for their development. The second principle emphasises collaborative working among peers in solving problems. The third principle maintains that learners come from different socio-economic and cultural contexts, and therefore, have different experiences. Viewed from this perspective, it is can be surmised that they can learn from their peers and can also teach them some of the things. Learners realise that learning can emerge from among them, and therefore that they cannot solely rely on textbooks and educators anymore (McGregor, 1992). That social interaction highlighted in the previous paragraphs is said to lead to advanced cognitive development than individualist learning activities. McGregor (1992) further suggests that learning is enhanced in a relaxed situation where students can freely discuss their ideas with peers.

Listening to different points of view about how to solve problems or to different perspectives on issues helps student to reach deeper levels of understanding about their subjects (McGregor, 1992). Collaborative learning is viewed as an umbrella that encompasses multiple educational strategies and approaches that involve both the educator and the learner in joint intellectual effort (McGregor, 1992). Collaborative learning involves educators working in groups to accomplish common goals. In collaborative learning, interdependence is prioritised; learners ensure that everyone complete his or her task (Gillies, 2007). If individuals work together to attain a group's goal, they will perceive themselves to be more

psychologically interdependent than individuals who are working in competitions with each other or by themselves, and this will have implications for how they interact (Gillies, 2007). Although numerous researchers have observed that individuals in groups will work either cooperatively with others, Morton Deutsch (1949), was the first to investigate the distinction between these goal-oriented approaches. While positive interdependence is sufficient to generate higher achievement outcomes than engendered by individual effort, the combination of goal and reward independence tends to increase learner's achievements more than goal interdependence alone.

According to Murawski and Spencer (2011), schools that work collaboratively usually share the same characteristics: (a) a sense of community – this provides a philosophy and vision that all children and educators belong and learn together (b) Responsibility is shared with the rest of the staff in planning and implementing strategies for school development. (c) Learners and staff support one another through collaborative strategies (d) Old roles for educators, staff and learners are changed (e) Services that include health, mental health social services, and instructional services are all coordinated collaboratively (f) Families of all kinds are involved in the education of their children (g) Flexible grouping, meaning individualised instruction and appropriate content delivery are everyday occurrences (h) There is less reliance on standardised tests and more reliance on accountability and accessibility that demonstrate true student growth and progress towards individuals' goals (i) All aspects of physical building are accessible (j) recognising that learning is on -going.

Improvement in teaching and learning is more likely to occur when it is a collective endeavour. Most professional community models operate with the underlying assumption that the individual educator alone is not the most effective unit through which to change practice (Little, 1990; Cuban, 1993). In fact, many researchers who have influenced this movement suggest that the isolation of educators United South American schooling system is a primary reason that educator's knowledge and practice often seems resistant to change. Models of educator professional community differ widely in their underlying assumptions about the role of disciplinary knowledge in developing change in teaching and learning.

2.10.2 Transformational learning theory

Bush (2003) characterised transformational leadership as a process that motivates followers by appealing to higher ideals and moral values. Transformational leaders must be able to define and articulate a vision for their organisations and the followers must accept the

credibility of the leader. Bass (1990) proposed that transformational leadership as behaviours that communicate expectations, clarifying and creating team building through inspiring. Transformational leadership is described along six dimensions; building school vision and goals, providing intellectual stimulation; offering individualised support; symbolising professional practices and values; demonstrating high performance expectations, and developing structures to foster participation in school decision (Leithwood, 1994).

Transformational leadership is defined in terms of the leader's effect on followers and the behaviours used to achieve this effect. The followers feel trust, admiration, loyalty and respect towards the leader, and they are motivated to do more than they originally expected to do. This process is described in terms of motivating the followers by making them more aware of the importance of task outcomes and inducing them to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the organisation. Transformational leadership is positively related to indicators of leadership effectiveness such as subordinate's satisfaction, motivation, and performance (Bass, 1990).

Most school reform initiatives assume significant capacity development on part of individuals as well as whole organisations. Such initiatives depend on high levels of motivation and commitment on the part school staffs to solving problems associated with their implementation. ACESL programme was introduced to enable school principals to lead and manage their schools as learning organisations. All principals enrolled in this programme were supposed to instil values that support transformation. Learning in the programme was underpinned by transformational learning theories. Principals studied ACESL were expected to transform their schools into community learning centres. Collaborative learning, through interactive group activities such as debates, stimulus problem-focused deliberation and debates in group context, form an important component of ACESL programme. The principals took part in this study have managed to establish the PLCs in their schools after completing the ACESL programme. These principals managed to transform their schools into learning community centres and they have brought a vast change in their schools as a result of having participated and completed the programme.

2.11 Empirical research conducted on the study

The study sought to establish the extent to which schools in Seoul, South Korea, displayed the characteristics of professional learning communities. It also sought to find out if there were connections between PLC and educators on one hand and learners and parent

contentment with schools on the other. The aim of study was to provide realistic findings about PLC in schools in South Korea and offer recommendations for school improvements. The significance of enhancing educator, learner, and parent satisfaction with their schools was paramount (Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education, 2011). This research was driven by two research questions:

- (a) To what extent do schools in South Korea exhibit the characteristics of PLC?
- (b) Is the development of PLC closely related to the educator, learner and parent satisfaction with the schools?

This study used the data from a survey achieved by the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education during the summer of 2010. A total of 1738 educators, 9748 learners and 14398 parents from 265 primary and high schools participated in the survey. The purpose of the survey was to gather information on the existing state of education in schools in Seoul and make operative educational policies based on the result of the research. Educational Reform in Korea shows that more attention is paid to transforming schools into learning communities of learners, educators and administrators (Ministry of Education, Science & Technology, 2011; Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education, 2011). School Reform initiative is an opinion which says that a school is a place where, not only learners, but also the educators and managers learn to grow. Building a learning community of educators and managers has been measured as critical to school improvement. Educational reformers have urged schools to establish PLC and participate in school development. School administrators have been invigorated to build a mutual relationship with educators in order to distribute power and leadership (Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education, 2011). Educators have been stimulated to share their professional knowledge and practice learn from each other, and work collaboratively with colleagues to expand learning.

The results show that schools in Seoul do display the characteristics of PLCs to some extent, not to the fullest extent. With regards to shared values and vision, there is significance difference between primary and high schools. The study indicates that PLCs are most common in primary schools and least common in high schools. There is a strong correspondence between educator satisfaction and shared values and vision, as well as with shared leadership and weak relationship between partnership and teacher fulfilment. With regards to learner fulfilment, educators treat learners fairly and the school provides

counselling and advising to individual learners. Primary school parents were found to be relatively higher in satisfaction with their schools compared to high school parents. Collaborative practice, such as having colleagues observe their classrooms, visiting other classrooms and observing peers and working in teams was relatively lower than other elements of collaboration.

2.13 Chapter Summary

This chapter is focused on the review of literature relating to issues of professional learning communities. The chapter commenced with the detailed explanation of what this concept is about. It proceeded by describing the implementation of PLCs, the challenges facing the implementation, and collaborative learning theory. The next chapter provides a detailed explication of the methodological processes and research methods that were used to generate data that would answer the research questions.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction.

In the previous chapter the review of literature relating to professional learning communities was conducted. The discussion about theoretical frameworks that is relevant for the study was done. This chapter provides a detailed account of how the process of conducting the research unfolded. The chapter begins by briefly describing what a research design is all about; it proceeds by discussing the sampling procedure that was followed; the methodology and methods that were used for data generation, as well as the procedure that was used in recording and analysing the data is explained. The chapter end by discussing the ethical issues that were considered during the study.

3.2 Research design

Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that research design is a strategic framework; it is a plan that directs the activities of a study in order to ensure that comprehensive conclusions are grasped. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2004) suggest that the research design ensures the fulfilment and the purpose of the research is accomplished. These scholars further state that the research should be coherent, with reasonable conclusions and ensure that the purpose of the research is fulfilled. Creswell (2012) describes the research design as features that are used to produce, analyse and interpret data using qualitative and quantitative research. Mouton (2001) suggests that a research design is a plan of conducting a research. Leedy and Ormrod (2001) state that the research design provides guidelines that the researcher needs to follow the generation and analysis of data. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) are of the view that research design is governed by the notion of fitness of purpose. This means that the research design is determined by the purpose of the research.

Mouton and Marais (1990) indicate that the aim of a research design is to plan and structure a given research project in such a way that the validity of the research findings is increased. This study is located within the interpretive paradigm. Interpretive paradigm involves taking people's subjective experiences seriously (ontology), constructing insight of people's experiences by cooperating with them and listening sensibly to what they say (epistemology) and making use of qualitative research methods to generate and analyse information (Terre Blanche and Durrheim 2007). Paradigms act as perspectives that provide a rationale for the

research and commit the researcher to a particular method of data generation, observation and interpretation.

3.3 Sampling

Sampling is a procedure used by the researcher to select a smaller group of people, places, or things to study from a population of interest (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007). Time factor and expenses should be considered when a researcher chooses a sample, because these factors may prevent the researcher from gaining information from the whole population. The smaller group, called a sample, will be a representation of the whole population. Cohen, *et al.*, (2007) identify the key factors to be considered by the researcher in sampling which include the sample size, representativeness and parameters of the sample and the sampling strategy. Cohen *et al.* (2007) state that the quality of a piece of research is not only in the appropriateness of the methodology or the instrument, but also on the suitability of the sampling strategy adopted. Participants in this study were selected purposely because of some defining characteristics that make them relevant for the data needed for the study. The principals were selected for their experience and they had all studied and completed ACESL programme in 2009 at the UKZN. Creswell (2008) stipulates that purposeful sampling involves the researcher intentionally, selecting individuals to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement. Cohen, *et al.*, (2007) are of the opinion that the purpose of the sampling choice is to learn from and collect data for the central phenomenon. The central phenomenon in this case is the implementation of PLCs in the studied schools.

Qualitative researchers use sampling to select a wide variety of data sources (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtler, 2010). Sampling methods or strategies include decisions about the setting, people, behaviours, events, and social processes to use in the study (Maree, 2007). The sampling procedure most often used in qualitative research is purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is relevant for this study because participants are selected due to the relevant data they possess for the study (Maree, 2007). Sampling decisions are made from the reliable information generated to answer the research questions. Decisions in purposive sampling also involve the incidents, settings, events and activities for data generation (Maree, 2007). Participants were selected on the basis that they could supply information relevant to the problem in question. A purposive sample of three principals who studied and completed ACESL was selected. Two of these principals were from primary schools and one was

selected from the high school. All these principals selected for their convenience and in-depth knowledge about the ACESL.

3.4 Methodology

The study adopted a case study design which is located within the qualitative research approaches. A case study is a research study conducted to get an in-depth understanding of a particular situation. This research study is case of three principals who have studied and completed ACESL programme at the (UKZN) during the years of 2007 to 2009. The case in this research study is the implementation of PLCs in their schools after having attended and completed the ACESL programme. The study intended to focus on how the implementation of the PLCs was introduced in their schools. The research study also intended to find out if principals' participation in ACESL had brought changes in the way they are leading and managing their schools. This research study also concentrates on the leadership approaches that these principals apply to implement the cultures which support collaborative work among their teaching staffs.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) assert that qualitative research offers a detailed understanding of actions, meanings, non-observable and observable phenomena, intentions, attitudes and behaviours. This approach was deemed relevant for the study because the aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of how principals have implemented the professional learning communities in their schools. The aim of the study was to understand reality in its own uniqueness. This study was to establish whether principals who had completed the ACESL programme had established PLCs in their schools and find out if their participation in ACESL had brought changes in the way they lead and manage their schools. It affords an example of real people in real situations as ideas are presented simpler to the readers to understand because they are not given in nonconcrete theories (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2011). This project is an experimental enquiry investigating a current occurrence within its factual existence situation. Maree (2007) states that in case studies participants are able to interact and talk with each other to make meaning and clear understanding of their study. Cohen *et al.* (2011) assert that case studies explore and report the real situations, and also deal with other factors in exclusive instances as contexts are unique and dynamic.

The methodological approach used in this study is qualitative research because it is a research process undertaken in a natural setting. Maree (2007) states that qualitative research provides a means where the efficiency of policies, practices or improvements can be judged by the

researcher. Qualitative research enables a researcher to advance innovative understandings about a specific occurrence and allowing the researcher in investigating the validity of positive expectations (Maree, 2007). The analysis and coding of data as stated by Creswell (1994) assist in the description and interpreting the meanings of themes. Mason (2002) views qualitative research as a formula to present information gathered verbally in a comprehensive and broad form. Mason (2002) further highlights that dimensions of social world are explored through qualitative research. These dimensions include experiences, understanding the research participants, relationships at work and institutions discourses.

3.5 Methods of Data Generation

Qualitative data generation derives from many sources, for an example, interviews, observation, documents, reports and field notes (Cohen, *et al.*, 2011). Data generation methods used in this study are the semi-structured interviews and documents review. This was done at the expense of other types of interviews (unstructured and structured) because these interviews allow the participants to express their feelings easily, enable the researcher to naturally converse with the participant and to test the hypothesis (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2006). Semi-structured interviews give flexible method of generating information used with all groups such as the young ones, people who are unable to read, even with people with poor eyesight (Maree, 2007). Participants were to be probed and asked for clarification. Probing enables the interviewer to ask the respondents to extend, elaborate, add on and provide detail for clarity. Individual interviews and documents review were the most suitable instruments to be used to obtain in-depth information in implementing the PLCs in the participating learning centres. Sarantokos (2005) suggests that qualitative interviewing uses methods, process of analysis that takes into consideration the implications of the knowledge they produce for social life. Qualitative interviews are directed towards studying reality. A semi – structured interview, as explained by Kvale (1996), is an interview with the purpose of attaining report of the life of the interviewees, with to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomenon. Semi –structured interviews can be highly structured and used for the purpose of reality (Knight, 2003). Therefore, the interviews had to be carefully planned so that I would be able to gather sufficient data for my study. Knight (2003) also points out that semi-structured interviews can be conceived as data generation devices which attempt to capture response of the people to questions that are carefully standardised and intended to be minimally interceptive.

3.6 Interview - recordings

Prior to the commencement of the semi-structured interviews, the participants were reminded about the purpose of the interview. Interviews were audio – taped and recorded for accuracy of the record of what transpired during the interviews and also for future reference during analysis stage. I was prepared to also take extensive notes of what was said. The interviews lasted for approximately one hour. The main method of generating data from interviews is to tape – record and transcribe the interviews (Knight, 2003). Voice recorder was used to record the participants because tapes can be listened to as many times as required. This produces more accurate and more valid records. In qualitative research the method of recording varies with the research topic and the observer's degree of familiarity with the available methods (Cohen, *et al.*, 2011). Note-taking strategy was not used in this research because taking notes may divert the attention of the participants, instead, only the key words were written for future references.

3.7 Documents review

Documents may be defined as a record of an event or process (Cohen, *et al.*, 2011). Records may be produced by individuals or groups, and take many forms. Documents analysis was conducted in all the three schools where the principals were selected for the interviews. Documents that were the focus of my study were minutes of the subject committees, minutes of school management teams, minutes of report-back from the workshops attended, minutes of cluster meetings where the evidence of PLCs activities taking place are discussed and recorded. The Log Books of all the schools were studied and two of these schools exposed the flow of petty cash register allocated for the workshops.

Cohen, *et al.*, (2011) asserts that documents are useful in rendering more visible the phenomena under study. Most of the documents analysed revealed other aspects that were not found through the interviews. Official documents used, corroborated the data from the interviews to improves the trustworthiness of the findings.

3.8 Qualitative data analysis

Recorded data was transcribed and analysed by the researcher to be able to identify relevant themes. Qualitative data generated was analysed. Themes derived from the research questions that guided the study were investigated. According to Cohen, *et al.*, (2006), qualitative data analysis involves organising, accounting, and explaining the data. Sarantokos (2005) suggest

that qualitative data emphasizes on smaller numbers of people rather than quantitative – data and usually, it is inclined to be comprehensive and rich. In this case study there are three participants and it was important that I used the exact words that the three participants used. Most researchers maintain that the flavour of the original data needs to be kept so that they report direct phrases and sentences (Cohen, *et al.*, 2006).

Data was transcribed verbatim and also generated through documents review that was not expressed verbally. The codes of meaning were arranged in categories and themes that emerged from data generated. Data was first analysed by identifying areas of the transcript related to interview questions. Emerging themes and patterns in relation to these areas were identified and colour coded for identification and separation. A table of emerging themes and patterns was drawn up, allocating the identified areas of the text to each heading. The analysis was intensified then the study was completed by focusing on more specific aspects of research questions as mentioned in the transcripts.

3.9 Measures to enhance trustworthiness

Since this study is a qualitative and interpretative, it is important to interpret the data generated with caution and not to judge people about what they have shared. Tamboukou, Squire and Andrew (2008) explain that human beings are powerfully limited in story understanding but experienced-centred approach forges congruence between the story teller and the hearer. As asserted by Feldman (2003, p. 27), it is “important to provide clear and detailed description of how we collect data and make explicit what count in our work” if we want to improve honesty in our research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) are of the opinion that trustworthiness of a research is important to evaluate its worth. To attain this, they suggest four principles to be considered by qualitative researchers in pursuit of a trustworthy study, and these are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

3.9.1 Credibility

It is crucial that a researcher ensures credibility as one of the most important factor in establishing trustworthiness. This will assure that what the researcher has reported is truthful and correct (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure credibility in this research I went back to the sampled three schools with the transcripts to confirm with the participants. I gave the participants the assurance that what they told me in the interviews remain with us. The participants were willing to give more information. Credibility was also enhanced by

member-checking where transcripts, field notes, data analysis and findings were returned to participants to check that what they have said is true and accurate.

3.9.2 Transferability

Transferability denotes to the level of which the results can be useful to other situations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) are also of the understanding that transferability denotes to the extent to which the outcomes of the research can be useful in similar situations. In this study transferability was ensured by giving detail information regarding various schools involved in this study and where they are situated; the number of participants involved; the data generation approaches applied then data generation sessions.

3.9.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to whether the findings of the research would be consistent if the study was repeated with similar subjects in a similar context. Consistency in this study was ensured by using rich, detailed account of the research methodology and the availability of audio-recordings and documents review.

3.9.4 Confirmability

Miles and Huberman (1995) argue confirmability as the way in which the researcher admits his or her own preconceptions. My main predisposition was that as a principal, I work with the participating principals in the same district and one of them was my deputy-principal before his promotion to the principal ship position. I was also familiar with some of the terms that he used in describing this story. It was therefore important that I do not interpret what the participants told me through my own understanding of what they could have meant. I had to ensure that my interpretation of what they were telling me, was confirmed with them first before I could have confidence that my understanding was accurate. My understanding is that confirming personal interpretation with the participants constitutes the essence of confirmability.

3.10 Ethical Issues

Three principals of schools in the Umbumbulu districts were requested to participate in this research study. The ethical clearance was requested from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethics committee in the College of Humanities. Besides the ethics committee, permission to conduct research was also pursued from the gatekeepers. In this instance, the gatekeepers

were the principals of schools, and these were also research participants. They granted permission to conduct the study and also agreed to participate in it. As research participants, the principals were made aware that their involvement was not imperative; and no personal benefits to be awarded for their participation, and also that they were free to withdraw from participation at any stage without them incurring any risk or harm of any kind. Promise was also made that no disturbance or disruption to the programme of the school be done by participating in the research. Therefore, the interviews took place after school hours.

Guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity were made and kept. The names of the participating principals and that of their schools were not to be mentioned and that promise was kept as their names are not mentioned anywhere in this report. At the end of the research process, electronic data was saved on the compact disk (CD) and tape recorded voices were deleted from my computer. Original transcripts of interviews are well-kept-up in inaccessible cabinet in my supervisor's workplace and will be destroyed after the period of five years. Data in the CD format will be destroyed through the incinerator and the hard copies will be destroyed through shredding machine.

3.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter on research design and methodology provided a comprehensive explanation of entire research process. The next chapter provides a detailed description of the themes that emerged from initial analysis. As part of the description, relevant literature is infused in order to illuminate and contextualised the themes and the discussion thereof.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the research design, sampling technique, methodology, methods of data generation, interview recordings, documents review, data recordings, data analysis, trustworthiness and ethical issues were discussed. In this chapter data that was produced through the use of the methods mentioned above is presented. Before the themes that emerged from the data are presented, a brief profile of each participating school is presented. The outlining of the profile of the research site will be beneficial for the reader to understand the context from which the data was generated. These profiles follow below.

4.2 Profiling the participating schools

This section presents the profiles of the three schools that participated in the study. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, the names and surnames of all the participants and those to describe their schools are not the real names; however, the information about them is authentic.

4.2.1 Thulasizwe Combined Primary

Thulasizwe Combined Primary is a public school that was established in January 1979, and is located in the rural area of Umbumbulu District in the south of Durban, province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. It serves poor community and, according to the principal, most of parents of the learners are not employed mostly depend on government social grants. The post provision norm (PPN) stands at 23 educators. The principal of this school is Mr N Dlomo who has studied and completed ACESL programme in 2009. There is only one deputy principal (DP) and four heads of departments (HOD). Seventeen of the other educators are Post Level One (PLI). The teaching staff in the school consists of three male educators and twenty female educators. There are also two non-teaching personnel consisting of an administration clerk and a cleaner. This is the only school in this area and it is used by the community for different community activities.

DISTRIBUTION OF POSTS					
Principal	D- Principal	HOD	PLI	Support Staff	Total
1	1	4	17	2	25

Table 1: Distribution of posts at Thulasizwe Combined Primary School

This school enrolls learners from Reception up to Grade 7. Total learner enrolment is 776. The school is made of blocks with a total number of 18 classrooms. The school has the library, staffroom, toilets, sports field for soccer only, kitchen, storeroom, two offices for the principal and the administration clerk, electricity and water. The roof of this school is made of asbestos. The governing body is composed of five parents, two educators, one member from the support staff and the principal. The strengths of this school are as follows: an effectively functioning school governing body; a full complement of the school management team (SMT), committed educators, high staff morale, fully qualified teachers and the availability of school policies. There are also opportunities in the environment around the school and these include the fact that there are number of organisations and companies that are close to the school and they offer training support to the teachers and to the SMT members. These organisations, companies and programmes include Ikhwezi, Toyota and Edupeg. The district office can also be regarded as an opportunity in the environment in that it is a supportive district office, and so do parents and the teachers who have always shown commitment and support to the school's activities.

Beside all of the above mentioned strengths, the school is full of the weaknesses such as a lack of sport facilities, tuck shop, shortage of reading materials for the learners, computer lessons, lack of discipline among the learners, vandalism and theft, infrastructure and the shortage of tools.

4.2.2 Makhosonke Secondary School

Makhosonke Secondary School is a public school which was established in January 1984 and is located in the rural area of Ngonyameni, under the Umbumbulu District. The enrolment stands at 900 learners and the post provision norm of the school is 26 educators. The Senior Management Team of Makhosonke Secondary School consists of six members, namely, the principal (Mr D. Makhathini), two deputy principals (Mrs Nzama and Mr Ngcobo), and HODs (Mrs Mcanyana, Miss Ncwane and Mr Zondo). Twenty of the other educators are Post Level One (PLI). There are three non- teaching staffs namely, a cleaner, an administration clerk and the gardener.

DISTRIBUTION OF POSTS					
Principal	D- Principal	HOD	PLI	Support Staff	Total
1	2	3	20	3	29

Table 2: Distribution of posts at Makhosonke Secondary School

Unlike many secondary schools which start from Grade 8 up to Grade 12, Makhosonke starts from Grade 8 up to Grade 10. There are three streams offered at this school (Commerce, Science and Humanities). Within commercial stream, there is Business Studies, Accounting and Economics. Within the Science stream, there is Mathematics, Mathematical Literacy, Life Science and Physical Science. Humanities stream consists of History, Geography, Tourism and Life Orientation. The strengths within the school include the fact that the school provides quality education and ensures that it matches other schools that are renowned for high levels of performance in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Effective teaching and learning is normal whereas, the opposite is true of other schools in the district, especially those located in rural contexts. Heads of Departments are tasked with the responsibility of monitoring the work of their subordinates to ensure both teaching and learning including Saturday classes. Other strengths include the fact that the school has highly qualified educators, sports fields, and the support of school governing body.

The opportunities offered by the environment around the school include a generally high level of computer literacy which enables the learners to access additional learning material that is available in the software format like computers. Parents are largely supportive of educational activities, and because of that, the school is endowed with parents who are active participants in the SGB activities. According to the principal, major threats include the fact that the rate of employment is very low and there is a lack of discipline among the learners. The school hall is the only place for the meetings of this society. School-community partnership is high. Parents are always available to provide assistance and they always take part in school matters. Prominent figures of this community are committed to education that is provided by the school.

4.2.3 Mabhalane Primary School

Mabhalane Primary is a public school that was established in January 1972, and is located in the rural area of Ukhomazi in the south of Durban. The post provision norm of this school is 11 educators, consisting of the principal (Mr D Hlophe), two HODs (Mrs Dlozi and Mrs Ntanzi). Due to the low enrolment figures, the school does not have a deputy principal.

Therefore, the SMT consists of only 3 members and there are 8 Post Level One educators. The school has only one support staff member who is a cleaner. The school is situated in a poverty stricken area where most parents, according to the principal, are unemployed.

DISTRIBUTION OF POSTS					
Principal	D- Principal	HOD	PLI	Support Staff	Total
1	0	2	8	1	12

Table 3: Distribution of posts at Mabhalane Primary School

This school consists of four male and seven female educators. Unlike most primary schools in public sector, the school starts from Grade 5 up to Grade 7. It has the enrolment of 420 learners who are accommodated in eight classrooms. Besides these classrooms, the school also has one administration block with the principal's office and that of the administration clerk. The SGB has eight members consisting of four parents, two teachers, one support staff member staff and the principal.

The school has the following strengths: the school has a hall where most school activities are held; three female toilets and one for the males; library sponsored by Huntsman Pty Ltd and the sports fields for soccer and netball activities. The other strengths include the fact that the school has fully qualified educators who are highly dedicated towards their learners for effective teaching and learning. The opportunities offered by the environment around the school include the fact that reliable transport is available and the accessibility of the school is guaranteed which is not a common feature in many rural schools. Most of educators are local people and this lessens the problem of late coming. The weakness of the school is the lack of security. The school is not fenced; the rate of unemployment among the parents is high which makes payment of school fees difficult. The school is in a poverty stricken area where most parents, according to the principal, are unemployed. Parent involvement in the activities of the school poses a challenge since parents do not attend parent meetings.

4.3 Themes emerging from data generation

Eleven themes emerged after the analysis of data generated, and these were (a) the impact of ACESL programme in promoting continuing professional teacher development (b) networking for teacher development (c) the principal's role in supporting collaborative teaching and learning (d) changes brought by the implementation of the PLCs in schools (e) experiences of principals in promoting policy developments (f) promotion of teacher leadership in schools (g) teacher involvement in decision making (h) the significance of

policies in schools and contribution of ACESL (i) mentoring and coaching (j) effective leadership and management for effective teaching and learning (k) challenges faced by the principals in implementing the PLCs.

4.3.1 The impact of ACESL programme in promoting continuing professional teacher development (CPTD)

The development of professionals is the practice where teachers and principals learn, enhance and use appropriate knowledge, values and skills (Ono & Ferreira, 2010). School principals that studied ACESL at the UKZN during the 2007 and 2009 academic years were encouraged to build mutual relationship with the educators in order to distribute power, leadership and decision making as well as creating a conducive environment for the CPTD to occur so that student learning can be improved. All of my participants (three principals) were part of ACESL programme. They were interviewed in order to find their views regarding the impact of ACESL programme in promoting continuing professional teacher development. Their responses suggest that the ACESL programme developed principals in different areas. All of them declared that they benefited a lot in terms of the skills to develop school policies, effective strategies of networking, report making skills, curriculum development, effective filing systems, finance management, effective management of resource and schools. All of them praised ACESL programme for the vital role it played in developing management skills in leading schools in a professional method in support of teaching and learning:

I benefited a lot from being part of this programme (ACE School Leadership) especially with us as principal of schools. This programme has introduced us to various skills, for example, in terms of formulating and developing policies in schools and effective management of schools. We have also learnt how to manage resources, curriculum, finances, mentoring, coaching, and appraising the educators (Mr Dlomo).

ACESL programme has enhanced principals' capacities to do various things as school principals. It has given them skills which enable them to provide support in terms of learning in schools. In this regard, the principal of Makhosonke Secondary had this to say:

ACESL has been an eye opener to me; I benefited a lot, they [lecturers and tutors], taught us that we can't operate without policies. ACESL taught me that the core business of any principal is to guarantee that curriculum is well delivered, teaching

takes place in each and every class and to ensure that educators are empowered and encouraged to network with other educators (Mr Makhathini).

Mr Hlophe, the principal of Mabhalane primary school, has also acknowledged the important role that ACESL has played in promoting professional development; it has shown that continuing professional development is process of building capacity to further studies. Mr Hlophe supported the views of Mr Dlomo and Mr Makhathini by saying that:

ACESL has helped me a lot in developing school policies and I also gained a lot from the programme in terms of filing system, coaching, networking and matters related to school governance (Mr Hlophe).

After reading the school petty cash-register, I found that the teachers were paid stipends for attending workshops and seminars. The minutes of the minute-books of all phases did reflect teachers giving reports back to their colleagues and principals motivating teachers to further their studies.

From the responses of the principals interviewed, it was evident that they were aware of the importance of the continuing professional teacher development (CPTD). These initial findings seem to corroborate the views of Bolan (1993) who states that CPTD is an aspect of development professional activities by the teachers which improves their skills and enable them to consider their attitudes and approaches to the children's education. The above-mentioned view is also supported by Ono and Ferreira (2010) that CPTD is important for an educational effort to improve curriculum delivery. From the transformational leadership theory perspective Hargreaves (2003) postulates that transformation occurs through stimulating a controlled processes of innovation in schools. He also adds the issue of building an infrastructure that is capable of transforming knowledge, ideas and new practices as part of transformation process. Transformational leadership is both dominant and difficult and takes place when one or more teachers interact with others in a way that everybody raises one another to developed levels of obligation, commitment and inspiration (Miller & Miller, 2001).

The data suggests that professional development is regarded as vital dimension in improving the teachers' professional skills and capabilities. It is a vital part of lifelong learning and it is beneficial for schools to ensure that there are sufficient spaces for the teachers to gain access to professional development opportunities at every career stage. This data seems to indicate that pedagogic processes need to be controlled and that policies need to be framed to guide

these procedures and the functionality of the schools generally. While various policies are to be made, it is important that these should need not to supersede the constitution of the country; policies are made in order to give each and every organisation a direction (Dimmock, 2012). This data also seems to reveal that ACESL has taught the principals to raise the consciousness of the principals regarding the core functions of the school, namely, teaching and learning.

4.3.2 Networking for teacher development

The sharing of information among the teacher came out as a tool for teacher development. All three principals interviewed were in agreement that collaborative sharing of information among teaching staff was taking place. These principals revealed that their first encounter with the sharing of information and collaborative learning was when they were studying at the UKZN. They also experienced collaboration when working with their staff members in their schools. That experience formed part of the implementation of collaborative learning and collaborative work which was part of learning outcomes of the ACESL programme. Principals have motivated their staff members to work together; to share information with other educators from different schools and motivate educators to attend workshops and seminars.

It has emerged from the principals that the sharing of information and collaborative work has benefited most educators in the participating schools. For instance, they have established subject committees and these committees provide a platform for collaboration among teachers who teach similar subjects. In that regard, Mr Dlomo, the principal of Thulasizwe Primary had this to say:

They come together and they are able to share information with regard to that particular subject, it is when a teacher does not work in isolation, when you come together with other colleagues, through these subject committees definitely you gain a lot of information (Mr Dlomo).

This view was also shared by Mr Hlophe, the principal of Mabhalane Primary School. This is what this principal said:

They come together to form their committees, in that committee they work collaboratively with the aim of sharing the information of the subject (Mr Hlophe).

The above mentioned sentiments were also echoed by Mr Makhathini, the principal of Makhosonke Secondary School, when he said:

We use to attend workshops, we attend seminars where by the teacher gone for the workshop on the day, report back to the staff whatever information that she or he has from that workshop. Educators give the report back from the seminars or from whatever meeting that they have attended in connection with teaching and learning (Mr Makhathini).

When I conducted the analysis of the minutes of the meetings, I noted that meetings of all phases did show that educators made reports back whenever they attended the workshops. Such reports- backs took the form of fully fleshed meeting in which they shared information they got from the workshops. The minutes of the subject committees were found to be relevant. The emerged data seem to suggest that the implementation of PLCs in schools is important. The sharing of information did take place when teachers work collaboratively. The above views are corroborated by the views of Stoll and Louis (2007) who state that professional learning communities exist in school when teachers share collaboratively and advance practice. These views are also supported by DuFour (2004); Hord (1997); Kruse and Bryk (1995), who view the PLCs as extents: shared values, beliefs, visions, shared and supportive leadership, collective learning and peer sharing.

From the collaborative learning theory advocated by Vygotsky (1962), collaborative learning is the ideal which says that knowledge is created when members are actively interacting by sharing their experiences. Viewed from that perspective, it is a fact that learning is a natural social act where participants talk to learn. Sharing of information seems to play a major role to facilitate effective learning in the participating schools. Subject committees that were formed in the schools in different subjects seemed to be of great benefit. Educators used these subject committees to share information in group discussions for the benefit of a learner. Educators attended workshops and seminars which gave them a platform to share information with other educators. Besides subject committees that were established in each school, other educators were organised into clusters which consisted of educators who taught the same subjects in other schools within the circuit. Such a practice usually assisted educators to perform to the common standards that were expected of all the educators in the district. This also motivated the educators to further their studies.

The data indicates that networking is a critical element of professional learning communities' concept. Networking promotes interaction among schools that generate enthusiasm as well as effective teaching in schools (Bush, 2005). Fullan (1993) states that school networks should be based on the idea that educators improve student learning only if they are improving their learning through further studying. Fullan (1993) further states that teachers learn best by sharing ideas, planning as a team, evaluating each other's ideas and experiences, and by decreasing the segregation encountered in most schools. Principals have encouraged educators to attend workshops and seminars and thereafter share information with the staff. Principals were also part of networking programmes; they attended seminars and workshops, sharing information with other principals. Principals who took part in this study asserted that networking was the core activity in the implementation of the PLCs:

As a school principal you need to network with other similar institutions. Doing that assists you to know what other schools are doing. We used to attend workshops and seminars whereby teachers that had gone for the workshop come back and report to the staff. We happened to learn a lot from X Model schools, and then visited their schools to find out how they were teaching in their schools (Mr Dlomo).

The views expressed above were also shared by the principal of Makhosonke Secondary School when he said:

As a principal you need to ensure that educators are empowered and you need to encourage teachers to network to share information with other schools (Mr Makhathini).

Similarly, the principal of Mabhalane Primary School also confirmed the views of the other two principals by saying that:

I work with other principals; I network with them in case there is information that I need from them or information that I want to impart to them. Teachers attend various workshops as a group sometimes they send one educator to attend or all to attend and come together and work as a group. They also cluster with various educators of our neighbouring schools (Mr Hlophe).

After conducting the interviews, I reviewed some documents that were kept in the three schools. Some of the documents reviewed were schools' log-book, petty-cash register. There was evidence of networking between the participating schools and others. It was clearly

recorded in the Log-books showing teachers attending workshops and seminars. Petty-cash registers also provided records of monies that were given to different educators to attend workshops. The data corroborates the views expressed by Veugelers and O'hair (2005) that networking mainly provides the functions of learning from others' experiences and using each other's proficiency. Networking encourages and supports learner-centred-learning environment through the creation of high standards for all the learners. Networking proved to be reliable with collaborative learning and transformational leadership theories which underpin this study. The whole ethos of working in this study is collaborative learning.

In addition, the responses from the principals in this study seemed to suggest that educators were empowered through networking; therefore it is imperious for the principals to encourage and motivate educators to take part in networking programmes.

4.3.3 The principal's role in supporting collaborative teaching and learning

The theme emerged from this data confirmed that effective teaching and learning took place through various stake holders working collaboratively in the schools. The data indicates that to support collaborative learning and teaching, the principal must ensure that teachers are well skilled and well developed. The principals who participated in this study emphasised that educators must be given opportunities to attend as many workshops and seminars as possible, in order to enable them to share information and get new ideas. It has emerged from all the principals that effective teaching and learning is the fundamental business of the principal. This is what the first participant (Mr Dlomo, the principal of Thulasizwe primary) had to say in this regard:

As a principal, in supporting the school, mine is to ensure that we (as SMT) implement effective teaching and learning in our schools which is the core of why we are here in our schools, and the reason why the principal has to work together with the SMTs as I understand you can't be all over all the time (Mr Dlomo).

Similarly, Mr Makhathini, the principal of Makhosonke Secondary, shared the same sentiment when he said:

As a principal I ensure that effective teaching and learning takes place in each and every class (Mr Makhathini).

In agreement with the other participants (Mr Dlomo and Mr -Makhathini), Mr Hlophe, the principal of Mabhalane primary school, had the same view about the importance of the

effective teaching and effective learning in school. He went further to explain how he supported teaching and learning in his school by saying that:

As the principal I sit in those meetings; I give them feedback of the meetings that I attended; I work together with the educators and work collaboratively as a team, so that effective teaching and learning takes place (Mr Hlophe).

The above views were supported by the documents which I reviewed, which were the log-books, petty-cash register and the phase minute books of the three schools. The Log-Books used by the principals of the three schools portrayed a clear picture about the activities took place in all the schools. This included identities of all the educators that attended workshops mostly organised by the Department of Education in their wards.

The Intermediate Phase minute-book of Mabhalane Primary has shown that R1.330.00 was spent on workshops attendance by the educators on transport costs in a four months period. Petty-cash register of Thulasizwe Primary indicated that out of the R500.00 monthly allocation, most of this money was spent on workshops attendance. The Log-book of Makhosonke Secondary school gave a clear picture about staff meetings' agenda which also reflected some items of workshops which had to be attended by the educators. The above indicates that, although there was no evidence of any school-based professional development activities, all three schools made budget allocations for the teaching staff to be able to attend workshops that were provided by the Department of Education. The extracts mentioned above are in line with the views expressed by Briggs and Briggs (2002) when they state that if the institution's key purpose is to ensure effective learning, the primary task in managing the curriculum is to influence the environment within which learning occurs. This would normally encompass the following: the content; the form it is presented; the method in which it is learned and taught, also preparing circumstances under which these can be effectively realised.

This study is underpinned by collaborative learning theory which advocates that collaborative learning takes place when learners work together in search for understanding and significance of their learning. The emerged data from the principals interviewed suggests that effective teaching in the schools, mostly takes place through collaboration among the colleagues. This data shows that the principals encouraged their educators to work together by creating the environment favourable to collaborative learning as a method that classify teachers into

working groups. This took the form of principals working collaboratively with their subordinates; motivating the HODs to work together with the educators in various departments as teams. The principals working closely with other members of the SMTs were supportive to their colleagues and they encouraged them to try to their level best at working as groups and teams.

4.3.4. Changes brought by the implementation of PLCs in schools

There was agreement among all the participants that the implementation of the PLCs concept had brought positive changes in the schools. From the participating principals' perspectives, the changes were observed in the educators and the learners. There was vast improvement in terms of the learners' performance. The practice of sharing of information among educators improved rapidly and there was also an observed increase in the learner participation in the classroom activities. The participation of educators in subject committees increased and educators seemed to enjoy taking part in meetings compared to the previous scenario. In supporting this view, the principal of Thulasizwe primary had this to say:

PLCs do bring change; previously we had challenges in the classrooms; our learners were not performing well; we get to know from our feeder schools, but after having introduced the PLCs we are proud to say that our learners are performing very well in our feeder schools as well as the educators. In fact, our educators are working together now; understand each other and know exactly what to do. This programme is assisting a lot in our schools (Mr Dlomo).

Mr Makhathini, the principal of Makhosonke Secondary, also gave a positive response regarding the notion of change that the PLC had brought about in his school. This is what he had to say:

PLCs bring a huge change; when I came here these PLCs were not there but with the information and knowledge that I gained, I made it to a point that subject committees were introduced; after staging these committees all the problems with regards to their subjects were minimised. Through these meetings they share information and this has instilled pride to our educators, and they move to classes one could see even at a distance that this educator knows his or her work (Mr Makhathini).

The response of Mr Hlophe, the principal of Mabhalane primary was not different from those of the other two participants. This is what he had to say:

PLC s did bring change in my school. When I started teaching here, the school had a low number of learners but because of involving everybody in the learning committees there has been a remarkable improvement in the quality of teaching; this has resulted in the influx of learners from different schools, even from schools previously known as Model C schools are here in my school (Mr Hlophe).

The views expressed by the participants are congruent with those held by Bryk, Camburn and Louis (1999) when they state that PLCs usually bring changes in the educators' practices, and that such changes may lead to improve learner's outcomes. The responses of the participants are also echoed by DuFour (2004), Hord (1997) and Louis, Kruse, Bryk (1995) when they claim that the PLCs are characterised by shared beliefs, values and visions, reassuring leadership, structural interactive conditions, shared learning and peer sharing. Lieberman and Miller (2008) are of the view that PLCs can lead to authentic changes in teaching practice, improve learning of the student and the changes to the teacher identity.

Transformational leadership theory as espoused by Hargreaves (2003) was deemed relevant for this study because it aimed to describe how school principals understood their experiences and made meaning of the experiences. , Transformational leadership offers a potential to increase commitment of both the led and the leaders to the aim of the organisation and to inspire staff to perform to best level for their pupils and colleagues (Hargreaves, 2003). Narratives from the principals seemed to highlight the importance of the PLCs in the schools and changes that can and or do bring to the schools after their implementation. These changes if successfully implemented have the potential to play a critical role in improving learning in schools. Data has also suggested that the PLCs assisted educators in developing their confidence and motivation and provided the opportunity to innovative and to transform their professional work.

4.3.5 Experiences of principals in working with communities

The data that emerged from the interviews suggested a link of parent involvement in the affairs of the school and increased student self-esteem, fewer behavioural problems and better school attendance (Epstein, 1990). Parent involvement in the life of the schools is known in the literature as contributing significantly to the learners' achievements (Mashishi, 1994; Mthembu, 1999; Epstein & Van Voorhuis, 2001; Mabasa& Temane, 2002; Mbatha, 2005; Lemmer, 2007; Khumalo, 2008; Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009; Mncube, 2009). Principals that participated in this study praised the awareness and knowledge that ACESL gave them in

terms of, for instance, developing strategies through which to involve the parents in finance matters. The participants were in agreement that the involvement of the parents in the implementation of PLCs was of paramount importance. To this end, the principal of Thulasizwe Primary School maintained that:

This programme has assisted us in terms of understanding the functionality of the school governing body and how to manage finances in our schools. We involve parents in various programmes including the Prize Giving Day. We don't have prize giving day for learners only, but we also have Prize Giving Day for the parents (Mr Dlomo).

The views and experiences expressed by Mr Dlomo above were also shared Mr Makhathini, the principal of Makhosonke Secondary School when he stated that:

We need to understand that a school does not exist in isolation; a school should always be seen as part and parcel of the community. If you close the doors for members of community to come to school, you must realise that you have a serious problem. Here members of the community are always welcome to come to school to check the performance of their learners and to add value because one could see that parents out there have a lot to share with the school (Mr Makhathini).

Similarly, Mr Hlophe, the principal of Mabhalane Primary School emphasised the importance of working with the parents in particular and the community in general when he said:

I work with the committees, the parents- reps as SGB to formulate finance committees. If challenges need parent involvement we involve them in solving such challenges. Parents' intervention is very high in our schools, and therefore their visibility is clearly noticeable. Last year the school uniform was changed and that was made possible due to the involvement of the parents (Mr Hlophe).

When I analysed the minutes of the parents' meeting- books of all the three schools, it was found that parents were actively involved in the decision makings processes of the school. The minutes of the school governing body meetings did show that the involvement of parents was high; this includes the employment of new educators which is done in compliance with South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996).

Data further suggests that all parents were committed to their children's education as stated by Epstein (1989), including those from the most economically depressed communities such as this one in Umbumbulu. Scholars such as Swap (1993), maintain that when parents involve themselves actively in the school's affairs, positive feelings among the teachers prevail. Besides this author, Epstein (1990) also highlights the importance of the collaboration between the community and the school which, he argues, broadens their perspective about the schools' activities. Working collegially and collaboratively is important in order to guarantee that educators benefit from their involvements and endure to produce during their careers (Ono & Ferreira, 2010). Therefore, working with the community seems to be very important for the school to function well, and viewed from that perspective, it is imperious that school principals recommend parent intervention in schools.

4.3.6 Promotion of Teacher- leadership in schools

Sharing leadership responsibilities through distributed leadership have been viewed by Day, Sammons, Hopkins, Leithwood, Qing and Brown, (2010) as an effective practice for improving student outcomes. Certain attributes of shared leadership that was crucial for the school success included its collaborative and facilitative aspects, as well as its focus on student's teaching (Day, *et al.*, 2010). Distributed leadership has demonstrated that front-runners' trust in educators plays an important role in increasing their readiness to collaborate (Day, *et al.*, 2010). The practice of sharing leadership can be linked to that of encouraging collaborative inquiry among educators rather than depending on the principal-centred supervisory habits (Blasé & Blasé, 1999). Timperley (2005) argues that distributed leadership is not a division of task responsibilities among subordinates, but it involves a vibrant communication between leaders and subordinates.

The generated data suggests that effective distributed leadership has played an important role for effective teaching and learning in these schools. The principals observed that teacher leadership did take place in the participating schools. One of the ways in which shared leadership occurred was through the practice of delegation of duties to other staff members. They also involved their staff members in decision making and also in professional development. In this regard, Mr Dlomo had this to say:

There are times where you must understand that you don't work alone in the school. All these people must be involved in professional development, making decisions and formulation of internal policies. It's not me as the principal of the school who come

with solutions but I allow educators, HODs, DP, to come with input whereby we look at the challenge and then we say how to go about solving this challenge.

Similar views were expressed by Mr Makhathini of Makhosonke Secondary when he said:

I promote teacher leadership in this school. I am a democrat and I believe in democracy. Through ACESL I learnt that as a principal, you are not responsible for everything at school; you need to distribute leadership. I believe in distributed leadership, you work with people and people look at you as a manager, and yours is to capacitate them on those areas that are lacking (Mr Makhathini).

The responses of the principals in this study support the view of Gronn (2000), who advocates activity theory or collective action and views distributed leadership as a concerted action and essentially a form of aggregate leadership behaviour. The concerted action perspective states that distributed leadership is a comprehensive practice which involves delegation, collaboration, sharing, democratising and spreading leadership in schools. This holistic process occurs due to the concerted action of a number of colleagues who work as an organisation and rely to each other. Harris (2009) states that distributed leadership imply sharing of responsibility by all stakeholders. This theme indicates that educators learn best and they are able to change their teaching practice through collaborative engagement with peers. West- Burnham (1992, p.102) as cited by Coleman (1994), argue that leadership is crucial as it is concerned with the vision adopted, tactics used, the direction that is created when the organisation is transformed. Leadership generally entails developing and articulating a vision that the organisation adopts. In line with this thinking, school principals in this study believed that teacher leadership should be promoted in schools.

One way in which this can be done, is by distributing leadership roles among staff members. The principals in the study believed that such a strategy can help build leadership capacity among them. In that way, staff members can be prepared for future leadership positions. The following extracts indicate both the importance of and the manner in which teacher leadership was promoted in the participating schools:

Teacher leadership is promoted in this school; in fact we don't take positions as the matter of the role of being a leader, we take individuals and skills that we have as an individuals to say we can do one, two, three things right in our internal committees

like chairperson, secretary, and treasurer. By so doing we are giving that particular person a chance to lead in this particular unit or structure, preparing that person to take a lead in that particular department (Mr Dlomo).

On the same view a principal of Makhosonke Secondary School emphasised the significance of teacher leadership in his school. This is what he had to say:

I believe in distributed leadership, you work with people and they look at you as a manager, yours is to capacitate them on those areas where you see they are lacking. So through distributed leadership, educators begin to say this is our school and we work as managers of a school and we don't want educators to isolate themselves from what is happening within the institution (Mr Makhathini).

Similarly, Mr Hlophe, the principal of Mabhalane Primary School also expressed the view that teacher leadership was practiced in his school. In addition, he praised ACESL for making him realise the importance of teacher leadership specifically and distributed leadership in general. This is what he had to say:

I promote teacher leadership because ACESL has taught me that with teacher leadership, teachers play their roles and they involve themselves in many activities. I also delegate. I cannot do everything alone (Mr Hlophe).

The documents such as minute-books of different phases in different committees such as cultural committee, staff development committee, sports committee, fund raising committee, beautification committee, disciplinary committee, welfare committee, were reviewed. Such reviews showed that most of leadership responsibilities and positions held were in the hands of Post-level One educators.

The main task of the principals was that of creating and supporting the beliefs of school, and also interpreting vision and mission into action. It is an established fact that successful leaders pay attention to motivating and developing people (Bush, 2010). Bush (2005) emphasises that school leadership can be shared extensively and similarly in order to make the most of the potential advantage for the learners' education and for educators' job fulfilment and professional growth. Transformational theory as espoused by Hargreaves (2003) is appropriate for this study due to its focus on motivating the staff, construction of the school vision, framing organisational goals, as well as providing individual support.

The involvement of educators in taking leadership roles in schools seems to suggest that these principals can be regarded as effective leaders. Effective leaders are renowned for their ability to lead change by fostering a culture that is conducive to change and thereby establishing the organisation's and individual's capabilities for change (Bush, 2005). There is convincing evidence that successful leaders focus mostly on motivating and developing people (Oldroyd & Hall, 1991; Bush, 2005; Bush, 2010; Ono & Ferreira, 2010). Bush (2005) emphasises the notion that leadership in schools can be shared widely and equally, and by so doing, the potential benefit for learners' education and for educator's job satisfaction and professional growth can be maximised. The data has indicated that principals cannot work without the assistance of other educators in taking delegated leadership positions. This seems to indicate that educators who are not in leadership positions at schools should not be isolated in management tasks. Educators need to be inducted and take part in the management tasks, with guidance from the principals.

4.3.7 Teacher involvement in decision making

The data that emerged from this study has shown that the involvement of teachers in decision making is taking place. Teacher involvement in decision making is very important in schools. The principals in this study have acknowledged that educators need to be involved in decision makings of the school. According to them, educators should not be excluded from what is happening within the institution. Some of the benefits of sharing decisions in the school are that, the challenges that are experienced are worked together with all the stake holders, is ownership of the decisions. The principal of Thulasizwe Primary described how and why he encourages stakeholder participation in decision making in his school:

I allow educators, SMT members, DP, and other stakeholders to come with ideas whereby we look at the challenges and then we say how can we go about addressing these challenges? In other words to overcome those challenges' we used to come back, seat down and reflect and look how to overcome that challenge (Mr Dlomo).

The above mentioned sentiment is supported by the principal of Makhosonke Secondary, who also explained the importance of collaborative work. This is what he had to say:

We don't want educators to isolate themselves from what is happening within the institution. For instance, here at school we have grade educators who are mandated to look after grade matters. By so doing, these educators look at themselves as part of

the management team, yet they are not. By working collaboratively with these structures then we can say we are moving forward (Mr Makhathini).

The views and experiences expressed by the two principals were also shared by the principal of Mabhalane primary School when he said that:

The SMT works together with the subject committees; if there are challenges those challenges are worked together. As the principal I seat in those meetings (Mr Hlophe).

The data from the interviews was also supported by the documents reviewed in all the schools participated in the study. The minutes of the meetings showed that there was a high involvement of educators in the affairs of the school. For instance, the petty-cash register of Thulasizwe Combined Primary was controlled by a Post-Level One educator. The chair-person of discipline committee of Mabhalane Primary School was Post-Level One educator. The nutrition committee of Makhosonke Secondary school consisted of only Post-Level One educators.

This data was consistent with the views of Gorton and Alston (2009) that involving others may help in arriving at the best decision. Other individuals or groups should be involved in administrative decisions that will significantly affect their lives. Gorton and Alston (2009) further claim that the goal for the principal is to involve people in the process of decision making more especially if their involvement could improve the acceptance, quality or implementation of decision. It is certainly appropriate for the principal to have some tentative ideas about a decision before involving others, but unless those ideas are tentative and there is willingness for flexibility and open-minded in considering the inputs of others, involving others becomes a futile exercise (Bush, 2005; Gorton & Aliston, 2009; Dimmock, 2010).

Collaboration is viewed by many scholars as promoting professional growth among professionals and usually generates huge improvement of change in schools (Hargreaves, 1994; Harris, 2002; Bush, 2005; Bush, 2010). Drawing from the data and literature cited in this section, it is evident that involving educators in the affairs of the school plays a very important role. Teachers feel as part of the collaboration and the structure of the decision making of school usually end up owning the school.

4.3.8 The significance of policies in schools and the contribution of ACESL

The development of policies in schools is very important for the school to function in its best level. Schools cannot function without policies. The South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 is there to govern all schools. Some other policies are made internally by the schools but such policies should not contravene SASA and other government policies. The principals in this study got the opportunity to study and obtain better insights about key policies that regulate operation and governance of schools in the ACESL programme. All the principals interviewed were of the view that policies are of great importance in the schools:

This programme (ACESL) has introduced us in terms of formulating and developing policies in schools and put systems in place in term with managing schools to follow the right way or the correct way of doing things. We must be guided by the policies as well as the regulations of the Department of Education (Mr Dlomo).

The views expressed by Mr Dlomo above were shared by the principal of Makhosonke Secondary when he said:

You can't operate without policies, and policies are there to give direction to an organisation; without policies you can't move; without policies you would be found floundering. There are a quite number of policies that a school needs to put in place, policies that are internal and policies that are formulated by all stakeholders, but it is important that when you formulate these policies, you check all the time that they do not contradict the policies set by the Department of Education (Mr Makhathini).

The responses were corroborated by the data solicited through the review of the documents. A number of policies developed by the Department of Education and those developed internally in the schools were available in all the cabinets of all participating school principals. This seemed to indicate that schools were aware of policies regulating their operation. One can also surmise that the schools were using these policies to regulate their activities. The data corroborate the views of Jordan and Faasen (1993) that the goals of the schools are influenced largely by the national and regional policies. This study is also underpinned by the transformational leadership theory which emphasises the change of both the led and the leader as they interact. Transformational approaches to leadership have been advocated as industrious under conditions which are essentially similar to those faced by schools targeted for transformation (Leithwood, 1994). This theme explicates that schools operate with policies given by the Department of Education and some policies are formulated

internally. Schools cannot operate without policies. The data suggests that policies are very important to guide the educators for the effectiveness of teaching in schools.

4.3.9 Mentoring and Coaching

Bush (2005) views mentoring being concern more with career and life development while coaching is considered to be about enabling the individuals to improve their performance. Coaching is a mutual conversation between the manager and employer that follows a clearly and anticipated path and usually leads to higher levels of performance, commitment to continued improvement and positive relationships (Dimmock, 2012). On the same issue, Bush (2005) suggests that mentoring is an on-going process where in an organisation provides support and guidance to others so that it is possible for them to become effective contributors to the attainment of organisational goals.

In the context of this study, the three participating principals experienced that mentoring and coaching played an important role in their schools. They believed that in order to facilitate the effective implementation of the PLCs mentoring processes were important. The SMT in a school is responsible for the process of mentoring the newly appointed staff members while the senior and the master educators are responsible for the newly recruited educators in terms of coaching. These senior and master educators give their focus mostly to curriculum development, guiding and shaping the new educators according to the vision and the mission of the school. Principals in this study asserted the following:

Principals have learnt how to manage the resource, curriculum, and above all, as leaders we have learnt to be mentors and coaches. All educators must at some stage be given the ways and means of doing things (Mr Dlomo).

This view was supported by Mr Makhathini when he said:

I really wonder what we can do as part of the Department of Education, to see to it that once these people are promoted, at least they get through various workshops where they can be assisted. This practice of finding them one day workshop is really limited and is posing a problem in our schools.

The responses of the principals are in line with the views of Oldroyd and Hall (1991) that through coaching, educators embraces the spirit of sharing, supporting one another for the benefit of solving classrooms' problems. This supports the idea that the climate in the school should encourage educators to ask for help or offer assistance to each other (Mabasa &

Temane, 2002). Coaching requires interpersonal skills of a high order, openness and trust between the educators. Mentoring consists of support given by an experienced colleague, for example by a HOD to the novice educator or an experienced but poorly-performing educator. Mentoring and coaching in schools seems to be effective and it gives direction mostly to the newly appointed educators to acclimatise themselves with the new environment (Bush, 2005). Mentoring and coaching assist in giving direction, culture as well as the expected standards of that particular organisation. The responses of the principals in this theme seem to be in line with collaborative learning theory where teamwork requires an atmosphere that is non-competitive and supportive to educators. The confidence of educators with classroom problems is boosted when they work in teams; therefore they can bring up their problematic issues to other educators for assistance.

4.3.10 Effective leadership and management for effective learning and teaching

Dimmock (2012) defines leadership as an influence process over a group of individuals, workers or employees aimed at gaining their obligation to shared values and goals and ensuing goal attainment. Leithwood and Riehl (2005) look at leadership as process of influencing the subordinates to achieve the common goals of an organisation. Gorton and Aliston (2009) effective leadership originates from leaders who are effective in bringing consistent changes in the lives of others and create an environment that is conducive for learning. Law and Glover (2000) concurs with the views of Gorton and Aliston (2009) as they indicate that effective leadership is characterised by leaders who are confident, honest, enthusiastic, visionary and have ability to motivate others.

The views of all the principals interviewed praise ACESL for developing their leadership capacity. Administration systems were in place. Policies were communicated within all stake holders. ACESL had contributed to the growth of the principals to lead their schools successfully. To this end, the principal of Thulasizwe had this to say:

This programme has developed us in terms of what we call effective management of schools. By effective management of schools is where we put systems in place and how we follow the right way of doing things; what to do and what not to do; how to manage the curriculum and the resources (Mr Dlomo).

Similar responses were received from Mr Makhathini about ACESL in terms of its efficacies. This is what he said:

In ACESL we were informed about effective leadership and management and communication, and that as a principal, you must have ways to communicate with all relevant stakeholders. As a leader you must have a vision and as manager you must see to it that things are happening. Leadership and management are two terms which are not similar. As a manager you must see to it that all policies are in place and that they are communicated with relevant stakeholders.

Mr Hlophe echoed the sentiments as those of both Mr Dlomo and Mr Makhathini. This is what he had to say:

ACESL has taught me that with teacher leadership, teachers play their leadership roles and involved themselves in many aspects of the school that require taking initiatives. I also delegate to teachers because I have learnt from ACESL how to effectively delegate.

The responses of the principals were consistent with the views expressed by Moyles (2006) that leadership is supplemented by management, and where they differ is with regards to change. Effective leadership is about understanding how to lead and manage change; ensure that all relevant people are empowered and also ensure that effective interaction among various stakeholders happens (Mckenzie, Mulford & Anderson, 2007). These responses from the three principals seemed to indicate that effective leadership and management occurred and helped to ensure effective human resource management and administration.

4.3.11 Challenges experienced by principals in the implementation of the PLCs

The principals have experienced a number of challenges when they implemented the concept of PLCs. All three principals have emphasised that a major challenge that mitigated the implementation of PLCs was the lack of time. Many educators in the study have claimed that PLCs activities should be conducted during lunch breaks. Others were of the view that PLCs activities need more time in order to do them effectively. Conducting these activities after school hours presented another problem for all. Commuting between rural areas where the schools are located neighbouring towns where most educators stayed presented another challenge as most educators used lift clubs and taxis as means of transport.

Some educators used to take more time when giving feedback during subject committees meetings. Some teachers monopolised the platform and shy educators were afraid to express themselves. Some of the experienced educators were resistant to change. The principals

interviewed highlighted different problems that made implementation difficult. For instance, the principal of Thulasizwe had this to say:

In any transformation there will be people with negative attitudes whatever you do. To be honest with you, even ourselves as principals when we come with new things to the educators, there will be those who will be positive and those who will be negative. Yes even in our school there were those people who were saying this is a lot of work, and we are doing some extra job more than what we are expected to do (Mr Dlomo).

The challenges were not just experienced by Mr Dlomo, but the principal of Makhosonke (Mr Makhathini) supported the views expressed by Mr Dlomo regarding the challenges they came across when implementing PLCs. This is what he had to say:

The only challenge that we have is the time during the day. When you stage these meetings after school you find that educators would always have some business to do, and it really becomes a problem and we cannot just cut-off classes to hold these meetings (Mr Makhathini).

There are other issues that have come up which pose challenges to the implementation of PLCs. These include teachers' personalities whereby, some of them want to work alone; some of them are accused of talking too much, and that tended to result in meetings taking longer than they should. The principal of Mabhalane Primary school had this to say:

Some of the teachers want to work as individuals rather than working in groups. Sometimes they complain about time that they are not safe if they kept long after school. They complain that PLCs activities take too much time. Another thing is that talkative teachers sometime dominate these committees and shy educators feel not accepted and they don't come up with their views and find out that good ideas are not valued (Mr Hlophe).

The responses of the principals were consistent with the views expressed by Watts and Castle (1993), that time is an important resource for the departments wishing to work collectively. Most scholars agree that PLCs are aimed at reforming and improving schools (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 2008). Other scholars emphasise the vital role that principals' supportive leadership play in the success of the PLCs (Louse & Kruse, 1995). Through PLCs, principals can develop educator leaders, promoting the notion of teachers as change agents.

4.4Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the data that emerged from analysis of interview transcripts and review of documents. Before the presentation and discussion of the data, the profiles of the participating schools were presented. The next chapter presents the conclusions and makes recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has presented and discussed data. This chapter moves away from the presentation and description of the data to conclusions and recommendations. The summary of the entire study is presented. This is done in order to remind the readers about what has thus far been addressed in this report. This chapter concludes by the recommendations to school principals and for further research.

5.2 Summary of the study

In Chapter One the background and the rationale of the study are discussed. As part of the background discussion, the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study are outlined. The research approach including research questions, the aims and objectives are also explained in detailed.

In Chapter Two literature review and theoretical frameworks are discussed in detail. Collaborative learning and transformational leadership theories are the two that framed the study and are discussed in full in this chapter. Various aspects of PLCs are discussed. The literature review has highlighted the fact that most of the existing knowledge relating to PLCs focuses on improving school climate and changing teacher practice.

In Chapter Three, the research design and methodology that was followed in conducting the study discussed in greater detail. The discussion provided and described the context of the study and how research participants were selected. This chapter has also explained why the case study approach was adopted as well as other key issues such as ethical consideration.

In Chapter Four, the presentation of data was provided in a form of a detailed description of the themes under which the presentation is organised. Before the emerging data is presented, the profiles of the three participating schools are outlined. The purpose of presenting the profiles is to ensure that readers obtain a better picture about the research sites.

Chapter Five brings the study to a close by conclusions and recommendations that were arrived at after thorough analysis of the data presented in Chapter Four. Recommendations are made for various stakeholders.

5.3 Research questions restated

As highlighted in the introduction of this chapter, conclusions will be discussed under the research questions restated below.

5.3.1 What are the principal's experiences in implementing the PLCs?

The research question has been addressed in many ways and is addressed in various themes that are discussed in the previous chapter. This question is about the experiences of the principals in implementing the concept of learning communities of professional people who, in the context of this study are the educators. The first issue to raise here is the fact that all three principals felt that the PLCs concept had to be implemented. They based their views on a number of realities. One of them is that teachers were no longer working in isolation as they used to. The second is that parents that served in the school governing bodies (SGB) were functioning well. For more details on this aspect, please refer to Section 4.3.5 of Chapter Four. The third issue is that educator participation, according to the principals was encouraged and was happening as anticipated. A complete discussion of this is presented in **Section 4.3.7 of Chapter Four**.

The principals' experience is largely positive and all of them expressed pride in what they had achieved. It does not matter what I as a researcher thinks about whether or not the notion of PLCs was alive in their schools; for them, it does, and they are proud of that, and they give credit to ACESL programme for their achievement. The words of Mr Hlophe, the principal of Mabhalane primary school that "Working together of educators in subject committees has helped a lot in effective teaching and learning in this school" bears testimony to the schools' achievement. All three principals attribute their respective schools' success to ACESL programme. For instance, Mr Makhathini, the principal of Makhosonke Secondary School says "As a principal I benefited a lot from ACESL programmes about managing resources and the development of the curriculum". The same experience was shared by the other two principals. In addition, they made claims that they obtained a better understanding of policy issues as a result of ACESL programme. For more discussion of the principals' experiences, refer to **Section 4.3.8 in Chapter Four**.

The given data also show that the principals' experiences are punctuated by a number of challenges relating largely to the location of their schools. All the principals were in agreement that time to engage in various learning activities as professionals was not inadequate. It has been indicated by all the principals that time to meet during learning hours

was undesirable. The fact that all these schools are located in the rural area of Umbumbulu and educators are using lift clubs going to and from schools has added another challenge which makes it difficult to meet after school hours. More details are provided in **Section 4.3.11 in Chapter Four**.

5.3.2 How the participation of school principals in the ACESL brought changes in the way they lead and manage their schools?

It is evident from the data that the concept of PLCs had taken root in the participating schools. The data indicate that a number of changes have occurred which can be attributed to the principals' practices in terms of establishing PLCs. Some of these changes include the fact that "educators are now working as groups in their subject committees" as Mr Makhathini, the principal of Makhosonke Secondary School explained. There was a view shared by all principals in the study that improvement in teaching and learning had occurred. For instance Mr Hlophe, the principal of Mabhalane Primary School highlighted that "The culture of teaching and learning has drastically improved in this school". More details on this issue can be found in **Section 4.3.4 in Chapter Four**.

Another finding which is consistent with PLCs concept is networking with other institutions and collaborative learning. This is one of the changes that had occurred in the three schools. All participating principals have highlighted the importance of sharing information where educators learn from one another. A detailed discussion can be found in **Section 4.3.2 in Chapter Four**. The significance of networking and collaborative work has been highlighted in **Chapter Two** which is dedicated to the discussion of literature that relates to PLCs.

5.3.3 What leadership approaches do principals apply to implement the cultures which support collaborative work among their teaching staffs?

The data show that principals utilised and expressed value for participatory models of leadership. Distributed leadership approach seemed to dominate the discourse about leadership and management. For instance Mr. Dlomo, the principal of Thulasizwe exclaimed "We encourage educators to lead in different positions to show how much they grow". These above extract encapsulates the broad data which revealed that different educators were leaders in community of practice. It was important for the educators to take leadership roles

in subject committees in order to make sure that they function effectively. A detailed discussion of this aspect can be found in **Section 4.3.6** and **Section 4.3.7 in Chapter Four**. Harris (2002), Bush (2005), Moloi (2007), Bush (2010) and Dimmock (2010) have revealed that effective leadership and management play an important role for effective teaching and learning. This is consistent with educator leadership theory as advocated by Bush (2010).

The involvement of educators in taking leadership roles in a school indicates the spirit of working together to accomplish the vision and mission statements of schools. It is indicated that the involvement of teachers did take place in schools and this involvement enhance the standard of learning in schools. Principals have acknowledged that teacher leadership should be promoted in schools and educators must be encouraged to take leadership positions in schools. Groon (2000) describes distributed leadership as a comprehensive process of distributing responsibilities to all subordinates. Dimmock (2012) support this view when saying that distributed leadership is a way of increasing and extending the organisational capacity of the school and the greater organisational capacity in turn can lead to the school making better use of its intellectual and social capital. The data of the study indicate that effective distributed and shared leadership have played an important role for effective teaching and learning in their schools. Having said the above, it also appeared as if participants lacked clarity about distributed leadership in the sense that mere delegation of duties to the teaching staff assumed educator leadership to them. It appears therefore that there was some kind of conflation in terms understanding of certain terminologies such as distributed leadership and delegation of duties; transformational leadership and changes in the school.

5.4. Recommendations

There are only two recommendations made for this study. The first one is directed at school principals and the other one is directed at research community.

5.4.1 Recommendations directed to school principals

The discussion of the findings indicates that although the PLC concept has been understood and PLCs established to some degree of success, there were some challenges that the principals experienced. Some of these related to the issue of time and the location of the schools. When they talked about PLCs, they seemed to suggest that PLCs are an act rather than a community of people. This suggests that principals that had participated in ACESL

programme need some more time to read and engage in PLC activities and try to gain more insight into this and other concepts such as educator leadership and distributed leadership.

5.4.2 Recommendations for further research

The study focused on trying to understand principals' experiences of implementing PLCs. Therefore, most of the findings relate to the participants' perceptions of their actions rather than on assessing the quality of the PLCs and the actual contribution to learner achievement. Much of the literature reviewed clearly indicated that there was a link between the existence of PLCs and the achievement of learners which was also linked to the learning that was achieved by the professionals (DuFour & Eaker, 2006; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Lieberman & Miller, 2008). However, more information is needed that is going to tell us whether the types of PLCs (where they exist), does contribute to the improvement learning standard in schools. This study did not address that issue at all. Nevertheless, it was not the mandate of this study to do that in the first place.

5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a summary of the research study. An overview of each chapter was provided. All three research questions have been addressed. The challenges mentioned by the participants suggest that there is still some work that needs to be done in terms of the principals' strengthening their understanding of PLC concept.

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

PERMISSION LETTER TO SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

18 Kite Place

Woodhaven

4004

19 August 2013

The Principal: Mr

Primary School

Dear Sir

Letter of request to the Principal

I am presently studying towards a Master's In Education degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am in the process of conducting research for my dissertation titled: Experiences of principals in implementing Professional Learning Communities in schools.

I request permission to interview you and audio tape our discussion. Your participation in this research will be voluntary, no benefit will be awarded, and you are free to withdraw at any time. Your name and your school name will not be mentioned in any part of the research. There will be no risk and harm involved.

The confidentiality, anonymity and non-traceability in this research study is guaranteed.

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

Cell: 0826201994 / (031) 4626480 Email: thulasm@live.co.za or

You may also contact: (1) My supervisor- Dr. TT Bhengu. Tel no. : (031) 2603534

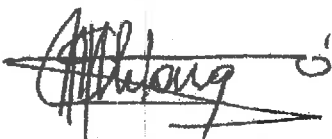
fAX (031) 260 1598, or Email : bhengutt@ukzn.ac.za

(2) HSSREC Research Office (UKZN), Ms P. Ximba, Tel: (031) 260 3587

Email: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za

Hope, this request will reach your favourable consideration.

Yours faithfully



S. Mhlongo

APPENDIX B: REPLY FROM THE GATEKEEPERS (SCHOOL PRINCIPALS)

PRIMARY SCHOOL

UMKOMAAS
4170

UMKOMAAS
4170

TO: MR S MHLONGO

RE-PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Your letter seeking permission to conduct a study with the principal has reference. Permission is hereby granted provided that the interviews are not conducted during school hours. I fully understand the contents of your letter and agree that participation is voluntary and I also agree that the interviews and discussions will be recorded. Your assurance of confidentiality and anonymity is appreciated. I would like to wish you a success in your studies.

Yours faithfully

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

PRINCIPAL / H.O.D.

APPENDIX B: REPLY FROM THE GATEKEEPERS (SCHOOL PRINCIPALS)

Dear Sir-Mr Mhlongo

This concise correspondence seeks to advise you learned folk and your institution that Thulasizwe Mhlongo has entered into partnership with the principal of Isolemamba Secondary School to have interviews with him in connection with his research project but not during school hours as we do not want to disturb school administrative duties.

This exercise will be executed under no duress.

Yours Faithfully

DATE: ~~_____~~

APPENDIX C: DECLARATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

_____ the principal of _____

Primary

understand fully that:

The participation is voluntary. Interviews will be recorded and discussions audiotaped. No benefits will be awarded for participation. My name & surname of the school will not be mentioned. No risk and harm involved in participating in this research. As a participant I may withdraw at any time, without any negative or undesirable consequences. Confidentiality, anonymity and non-traceability in this research is guaranteed

I therefore give consent to Mhlongo S. to do a research.

19/08/2013

Signature

Date

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
& CULTURE

APPENDIX C: DECLARATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

understand fully that:

The participation is voluntary. Interviews will be recorded and discussions audiotaped. No benefits will be awarded for participation. My name & surname of the school will not be mentioned. No risk and harm involved in participating in this research. As a participant I may withdraw at any time, without any negative or undesirable consequences. Confidentiality, anonymity and non-traceability in this research is guaranteed

I therefore give consent to Mhlongo S. to do a research.

Signature

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PRINCIPALS

- 1. What do you understand about professional learning communities (PLC's)?**
- 2. How and why do you implement the PLC's in your school?**
- 3. Is there a collaborative work in your school?**
- 4. How does the SMT support the collaborative work and as the principal what role do you play for collaborative work in terms of learning and teaching?**
- 5. You have studied ACE : LEADERSHIP and MANEGEMENT in UKZN tell me how do ACE Leadership and Management assist you in supporting teaching and learning in your school?**
- 6. How do educators reflect on the work done per term as a phase?**
- 7. Do the PLC's bring change in this school? Please elaborate.**
- 8. How do you involve your staff and the community to transform your school for better performance in teaching and learning?**
- 9. Tell me do you promote teacher – leadership and how do you motivate your staff in taking leadership roles in your school?**
- 10. What are the challenges do you encounter in the implementation of professional learning communities? And what solutions do you provide to meet these challenges?**
- 11. In conclusion, is there anything you would like to share with me as a researcher on teaching and learning which I have not asked you but you feel it is important to share with me? Please feel free to share with me.**

POSSIBLE PROBES

- 1. Networking**
- 2. Induction**
- 3. Workshops**
- 4. Mentoring and coaching**
- 5. Observing good practice**

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND INTO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

For students who are not taking the course, the book provides a comprehensive overview of the field. The book is divided into two main parts. The first part, "Theoretical Foundations," covers the basic concepts and principles of the field. The second part, "Practical Applications," discusses the various ways in which the theory can be applied in practice. The book is written in a clear and concise style, making it accessible to a wide range of readers. It is a valuable resource for anyone interested in the field.

Apakah ada yang ingin ditanyakan? 27

The research explored experiences of school principals in implementing the provision of learning communities as they focused on those three school principals that had studied and completed N.E. both of Leadership and Management programme between the years 2007 and 2009. These principals were expected to study in a collaborative manner as part of their studies, they were expected to be a community of learners, these were students at University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). In addition to being a community of learners, these teachers were also expected to introduce this concept to their schools and encourage their teachers that they were not only teachers but to become a community of learners. These principals were encouraged to build an interconnectedness with education in order to share decision, leadership and power. As part of establishing professional learning communities in their schools, principals had to create a situation that promotes continuous professional development and to work collaboratively with colleagues. The underlying assumption is that if the above environment and culture can be established, the standard of learning can be improved.

The area of professional communities of learners has received attention from researchers (Dunbar & Leber, 2006; Leberman & Miller, 2008). These scholars have made some recommendations regarding the manner in which professional communities can be perpetual. Professional learning communities occur in a school where a team of teachers share and collaboratively address their practice (Stoll & Louis, 2007). Professional learning communities (PLC) concept has been getting, sources (Clark, Campbell & Leber, 1998) is a key component for improving schools. Professional learning communities are closely associated to teacher, student and parent satisfaction with their schools (Dunbar & Leber, 1998). Professional communities of learners can enable dedication to the teachers' schools, leading to improved student achievement.

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