UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES: A CASE STUDY OF THREE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KWAZULU-NATAL

MAUREEN THOKOZILE SIMAMANE

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SCHOOL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES: A CASE STUDY OF THREE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KWAZULU-NATAL

by

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

SUPERVISOR: Dr InbaNaicker

DATE SUBMITTED: December 2013

06 December 2013

Mrs Maureen Thokozile Siamamane 9407551
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Protocol reference number: HSS/0713/013M
Project title: School Leadership Development and Professional Learning Communities: A case study of three primary schools in KwaZulu Natal.

Dear Mrs Siamamane

Retrospective – Expedited Approval

Further to our letter dated 01 August 2013, and your response dated 30 November 2013. The documents submitted have been accepted by the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee and **FULL APPROVAL** for the protocol has been granted.

Any further violation of the UKZN Code of Ethical Conduct will result in a disciplinary process.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

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

Yours faithfully

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/ms

cc Supervisor: Dr Inba Naicker
cc Academic Leader Research: Dr MN Davids
cc School Administrator: Mr Thoba Mthembu

Enquiries: Sibusiso Alwar   Tel: 033 341 8610   Ref: 2/4/8/472

Ms Maureen Thokozile Simamane
P.O.Box 180
Ndwedwe
4342

Dear Ms Simamane

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct a pilot and research entitled: **SCHOOL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES: A CASE STUDY OF THREE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KWAZULU-NATAL**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 01 August 2013 to 31 August 2015.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Mr. Alwar at the contact numbers below.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report / dissertation / thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Director-Resources Planning, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to the following school/s and/or institution/s in the KwaZulu Natal Department of Education.

Ilembe District

Nkosinathi S.P. Sishi, PhD
Head of Department: Education
16 August 2013

...dedicated to service and performance
beyond the call of duty

SUPERVISOR'S STATEMENT

This dissertation has been submitted with/ without my approval.

_____

Dr InbaNaicker

_____

Date

DECLARATION

I**, Maureen ThokozileSimamane,** declare that:

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

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

(iii)This dissertation does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.

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

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

Signed: _____

      Maureen ThokozileSimamane

   Date: _____

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my family (daughters and husband) for being instrumental in setting up and supporting me throughout this journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

The purpose of theAdvanced Certificate in Education (ACE) (School Leadership) is to empower school principals to develop the skills, knowledge and values needed to lead and manage successful schools. The study sought to achieve three objectives. Firstly, to find out if the school principals were able to use the learning from the ACE (School Leadership) programme in establishing the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Secondly, to find out if the school principals have succeeded in establishing and sustaining PLCs in their schools. Thirdly, to find out the extent to which school principals are succeeding in transforming their schools through PLCs. The theoretical framework used in the study were Leadership Development Theory andPLCs drawing from the Community of Practice (CoP). The study was located in the interpretive paradigm using the qualitative approach. Acase study methodology was employed. Semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis were the data production techniques. I sampled three primary schools led by school principals who successfully completed the ACE (School Leadership) programme between 2007 and 2009 in the Ilembe District of KwaZulu-Natal based on convenience. The school principals of each of the three primary schools were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. In sampling teacher participants, five teachers were sampled in each of the three schools. Two senior teachers from the foundation phase, two senior teachers from the intermediate phase and one senior teacher from the senior phase were selected. I also reviewed staff minutes for the period starting from January 2012 to June 2013. The data generated was thematically analysed. The study found that two school principals were able to establish PLCs in their schools and sustain them. The study also found that PLCs had massive impact in transforming the school. I conclude that the establishment of PLCs in schools promotes learning together and sharing of ideas and teaching techniques, among the teachers supported by school principal.

ACRONYMS

AC	-	Assessment Committee
ACE	-	Advanced Certificate in Education
ANA	-	Annual National Assessment
CAC	-	Cultural Activities Committee
CM	-	Circuit Manager
CoP	-	Community of Practice
CRC	-	Curriculum Review Committee
DoE	-	Department of Education
DP	-	Deputy Principal
HOD	-	Head of Department
IC	-	Irregularities Committee
ILST	-	Institute for Learner Support Team
IQMS	-	Integrated Quality Management System
LSPC	-	Learner Support Portfolio Committee
LST	-	Learner Support Team
LTSM	-	Learning and Teaching Support Materials
PLCs	-	Professional Learning Communities
PPN	-	Post Provisioning Norm
QLTC	-	Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign
SC	-	Subject Committee
SGB	-	School Governing Body
SMT	-	School Management Team
TPC	-	Teacher Professional Committee
WC	-	Welfare Committee

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND AND ORIENTATION TO THIS STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The job of a school principal is a onerous one. The *Employment of Educators Act, 76 of1998*, outlines the core duties and responsibilities of the school principal. These include general administration, personnel management, teaching, involvement in extra and co-curricular activities, interaction with stakeholders and communication responsibilities (Republic of South Africa, 1998, Personal Administration Measures, Chapter A). In addition to these duties and responsibilities, school principals are faced with ever changing legislation and an abundance of departmental policies that demand immediate attention and implementation.

In South Africa school principals do not require formal qualifications in school leadership to be appointed as principals. Further, there are no structures and processes in place to induct school principals prior to their assumption of duty. There is an absence of measures to determine the professional qualification of a person who can become a school principal. This underpins the view that in order to become a school principal, a teaching qualification and teaching experience are the only necessary requirements for consideration (Bush, 2009).South Africa lacks stringent criteria that informs the appointment of the school principals(Bush, 2004 cited in Mestry &Singh, 2007).The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education(2008) outlines the minimum requirements for candidates who aspire to become school principals. In terms of educational qualifications, the requirements are a three year professional qualification post grade twelve and a minimum experience of seven years working with the department of education as a teacher (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, 2008).

In most countries with successful education systems, this is not the case. In majority of the states in the United States of America, it is compulsory that a teacher completes the Master of Education (Administration) degree to qualify to be a school principal (Mestry & Singh 2007). In the United Kingdom, teachers must first become senior teachers or deputy heads and work with the principal as a member of the senior management team, have an average of five year

experience as a deputy head, before they are eligible for appointment as school principal (Mestry & Singh, 2007).

The Department of Basic Education (DoBE) in South Africa introduced the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) (School Leadership) to provide structured learning opportunities for school principals and other school leaders in order to promote the delivery of quality education in South African schools. The purpose of ACE (School Leadership) is to empower school principals to develop the skills, knowledge and values needed to lead and manage successful schools. The ACE modules are categorised in three groups, the fundamental, core and electives. The ACE (School Leadership) fundamental modules include developing a portfolio to demonstrate school leadership and management competence; leading and managing effective use of Information Technology and Communication (ITC) in South African schools. The core modules include understanding school leadership and management in the South African context; language in leadership and management; managing policy, planning school development and governance; lead and manage people; manage organisational systems, physical and financial resources and manage teaching and learning. The elective module includes lead and manage a subject, learning area or a phase; mentor school managers and manage mentoring programmes in schools; and plan and conduct assessment and moderate assessment (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, 2008).

1.2 THE RATIONALE AND MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

The purpose of the ACE (School Leadership) programme is to equip school principals with the necessary skills to lead and manage effective schools. Integral to effective schools is the development of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Therefore, there is a need for research to look into how the school principals who completed the ACE (School Leadership) programme have contributed to the formation of PLCs.

Being a principal myself, and having completed the ACE (School Leadership) programme I am keen on finding out how our learning is being translated into practice. The literature talks favourably about PLCs and the impact they may have on learner outcomes (Dufour, 2004; Jessie, 2007)

The significance of the study is that it may contribute to debates on how leadership development programmes contribute to the establishment of PLCs in schools. Not much has been explored in terms of PLC existence in primary school. This study can also add to the growing body of literature around the existence of PLC in schools.

1.3 THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study intends to explore the extent to which school principals, who participated and successfully completed the ACE (School Leadership) programme offered at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in the period 2007 to 2009 has enabled them to create and sustain PLCs in their schools. The study objectives are the following:-

1. To find out if the school principals were able to use the learning acquired from ACE (School Leadership) programme in establishing the PLCs in their schools.
2. To find out if the school principals have succeeded in establishing and sustaining PLCs in their schools.
3. To find out the extent to which school principals are succeeding in transforming their schools through PLCs.

1.4 KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Collectively, this study seeks to answer the following key questions:

- How have school principals used their learning from the ACE (School Leadership) programme to establish PLCs?
- What PLCs exist in schools of principals that have completed the ACE (School Leadership) programme and how do they sustain them?
- What impact do PLCs have on transforming their schools?

1.5 DEFINITION OF TERMS

In order to ensure common understanding, broad definitions of key terms that are used in this study are given.

1.5.1 LEADERSHIP

Bush (1998) sees leadership as linked to "values or purpose." Leadership entails direction and purpose; it is about getting things to change. Further, it includes vision, strategy, aligning people, motivating and inspiring (Clark, 2007). Davidoff and Lazarus (2002, p.168) state that, "leadership ensures that the school does not get stuck in a rut or become stale and reactive". Van Deventer and Kruger (2007, p.139) define leadership, "as one or other form of dominance where the subordinates more or less have to accept the commands and control of another person. It is important to note that leadership is about teamwork, delegation, influencing, monitoring, directing, implementing, decision-making and reviewing. Borrowing from Bush and Clark, in the context of this study leadership is seen as providing vision, strategy, direction, purpose, motivating and inspiring. Leadership and management are interrelated terms. For the purposes of the study when the term leadership is used the discourse management is also subsumed. Management is associated with words like "efficiency, planning, paperwork, procedures, regulations, control and consistency" (van Deventer & Kruger, 2007, p.141).

1.5.2 LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

According to Lawson (2008, p. 10), "leadership development is a strategic investment in a structured process that provides individuals with the opportunities, training, and experiences to become effective leaders in their organisations." Dixon (1993) cited in Chikoko, Naicker and Mthiyane (2011, p.317), define leadership development as, "building the capacity of groups of people to learn their way out of problems that could not have been predicted." Borrowing from both Lawson (2008) and Chikoko, Naicker and Mthiyane (2011), leadership development in the context of this study is seen as the training as well as the capacity building of individuals or groups to become effective leaders. The study looks at the leadership development of school principals to enable them to establish and sustain PLC in their schools.

1.5.3 PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES (PLCs)

According to Hord (2009, p.41), PLCs involve, "learning deeply with colleagues about an identified topic, to develop shared meaning, and identity shared purposes related to the

topic." Stoll and Louis (2007) define PLC as, "a group of teachers supported by leaders." It is very important that the school principal plays an active role to support and willingly work with the teachers. Borrowing from both Hord (2009) and Stoll and Louis (2007), PLCs in the context of this study is seen as deep learning together and sharing among teachers supported by the school principal.

1.6 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The study intends to explore the extent to which school principals, who participated and successfully completed the ACE (School Leadership) programme offered in the University of KwaZulu-Natal in the period from 2007 to 2009 has enabled them to create and sustain PLCs in their schools. The purpose of the study is to present issues of school leadership development and PLCs and its contribution to education. The study looks at the work of the following scholars: Ngcobo (2012), Chikoko, Naicker and Mthiyane (2011), Cuddapah and Clayton (2011), Muijs, West and Ainscow (2010) Coe, Carl and Frick (2010), Hord (2009), Schenkel and Teigland (2008), Kamper (2008), Mestry and Singh (2007). Most of the sources, books and journal articles were drawn from the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is located in the interpretative paradigm using the qualitative approach. The interpretative paradigm offers a perspective of a situation and gives insight tothe way participants make sense of their own situation (Maree, 2007). The qualitative approach provides the study with the richness and depth of descriptions from the participants' point of view (Maree, 2007). The case study methodology is used in this study because it allows for the pursuit of an in-depth study over a defined period of time (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Further, it is very instrumental when one wants to unearth new and deeper understanding of school leadership development and PLCs (Lapan, Quartaroli & Riemer, 2012).

There are three methods of data production that are used in the study, namely semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis. One semi-structured interview was conducted with each school principal in the three schools and focus group interviews were conducted with five teachers in each of the three schools. Staff minutes for the period between January 2012 and June 2013 werereviewed. Document analysisallows for the

viewing of written communications that may shed light on the topic under study (Maree, 2007).

Purposive sampling was used to select participants, because it allows for the use of the pre-selected criteria relevant to the study (Maree 2007). A semi-structured interview schedule and focus group interview schedule were used as the data production instruments. In ensuring that all details were recorded, a tape recorder was used to capture exactly what participants said. The recorded information was transcribed and read in order to establish key themes emerging from the data.

1.8 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study is largely delimited to the views of teachers and school principals in the three schools in KwaZulu-Natal in the Ilembe District. The schools of interest are three primary schools and focuses on the school principals who attended the ACE (School Leadership) programme between 2007 and 2009 at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). The data generation was conducted between August 2013 and September 2013 in the schools.

1.9 CHAPTER OUTLINE

This research study is divided into five chapters.

Chapter One provides the outline of the study. A brief background is given in the introduction which provides the problem statement for the study. The rationale and motivation of the study is given. The aims, objectives and the key research questions are provided. The key terms are defined and the review of literature is outlined. There is a brief mentioning of the research methodology. The delimitation of the study and the chapter outline are presented.

Chapter Two presents the literature review and theoretical framework. The Leadership Development Theory and PLCs drawing from the Community of Practice (CoP) are discussed. The broad debate on ACE (School Leadership) in South Africa, landscape of

leadership development and PLCs are discussed in detail. Both international and local studies on PLCs are reviewed.

Chapter Three unpacks the research design and methodology. It outlines the research paradigm and the methodology. It details the method of data collection that includes semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis. The chapter explains the sampling procedures used and the participants. It explains in detail how the data is analysed. Trustworthiness and ethical issues are also explained. The limitations of the study are presented.

Chapter Four deals with data analysis, findings and discussion. The data is presented under themes that emerged from interviews and document analysis using a theoretical framework and relevant literature.

Chapter Five brings the study to an end by providing the summary, conclusions and some recommendations of how leadership development can contribute to effective PLCs.

1.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided the background. It presented an introduction which explained the problem statement for conducting the study and the rationale for choosing School Leadership Development and PLCs. The significance, aims and objectives of the study were clearly specified. Furthermore, the key research questions were put forward together with the definition of terms. It highlighted the review of related literature. It gave a brief account of the research methodology and touched on the delimitation of the study and provided the chapter outline.

In the next chapter the review of related literature and the theoretical framework of the study is presented.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter one outlined the background and introduction to the study. This chapter provides an exploration of research on leadership development and PLCs with regard to the key research questions formulated in chapter one; namely:-

- How have school principals used their learning from the ACE (School Leadership) programme to establish PLCs?
- What PLCs exist in schools of principals that have completed the ACE (School Leadership) programme and how do they sustain them?
- What impact do PLCs have on transforming their schools?

This chapter commences with the review of related literature. It starts by explaining how the ACE (School Leadership) programme is structured. Thereafter, it goes on to discuss the landscape of leadership development in South Africa. Then PLCs are presented and discussed in detail. Further, local and international studies on PLCs are discussed. Thereafter, the theoretical underpinnings of the study is presented. Leadership Development Theory and PLCs drawing from the Community of Practice (CoP) are discussed.

2.2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Literature is reviewed on studies conducted on ACE (School Leadership) programme, the Leadership Development landscape and PLCs. The study will concentrate on PLCs that have been established in schools of principals that have undergone and successfully completed ACE (School Leadership) programme and how they sustain them.

2.2.1 ACE (SCHOOL LEADERSHIP) IN SOUTH AFRICA

In this section subtopics of interest cover the vision, purpose, rationale and modules in ACE (School Leadership) programme.

2.2.1.1 THE VISION OF ACE (SCHOOL LEADERSHIP)

The ACE (School Leadership) programme provides structured opportunities that, while recognizing the diverse contexts in which school operate, promotequality education in South African schools through the development of a corps of education leaders who apply critical understanding, values, knowledge and skills to school leadership and management in line with the vision of democratic transformation (Department of Education, 2008).

2.2.1.2 THE PURPOSE OF ACE (SCHOOL LEADERSHIP)

The ACE (School Leadership) programme empowers teachers to develop the skills, knowledge, and values needed to lead and manage schools effectively and to contribute to improving the delivery of education across the school system taking into account the diversity of school types and contexts(Department of Education, 2008).

2.2.1.3 THE RATIONALE OF ACE (SCHOOL LEADERSHIP)

The rationale for the development and implementation of the ACE (School Leadership) programme is to:
- Develop a programme, which provides an entry criterion to principalship.
- Provide aspirant principals with a professional qualification, which is career related.
- Provide a formal professional qualification, which is consistent with the Job Profile of school principals (Department of Education, 2008).

2.2.1.4 ACE (SCHOOL LEADERSHIP) MODULES

Here I am providing the list of the modules that are taught in ACE (School Leadership) programme. The ACE (School Leadership) is a programme that has been registered on the National Qualification Framework (NQF) at NQF Level 6 with an exit level at REQV14 (Department of Education, 2008). The programme is designed to take two years. The ACE modules are categorised in three groups, the fundamental, core and electives as outlined in chapter one (p.2).

2.2.2 LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT LANDSCAPE

This section provides a debate on leadership development, effective leadership approaches, effective leadership, need of structured development programmes and the influence of leadership development.

The issue of leadership is crucial since designing leadership development programmes relies on leadership development skills. The current issues in leadership development include the management competency-based approach, leadership effectiveness and the learning process. Ngcobo (2012) states that the management competency-based approach is of the belief that certain core managerial competencies are crucial for the development of leadership capacity in schools. A basic criticism of this approach is that it appears to be based on an assumption that management competencies equal leadership competencies. The assumption further seems to be that all of the identified management competencies are actually carried out by one person (Ngcobo, 2012). The emphasis in the leadership effectiveness approach to leadership development is on strategies that include critical, reflective, creative, proactive, responsive and a balance between collaboration and independent decision-making (Ngcobo, 2012). This can involve exposure to ongoing development. This type of development can prepare learners for the world of work because this approach is linked to a neo-classical curriculum. The assumption of the learning process approach is that learning is an ongoing process. This approach views leadership as having energising influence rather than hierarchical positions of formal authority (Ngcobo, 2012).

When you look at the countries like Canada, England, France, Scotland and USA, a formal leadership qualification is required before school principals' take on their posts (Bush, 2008). Bush (2008) further argues that the appointment of school principals without the specific preparation is a gamble. In the South African context from 1994, there was a need the structured development programme and it is worth mentioning that a number of policies have been introduced by the South African government with the intention to transform the country's education system (Ngcobo, 2012). The Norms and Standards for the Funding of Schools (Department of Education 1996), aimed at facilitating equitable access to quality basic education was introduced in 1996. A large number of schools appear to be struggling with the policy changes (Ngcobo, 2012). There are increasingly a number of school leadership development programmes aimed at capacitating school principals. Indicators are

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showing that these programmes are not contributing to sustainable leadership effectiveness in schools (Ngcobo, 2012). Ngcobo (2012) argues that the lack of a common understanding in South African schools has resulted in multiple and ever changing policies. The ACE (School Leadership) programme was introduced with the intention to develop the school principal's skills, knowledge, and values needed to lead and manage schools effectively (Department of education, 2008).

Chikoko, Naicker and Mthiyane (2011) conducted a study using principal's portfolios in the ACE (School Leadership) to examine how they learnt, sought to learn and can learn leadership. Portfolios were an instrument of learning where school principals captured information. The school principals were recording their learning experiences and what they were learning at their schools. Chikoko, *et al.* (2011), argue that there is still much debate about what constitutes effective leadership development, yet effective leadership is a core ingredient for successful schools. The issue of leadership is debatable amongst the scholars.

2.2.3 PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES (PLCs)

In understanding the PLCs I am drawing from the work of DuFour (2004) and Jessie (2007) who characterised the PLCs as consisting of three elements namely: ensuring that learners learn, a culture of collaboration and a focus on results. These elements are discussed below.

2.2.3.(i) Ensuring that learners learn

According to DuFour (2004), the PLC model flows from the assumption that the core mission of formal education is not simply to ensure that learners are taught but to ensure that they learn. Jessie (2007) argues that as the PLC focuses on learning instead of teaching that changes the role of the school principal. The school principals need to continue observing instructional processes, review learner performance and learner support. This shift from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning has profound implications for schools. DuFour (2004), further argues that it is of utmost importance that school staff view "learning for all" as a pledge to ensure the success of each learner rather than a political hyperbole. When teachers have built shared knowledge and have found common grounds to ensure that "learning for all" succeeds, the school has a solid foundation for moving forward with its improvement initiative. DuFour (2004) mentions that when a school begins to function as a

PLC, the teachers automatically become aware of the congruence between their commitment to ensure learning for all learners and their lack of a coordinated strategy to respond when some learners do not learn. The teachers can then design strategies to ensure that struggling learners receive additional time and support.

2.2.3.(ii) A culture of collaboration

Jessie (2007) argues that Professional Learning is embedded in the culture of a PLC. Staff members (teachers) learn from one another when they attend workshops and other outside professional development programmes. PLCs are based on collaboration. Professionals achieve more through collaboration than they could alone. Teachers benefit from the resources that each one brings to the PLC. Collaboration provides a mechanism for sharing responsibility for learners and a means to work together toward a common purpose (Stoll & Louis, 2007). DuFour (2004) expounds that teachers in PLCs acknowledge that they must work together to achieve a collective purpose of learning for all learners. Therefore, they create structures to promote a collaborative culture in their schools. DuFour (2004) further argues that, "the powerful collaboration that characterises PLCs is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyse and improve their classroom practice." Teachers work in teams, engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning. This process in turn leads to higher levels of learners' achievement (DuFour, 2004). Jessie (2007) argues that building and maintaining a collaborative culture is one of the most difficult aspects of a PLC.

DuFour (2004) advances two important aspects; collaborating for school improvement and removing barriers to success. One school in Virginia was involved in collaboration of grade-level teams for school improvement. Each team examined learner results and analysed how learners performed. The team members identified strengths and weaknesses of learners learning and discussed how they can build on the strengths. The entire team gained new insight into what was working and they discussed new strategies to implement in their classrooms. The collaborative conversations demand that goals, strategies, materials, pacing, questions, concerns as well as the results must be openly discussed by the members (DuFour, 2004). Teachers in school need to stop working in isolation. Collaboration must be practiced as a strategy to improve schools. In building collaborative cultures, PLCs will flourish (DuFour, 2004).

2.2.3.(iii) A focus on results

DuFour (2004) and Jessie (2007) argue that PLCs judge their effectiveness on the basis of the results from learner performance. Everyone in the school works towards improving learner achievement. This becomes an on-going process for every teacher participating in a team to identify the current level of learner achievement, establish goals to improve and work together to achieve set goals by continually providing evidence. PLCs promote result-oriented thinking that is focused on continuous improvement and learner's learning. Teachers in PLCs respond to data that require mutual accountability and changing classrooms practices (DuFour, 2004).

An intermediate school from Texas, worked in collaborative teams with a focus on continual improvement of results. It required teachers to change traditional practices and revise prevalent assumptions (DuFour, 2004). This required teachers to stop relating learner performance to issues like learners lack of discipline, staff morale, how busy they were and had to focus attention to learners learning.

2.2.3.1 THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AND PLCs

The following section talks about the school principal as the leader who ensures that PLCs are functional. Schools have a unique structure and require the extensive cooperation between various professionals. This requires an organisational structure that establishes learning networks for joint thinking and learning to enhance learners' welfare (Glatthorn, 1990; Reiter, 1994). In this regard, the school principals have been challenged to foster learning communities as a means for meeting both the intent and the spirit of laws regarding the education of learners (DiPaola & Wlather-Thomas, 2003).

The school principal is located at the intersection of the school and educational administration disciplines (Lashley & Boscardin, 2003). The school principal and his or her administrative team decide on work settings, organise the work groups and co-ordinate all the school's activities. The same team decides on staff meetings and is responsible for implementing the decisions made in them. Furthermore, the school principal and the teachers are constantly in touch with the learners' parents and help in creating connections with community centres in order to integrate the exceptional child into society (Sachs, 1992).

The primary responsibility of school principals is to ensure that the educational needs and goals of all learners are met. Research suggests that school principals are not sufficiently prepared for this responsibility due to a lack of coursework during their formal training and professional development (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003). In addition, the funding needs are the responsibility of school principals, meaning that they must provide resources and budget management to ensure that all learners in the school receive adequate support (O'Brien, 2006; Yell, 2003). Thus, service delivery mechanisms are becoming more difficult and complex to administer.

School principals play pivotal roles in high-risk learning environments which address complex learner achievement issues (Brookover, Schweitzer, Schneider & Beady, 2005; Wellisch, Anne, Ronald & Gary, 1978). School principals develop and sustain effective PLCs by making sure that learners have the support and resources they need to be successful (Glickman, 2002). They facilitate inquiry, collaboration, reflection and analysis to guarantee learners' achievements, professional growth, and continuous programme improvement (Gupton, 2003). When school principals focus on fundamental instructional issues and provide ongoing collaborative professional development, academic outcomes for learners improve (Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron & van Hover, 2006; Kearns & Finchman, 2005; Klingner, Arguelles, Hughes & Vaughn, 2001).

PLCs are an increasingly common attempt by school principals to empower learners (O'Brian, 2006; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001). By recognising local expertise and providing opportunities for senior teachers to share their knowledge and skills. The school principals ensure that PLCs efforts are well suited to the context and needs of their schools (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003).

The PLCs are key concepts in improving teacher performance (Roy & Hord, 2006). Strategies for effective teaching are intended to be modelled by the School Management Team (SMT) school administrators, in collaboration with classroom teachers, to improve specific teaching skills. The strategies to be utilised should be discussed by the teachers and the school principal and mutually agreed upon. The school principal and the teachers should be jointly responsible for ensuring that the necessary resources are available for selected professional development activities (Picard, 2004).

In one way or another, all the actions of effective school principals in schools are geared toward providing teachers with the resources and support they need to do their jobs effectively (Bateman & Bateman, 2001; Thomas, 2001). When teachers spend time in class, they learn about individual and school-wide professional development needs (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003). In this regard, school principals must ultimately consider and utilise school resources in a fashion that best enables teachers to perform their current educational roles (O'Brien, 2006). Once new school principals are on the job, systematic mentoring at both the district and school levels help familiarise them with existing organisational expectations (Lashley & Bascardin, 2003).

Research suggests that the school principal's role in nurturing PLCs is pivotal; however, few school principals are well prepared for this responsibility (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003). In light of the dilemmas that school principals must face daily, those of who are able to establish and sustain PLCs in their schools are able to achieve greater success. By creating and supporting networks that facilitate dialogue, support, and sharing between teachers and SMT working together for the benefit of all learners (Bateman & Bateman, 2001; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Gersten, 2001).

2.2.3.2 THE INFLUENCE OF PLCs ON SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

Research has demonstrated that teachers who work collaboratively produce improved learner results or learner achievement that is greater than the sum of individual teacher effort is (Fullan, 2005). Effective PLCs provide the conditions necessary for the synergy that drives school improvement. Learners become recipients of the powerful effects of collaborative action as practiced in PLCs.

The shared values and vision among SMT and teachers guide decisions about teaching and learning, and support norms of behaviour. In PLCs, the vision is what Martel (1993) defined as a total quality focus. These values then create the norms of a self-aware, self-critical, and increasingly effective professional organisation, utilising the commitment of its members to seek ongoing renewal and improvement (Sirotnik, 1999; Little, 1997).

PLCs help teachers to use a pedagogy that establishes relevance of the curriculum, and learners are engaged in learning activities that respond to their cultures and needs as learners (Reyes, Scribner & Paredes Scribner, 1999). Teachers seek the best strategies and instructional practices to engage their learners in learning, and they make the necessary adjustments to respond to the learners' diverse learning needs.

PLCs further help in creating supportive structures, including a collaborative environment. This has been described as the single most important factor for flourishing school improvement and the first order of business for those seeking to enhance the effectiveness of their school (Eastwood & Louis, 1992).

Elmore (2000, p. 32) states that, "schools and school systems that are improving directly and explicitly confront the issue of isolation by creating multiple avenues of interaction among teachers and promoting inquiry-oriented practices while working toward high standards of learner performance." Teacher interaction within a formalized structure for collegial coaching provides the means for confronting the issue of isolation in PLCs. Through such interaction, teachers continue to build a culture of mutual respect and trustworthiness for both individual and school improvement, and they also exhibit increased commitment to their work.

By working collaboratively, teachers develop new skills, explore and utilise enhanced instructional resources, and grow in shared commitment and motivation to improve learner achievement (Fullan, 2005). The core practices of successful school principals in PLCs is to set directions, build relationships, develop people, redesign the organisation, and manage the instructional programme (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006).

Prominent researchers advocate for the efficacy of PLCs because their findings provide evidence that learners achievement is influenced by the development of a collaborative action process that focuses on improved learners' learning. A number of studies provide evidence that the operation of purposeful interaction characterizes successful schools (Fullan, 2001). Teacher collaboration that is evidence based, improves the quality of instructional practice, resulting in significant, measurable improvements in learners learning (Hargreaves, 2003; Schmoker, 2005).

2.2.3.3 DIMENSIONS OF PLCs

According to Hirsh and Hord (2008), school principals can use PLCs by participating with teachers for school wide learning and by networking with other school principals to learn specifically about school leadership and other topics. The PLCs are powerful ways for the school principals to extend their learning. According to Hirsh and Hord (2008) PLCs share five research-based dimensions. These are shared and supportive leadership; a shared vision; supportive structural and relational conditions; intentional, collegial learning and shared practice.

In terms of shared and supportive leadership, the school principal is responsible for launching PLCs in a school. Successful school principals plan from its inception how they will share guidance and leadership with the teachers (Hirsh & Hord, 2008). Ultimately, PLCs should be a self-governing entity in which democratic participation is the norm.

The shared vision includes the purpose for which the school exists, how the members fit within that purpose and the values upon which it is founded (Hirsh & Hord, 2008). Working with teachers to develop a shared vision for decision making and referencing that vision often is the school principal's responsibility.

The supportive structural and relational condition is concerned with identifying the time and location where the community will meet to do its work (Hirsh & Hord, 2008). Finding time to meet is a real challenge, and schools have to find creative ways to challenge schedules or time usage. Successful PLCs operate within schools where administrators, teachers, parents, and learners respect, and trust one another. The school principal has the power to solve logistic problems and provide structures to build relationships (Hirsh & Hord, 2008).

The intentional, collegial learning is about the community working together to determine what it will learn together (Hirsh & Hord, 2008). The staff examines multiple sources of learners and teachers data to determine where they can celebrate high learner performance and where unsatisfactory performances begs attention. The PLCs determine where they need to give time and effort to their learning, which might include new curricula¸ instructional strategies, and approaches to learner motivation, and they also determine how they will acquire and implement their new learning.

The shared practice is concerned with the teachers visiting one another to observe, and the school principal might observe the practices that have been identified by host teacher's carefully scripted notes and follow up with the teacher later in the day (Hirsh & Hord, 2008). In this way, individual staff members and the school organization as a whole improve.

The school principal plays a strong directing role in the initiation of the PLCs. They then step back to support leadership opportunities and leadership development of the staff (Hirsh & Hord, 2008). From the inception of the PLCs, the school principal orchestrates how staff members will be prepared for new leadership roles (Hirsh & Hord, 2008). The school principal's levels of participation in PLCs vary. The teachers take note of these varying levels. They observe the school principal who ceremoniously launches learning communities but fails to invent any individual time in the effort. They observe principals who attends the meetings but whose actions do not demonstrate an individual investment. They observe the principal who engages as an equal member of the community and ensure the full effect of the PLCs on staff members and learners (Hirsh & Hord, 2008).

When the school principal shifts from serving as the director and authority source to become a learner as opposed to solely a facilitator, there are additional benefits (Hirsh & Hord, 2008). The school principal is viewed as the "head learner" who engages in learning and encourages others to do likewise. He or she gains valued colleagues while discussing instructional issues that focus on learners. In addition, staff involvement in school decisions and actions provide the school principal with partners who help in managing and leading the school (Hirsh & Hord, 2008).

2.2.3.4 HARD WORK AND COMMITMENT

According to DuFour (2004) the PLCs are a powerful new way of working together that profoundly affects the practices of schooling. In all schools, to establish and sustain the concept of PLCs requires hard work.

2.2.3.5 PLCs IMPACT LEARNER SUCCESS

Rentfro (2007) sees PLCs as a corroborative team that focus on improving learner performance. Rentfro (2007) further identifies collaborative teaching, learning and

assessment of learners as well as the PLCs success as crucial elements that impact learner success. The team meets to review results and identify risk, learners and write goals and targets on the grade expectation for pacing the curriculum and on the common assessment with scoring. The learning and assessment of learners involves the monitoring of learning by using common assessment and progress monitoring by teachers. The idea is to identify learners who need extra support. During the interventions, all staff members in the building are involved and work as a team to meet the needs of all the learners (Rentfro, 2007).

2.2.3.6 STUDIES CONDUCTED ON PLCs

The local as well as the international studies on PLCs are presented.

2.2.3.6.1 LOCAL STUDIES

Coe, Carl and Frick (2010) discovered that peer collaboration can assist many teachers to address the problems that they encounter in their classrooms teaching. The interviews, planning, observation, debriefing, revising and sharing by teachers act as an agent of change in solving the problem of the culture of isolation (Coe*et al*., 2010). The interest of my study is on the establishing and sustaining of PLCs in school as opposed to teachers working in isolation.

Naidoo (2011) explores the role of Leadership Practice Communities (LPCs) in developing the leadership capacity of school principals and discovered that LPC played a major role in developing the capacity of novice and senior principals. Further, this could be the way to ensure that development of school principals could be undertaken and it should be replicated by all Circuit Managers (CM) with a view to developing and strengthening leadership in schools under their control (Naidoo, 2011). This is significant for my study because the culture of working together is not confined to the school; the school principal will have to work together with other school principals and the CM. Further, this says school principal need to collaboratively work with the teachers in sustaining PLCs.

Ntengwane (2012) argues that the lack of professional leadership and management skills, knowledge and expertise has resulted in poor learners' performance in schools in the

Eastern Cape. This results from the fact that in South Africa, school principals have not been adequately and professionally developed to meet the demands of leadership (Ntengwane, 2012). The professional development of the school principals is important in that it can facilitate the smooth establishment of the PLCs in schools and that is the area of interest for my study.

2.2.3.6.2 INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

The study by Shekel and Teigland (2008), investigates the relationship that exists between the CoP and performance. In every organisation, valuable knowledge is implicit and the interaction that occurs among the staff is primarily informal and face-to-face discussion. My study seeks to establish the level of interaction, whether it is occurring on a formal or informal basis. Hord (2009) encourages the importance of regular teacher meetings at grade level focusing on the learner needs, curriculum and instructional practices. The process of learning occurs when professionals engage in order to enhance their knowledge and skills. The leadership role of the school principal is very important because he or she must provide support and encourage the importance of the staff gathering (Hord, 2009). Further, distributed leadership is the building block in the success of the school, where the school principal is willingly sharing powers and authority among the staff members. The implications of this study to my study is that, Hord (2009) focuses on principal leadership and my study focuses on principal leadership too, but I will also look at the establishment of PLCs in schools.

In education collaboration is used very often. Muijs, West and Ainscow (2010) view CoP and collaborative arrangements as an engine for the success of the organisation. In my study, the school principals who successfully participated and completed the ACE school leadership programme have gained variety of leadership skills that include networking and collaboration. In an attempt to ascertain if the school principals have imparted knowledge to the staff, I will use focus group interview to engage the teachers.

Maloney and Konza (2011) argue that collaboration and teamwork practices within supportive learning communities have positive outcomes for teachers' professional learning. Maloney and Konza (2011) further argue that in many schools, teachers still work in isolation and they are used to working within their own classrooms with little time to engage in collegial or structured conversations about practice. Maloney and Konza (2011) explore the

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reflection of teachers' beliefs about best practice in early childhood education. My study seeks to explore the extent to which school principals who participated and successfully completed the ACE (School Leadership) programme are succeeding in transforming their schools through PLCs.

Cuddapah and Clayton (2011), using Wenger's CoP framework, argue that it is important that teachers have regular meetings in which they talk about resource sharing and possible solutions to problems. The study deals with developing skills of new teachers but in my study I am interested in finding out if school principals have established and sustained PLCs in their schools.

Williams (2012) conducted a study of PLCs in more than 200 schools to determine if urban learners reading achievement increased as a result of weekly collaboration among teachers in a large urban district of Texas. The study revealed that significant growth occurred after the PLCs were established. The teachers perceived the PLCs as impacting their classroom practices and learners achievement.

2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical frameworks that are discussed are Leadership Development Theory and PLCs drawing from the Community of Practice (CoP) theory. The theories identified will help to make sense of how the school principals are enabled to create and sustain PLCs in their schools.

2.3.1 LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT THEORY

Lawson (2008, p. 10) articulates that leadership development is a "strategic investment in a structured process that provides individuals with the opportunities, training and experiences to become effective leaders in their organisations". This is an approach that aims at developing appropriate knowledge, skills and values in leaders.

Gray and Bishop (2009) indicate that for leadership development to be successful, it relies on the following aspects: assessment, challenge and support. Assessment refers to the identification of an individual's strengths, weaknesses and development needs. Providing a

challenge means taking people out of their comfort zones and allowing them to develop new capacities in the process. The school principal would be taken out of their comfort zones, their site of operation, and be thrust into the limelight with all their glaring deficiencies and knowledge gaps, with the intention of addressing gaps. Rendering support means providing the individual with motivation to believe in themselves that they can grow and change. While they are not in their cohort, they would be able to garner support and gain confidence as they go along. The exposure of the school principals to ACE (School Leadership) programme allowed them the chance to expose their lack of knowledge in certain matters to their critical friends, other school principals and network colleagues. Further, the ACE (School Leadership) programme gave the school principals necessary support to deal with challenges of leadership management.

Gray and Bishop (2009) further develop their theory by elucidating the conditions that contribute to the success of leadership development. They list five processes that they believe will sustain leadership development initiatives. These are role-embedded learning, mentoring and coaching, focused learning experiences, competences and standards to guide performance and reflection on practice. Role embedded learning involves high quality training and on the-job-application of skills, knowledge and practice. Gray and Bishop (2009) believe that there is no substitute for on the-job-leadership development through acting as a leader and evolving in authentic day-to-day situations with real-world consequences. School principals as leaders of schools have to translate theory into practice, that is, what they learnt from ACE (School Leadership) programme into practice in schools.

Mentoring and coaching help to provide feedback to assist the new leader to progress. Leaders are able to shape beliefs about school change, challenges, and relationships amongst and between staff and community members, as well as develop ethical practices. In ensuring that resource are available, the Norms and Standards for the Funding of Schools (Department of Education 1996), which is aimed at facilitating equitable access to quality basic education is available (Ngcobo, 2012).

Focused learning experiences allow opportunities for school principals as leaders to solve a range of school problems. This may be done initially by observation and participation and then by actually leading of teams to identify and implement strategies and interventions (Gray & Bishop, 2009).

Competencies and standards assist to guide the performance of school principals as leaders. These may take place through setting up standards for understanding school and classroom practices, working with people, the educators, to design student improvement initiatives and providing the necessary support to staff to carry out instructional, school and curriculum practices (Gray & Bishop, 2009).

Reflection on practice allows for school principals to practice their skills and then reflect on decisions and actions that they have taken and the consequences of their decisions can then undergo self-evaluation. Various leadership programmes advocate capturing of personal thoughts in a journal to share with cohorts (Gray & Bishop, 2009).

2.3.2 COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

It is impossible to separate PLCs from Communities of Practice (CoP) as PLCs are linked and have developed from CoP. Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, (2002, p. 4) defines CoP as, "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an on-going basis."

Wenger's model consists of four components. These are community, practice, meaning and identity. In Wenger's (1998) theory, 'community' refers to the group formed through mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire. It is the social organisation within which people are operating. The learning is taking place in the social engagement of the participants. The community is the key curricular component and is based on the notion that new teacher participation in an intentionally formed community will translate into novices coming to facilitate such communities in their own classrooms. In this study my intention was to investigate whether a similar trend would influence school principals through their participation in ACE (School Leadership) programme, to learn and transfer their learning to their own schools by forming and sustaining PLCs.

According to Wenger (1998, p.5) 'practice' refers to explicit and tacit shared enterprise in which people with common reference can sustain mutual engagement in action. Heckler, (2005) argues that in a CoP, a practice or specific artefacts and stories are shared by

members. This is practised in PLCs, where learning include activities whereby professionals get together to enhance their knowledge and skills (Hord, 2009).

Wenger (1998, p.5) postulates that 'meaning' is ultimately transformative in that it is an experience of identity. Learning is not just an accumulation of skills and information, but a process of becoming. For Wenger, through participation in communities of practice individual and group meanings are made. People experience, shape, and take on new identities. Wenger (1998, p.5) defines identity as, "a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities." Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of legitimate peripheral participation, is key in the formation of identity. The legitimate peripheral participation seeks to know how one enters, learns from and contributes to an established community of practice over time. This concept in the context of this study, refers to the school principals being able to form PLCs in schools and sustain them over time.

According to Samaras, Freese, Kosnik and Beck (2008) there are two crucial aspects that CoP expounds. These are stimulation and support. In terms of the stimulation, the CoP assists the groups to navigate together especially when something new is started. In terms of support, new practices demand change in approach and practices. The change in practice is hard work and necessary support is crucial (Samaras *et al.,* 2008).

2.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the review of related literature. The impact of the ACE (School Leadership) programme in South Africa was discussed. The Leadership Development landscape was explored. The importance of PLCs in the effective functioning of the school was discussed. The local and international studies on PLCs were explored. The theoretical framework underpinning this study was covered. The theory of Leadership Development and the PLCs drawing from CoPs were presented.

The next chapter deals with the research design and methodology employed in the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on the theoretical framework that informed the study and the literature reviewed around the following critical questions:-

- How have school principals used their learning from the ACE (School Leadership) programme to establish PLCs?

- What PLCs exist in schools of principals that have completed the ACE (School Leadership) programme and how do they sustain them?

- What impact do PLCs have on transforming their schools?

This chapter focuses on the research design and methodology. It commences by presenting the research paradigm. This is followed by a detailed discussion of the methodological approach to the study. The methods of research, sampling, piloting, data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical issues and the limitations of the study are furnished.

3.2 PARADIGMATIC LOCATION

The study is located in the interpretative paradigm using the qualitative approach. The interpretative paradigm offers a perspective of a situation and gives insight to the way participants make sense of their own situation (Maree, 2007). In terms of the ontology, the interpretative paradigm sees the world as being subjective; everyone has a view about something. According to Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter, (2006, p.7), "the reality to be studied consists of people's subjective experiences." Epistemologically, a person's truth depends on the context and where you are standing. People construct knowledge and everyone has his or her truth. According to Terre Blanche *et al*. (2006, p.274) epistemology is about, "making sense of people's experiences by interacting with them and listening carefully to what they tell us." Methodologically, in the interpretive paradigm, the researcher uses a variety of methods to gather information or truth. They make use of interviews, documents,

focus groups, drawings and collages. They rely on a subjective relationship between researchers and subject (Terre Blanche *et al*., 2006). This paradigm allowed me to understand the subjective world of the school principals and teachers, and to make meaning of leadership development and PLCs from the participants' perspective (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

3.3 METHODOLOGY

The qualitative approach enabled me to gain insights into the school leadership development and PLCs. I was able to discover the problems that exist in the schools pertaining to PLCs formation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). According to Barbour (2007, p. xii) the qualitative approach, "seeks to unpack how people construct the world around them, what they are doing or what is happening to them in terms that are meaningful and that offer rich insight." Further Barbour (2007, p. xiii) states that, "the approach takes context and cases seriously for understanding an issue under study." This approach provided the study with the richness and depth of descriptions from the participants' point of view (Maree, 2007). It enabled me to describe and analyse people's individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions of leadership development and formation of PLCs according to school principals and teachers (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

In qualitative research, subjective and personal views and experiences are acknowledged. Qualitative research, according to Creswell (2012, p.205), "relies on general interviews or observations so that we do not restrict the views of participants." It allows the research participants to speak and makes it easier to access the meaning that people have constructed (McMillian &Schumacher, 1993). Working within a qualitative research design enables the researcher to participate in the world of the individual to understand the experiences and perspectives from the participant's points of view (Creswell, 1994).

A case study methodology is used in this study. Yin (2003, p. 2) defines the case study as, "an approach allowing investigators to retain a holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events." According to Maree (2007), a case study provides the richness and depth of descriptions from the participant's point of view. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) argue that a case study allows for the pursuit of an in-depth data gathering for the purpose of learning more about an unknown or poorly understood situation over a defined period of time. Further, it is

very instrumental when one wants to unearth new and deeper understanding (Lapan, Quartaroli & Riemer, 2012). In conducting a qualitative inquiry, a case study approach is one method that can accommodate a variety of research designs, data collection techniques, epistemological orientations and disciplinary perspectives. I used a case study approach since it "provides unique examples of real situations" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011 p.181). A case study enables a researcher to "penetrate situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis" (Cohen *et al.,* 2011 p.181).

Further, it enabled me to empirically investigate how school leadership development impacts in PLCs formation in a real-life context, using multiple source of evidence (Maree, 2007). It examines a case over time and in detail using multiple sources (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). In my study the case is how school principals have used the learning from ACE (School Leadership) programme to establish and sustain PLCs. It is a case of how PLCs have transformed the schools.

In my study, therefore, qualitative interpretive research offered the opportunity to gain insight into the world of participants (their attitudes, motivations, expectations, culture or lifestyle, concerns and value systems).A case study has possible strengths and one weakness. The key strength that is put forward, is the use of multiple source and techniques in the data gathering process. The researcher has the power to determine in advance what evidence to be gathered and the data analysis techniques to be used (Maree, 2007). The levelled weakness is its dependence on the single case as the result. It is incapable of providing a generalising conclusion (Maree, 2007). While this is the weakness, it was not my intention to generalise. My intention was largely to understand what is happening in these three schools in term of leadership development of the school principal and the establishment of the PLCs.

3.4 METHODS OF DATA PRODUCTION

The data production techniques that were used in the study are semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis.

3.4.1 INTERVIEWS

I used interviews as the means to generate data. An interview occurs when researchers ask participants questions and record their answers (Creswell, 2012). The interviews enabled me to get rich descriptive data and to view the world through the eyes of the participants (Maree, 2007). They allowed the participants to discuss and interpret the world in which they live, and express their own points of view regarding the situation (Cohen *et al.* 2011). They are very useful since they yield a great deal of useful information (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). I used both semi-structured and focus group interviews.

3.4.1.1 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

I used semi-structured interviews, because they are ideal for interviewing participants who are not hesitant to speak and who can share ideas comfortably (Creswell, 2012). They allowed for the use of probes and required the participant to answer a set of predetermined questions (Maree, 2007). The probing technique allowed for the use of standard questions that are individually tailored to get clarification or probe a person's reasoning (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). One semi-structured interview was conducted with each school principal at their schools. The challenge of using semi structured interviews is that it can get side tracked by issues that are not related to the study (Maree, 2007). As a researcher it was my duty to always guide the participants back to the focus of the research.

3.4.1.2 FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

I used the focus group interviews because it allows for the participation of several participants at the same time (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). According to Creswell (2012) a focus group, "is the process of collecting data through interviews with a group of people, typically four to six." According to Barbour (2007), a focus group may be any group discussion as long as the researcher is actively encouraging and paying attention to the group interaction. It enriched my study by allowing the participants to build on each other's ideas and comments to provide an in-depth view not attainable from individual interviews (Maree, 2007). It allows for the collection of shared understandings from several individuals and enables the researcher to get views from specific people (Creswell, 2012). Focus group interviews further

allow for discussion and the interaction of participants with one another that yield to the collective view (Cohen *et al*., 2011).

The focus groups are very useful when time is limited and people feel very comfortable talking in a group than alone (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The challenges of using focus groups are: first, the researcher might lack control over the interview discussion; second, the researcher may encounter difficulty to differentiate voice of participants during transcription when audiotape is used; third, it can be difficult to take notes because a lot is happening (Creswell, 2012). As the researcher to guard against the levelled challenges, it was my duty as the researcher to guide the participants back to the research questions. I also decided to give participants pseudonyms to use during the interview process to guard against failing to differentiate their voices during transcription. I decided to make use of an audio recorder during interview process as trying to take notes would have led to the loss of vital information. In the study, one focus group interview was conducted in each of the three schools with five teachers comprising each focus group.

3.4.1.3 DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Documents provide valuable information. They allow one to view the written communications that may share light on the topic under study (Maree, 2007). They are in the language and words of the participants, and are ready for analysis (Creswell, 2012). The challenge of using document analysis are that documents are sometimes difficult to locate and may be incomplete (Creswell, 2012). I reviewed staff minutes for the period January 2012 to June 2013. However, I did not have the challenge expressed above as these documents were readily available because of the recency in construction.

3.4.2 DATA PRODUCTION INSTRUMENTS

In this study the data production instruments were a semi-structured interview schedule and a focus group interview schedule. The semi-structured interview schedule (see appendix 4, page 79) was structured as follows. The first part of the instrument focused on the biographical details of the participants. The second section of the instrument focused on putting ACE (School Leadership) learning into practice in terms of establishing PLCs. The

third section of the instrument focused on PLCs that exist in schools and how they are sustained. The forth section focused on the impact of PLCs in transforming the school.

The focus group interview schedule (see appendix 5, page 80) was structured as follows. The first part of the instrument focused on putting ACE (School Leadership) learning into practice in terms of establishing PLCs. The second section of the instrument focused on the PLCs that exist in school. The third section focused on the impact of PLCs in transforming the school.

3.5 SAMPLING

I sampled three primary schools in the Ilembe District of KwaZulu-Natal, convenient to me with school principals who have successfully completed the ACE (School Leadership) Programme between 2007 and 2009. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants, because it allows for the use of the pre-selected criteria relevant to the study (Maree 2007). According to Creswell (2012), in purposive sampling the researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon. It allows for the use of people or units who are appropriate for the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). It allowed me to select information-rich participants and groups for the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The sampled schools were chosen because their principals were more likely to be knowledgeable and informative about school leadership development and PLCs. Cohen *et al*., (2011, p.156) state that in purposive sampling, "the researcher hand-picks the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought."

The principals of each of the three primary schools were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. In sampling teacher participants, five teachers were sampled in each of the three schools. Two senior teachers from the foundation phase, two senior teachers from the intermediate phase and one senior teacher from the senior phase were selected. One of the schools that took part in the study does not have senior phase. In that school four senior teachers from the foundation phase and one from the intermediate phase participated in the study. The study sampled senior teachers. The senior teachers interviewed had an average teaching experience of eighteen years. These teachers were sampled because they have rich stories to tell about the formation and the impact of the PLCs in transforming their schools.

3.6 PILOTING

The researcher may pilot the study to try out procedures, measurement instruments or methods of analysis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The study was piloted by locating a sample of school principals and teachers with characteristics similar to those that are used in the study with the intention of knowing how long it takes to complete, whether the directions and items are clear, and so on (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

During piloting I discovered that both the semi- structured interview instrument and the focus group instruments were fine. The participants did not encounter problems understanding the questions. They responded well. I did not have to change any of the questions. The pilot interviews for the school principals that used the semi-structured interviews lasted for thirty minutes. The pilot interviews for the teachers that used focus group interview lasted for thirty five minutes.

3.7 PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY

In this section I present a general profile of the participant school principals and teachers in the three schools sampled for the study. Kindly note that the names used for participants school principals and teachers are pseudonyms.

Sithelo Primary School
School Principal - Mr Khumalo

Mr Khumalo is the school principal of a combined primary school. He is fifty seven years old and has been in the teaching profession for twenty one years. Prior being the school principal, he served as a teacher. He has thirteen years' experience as the school principal. He holds a secondary teachers Diploma, Further Diploma in Education and the Advanced Certificate in Education (School Leadership).

Participating teachers

Miss Zandi Xulu is teaching in the intermediate phase, and has been teaching for twenty eight years.

Mrs Zola Kweyama is teaching in the foundation phase and has twenty one years teaching experience.

Mrs Zukiswa Sono is teaching in the foundation phase with twenty years teaching experience.

Mrs Zenzele Shange is teaching intermediate and senior phases and has twenty seven years teaching experience.

Miss Zenandi Shezi is teaching intermediate and senior phases and has teaching experience of twenty years.

Esethu Primary School
School principal: Mrs Cele

Mrs Cele is the school principal of a junior primary school. She is fifty four years old and has been in the teaching profession for twenty seven years. She served for seven years as the vice principal. Her experience as school principal is sixteen years. She holds a Senior Primary Teachers Diploma, Bachelors Degree and the Advanced Certificate in Education (School Leadership).

Participating teachers

Mrs Nomonde Hlela has been teaching for twenty two years in the foundation phase.

Mrs Naziz Shozi is teaching in the foundation phase and has twelve years teaching experience.

Mrs Nelia Chonco is teaching in the foundation phase and has ten years teaching experience.

Mr Bonga Kunene is teaching in the foundation phase and has six years teaching experience.

Miss NamoNgcobo is teaching in the intermediate phase and has twelve years teaching experience.

Siyakhula Primary School:

School Principal: Mr Goba

Mr Goba is the school principal of a combined primary school. He is fifty eight years old and has been in the teaching profession for thirty four years. Prior to being the school principal, he served as a teacher. He holds a Professional Teachers Certificate, Senior Primary Diploma, Higher Diploma in Education, School Management Diploma, Bachelor in Education and the Advance Certificate in Education (School Leadership).

Participant teachers

Mr Ziba Khulu is a senior phase teacher with eighteen years teaching experience.

Mrs Anatha Hlengwa is an intermediate phase teacher with twenty years teaching experience.

Miss Amanda Mthiya is a foundation phase teacher with twenty four years teaching experience.

Miss Cabangile Majozi is an intermediate phase teacher and has nineteen years teaching experience.

Miss Zama Cibane is the foundation phase teacher and has thirteen years teaching experience.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

All the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The transcribed interviews were subjected to content analysis. I did content analysis by reading and re-read the transcript in order to get the essence of what participants said. Then after I read to elicit the key statements that the participants were making in relation to my critical questions and put them into themes (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS

In the study four issues of trustworthiness were attended to: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 296), "credibility is an evaluation of whether or not the research findings represent a

credible conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants original data." Transferability is the degree to which the findings can be transferred and be applied to other situations (Shenton, 2004). Dependability is about the quality of data collection, data analysis and generation of new theory(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability is the extent to which the findings of a study are supported by data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In addressing credibility, firstly, the data collected from three sources namely the school principals, teachers and documents. The intention was to develop three layers of data. Secondly, I completed member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the process of member checking research participants reviewed a summary of the data analysis procedure and a summary of the final results of the study. In addressing transferability, I compared my study findings and results with the pilot findings and I witnessed that the findings of my study are transferable to similar context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In ensuring dependability and conformability, I did document analysis using staff minutes to eliminate researcher bias since they were captured in my absence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.10 ETHICAL ISSUES

In conducting research the issue of confidentiality and the protection of the participants' identities is crucial (Maree, 2007). Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and the reciprocity, assessment of risk, confidentiality, informed consent, data access as well as ownership of data were attended to (Creswell, 2012).

The ethical clearance approval from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethics committee was granted (see page ii). Research clearance from the Department of Education has been obtained (see page iii). Signed consent forms were obtained from all participants (see appendix 2, page 75 and appendix 3, page 77). Confidentiality and anonymity was consistently ensured and pseudonyms were given to participants.

3.11 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study involved only three school principals who successfully completed the ACE (School Leadership) programme offered at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in the period

between 2007 and 2009, and fifteen teachers. It is for this reason that the findings of this study cannot be generalised (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

3.12   CHAPTER SUMMARY

The research paradigm was presented, covering the issues of ontology, epistemology and methodology. A discussion of the methodology using the qualitative approach moving on to explain why I chose to adopt a case study design was covered. The methods of data production that covered semi-structured and focus group interviews and document analysis were clearly presented. Further, sampling, piloting and participants in the study were put forward. It provided a briefing of data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical issues and touched on the limitations of the study.

 The next chapter deals with the data presentation and discussion.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter outlined the research design and methodology employed in the study. This chapter presents the findings and discussion of the study in order to answer the three critical questions generated in chapter one, namely:

- How have school principals used their learning from the ACE (School Leadership) programme to establish PLCs?
- What PLCs exist in schools of principals that have completed the ACE (School Leadership) programme and how do they sustain them?
- What impact do PLCs have on transforming their schools?

In presenting the data, the key research questions are used as a framework to present and discuss the data. Under each research question, the data is presented under themes that emerged from the interviews and the document analysis. A discussion of the data in terms of the theoretical tools as well as relevant literature is also presented.

4.2 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

I presented my findings and discussion under three broad headings that are linked to my key research questions namely:

- Putting ACE (School Leadership) learning into practice in terms of establishing PLCs.
- The PLCs that exist in the school and how they are sustained.
- The impact of PLCs on transforming schools.

4.2.1 PUTTING ACE (SCHOOL LEADERSHP) LEARNING INTO PRACTICE IN TERMS OF ESTABLISHING PLCs

With regard to the issue of putting ACE (School Leadership) learning into practice in terms of establishing PLCs, three themes emerged from the data. The first theme was the school principal assisting teachers to work in teams to improve Mathematics and Language literacy in primary schools. The second theme was how the school principals involve teachers in decision-making with regard to curriculum matters. The third theme was the involvement of teachers in the promotion of effective learning in their schools.

4.2.1.1 The school principals assisting teachers to work in teams to improve Mathematics and language literacy in primary schools.

The participating school principals were asked to explain what they had done to assist teachers to work in teams in order to improve Mathematics and Language literacy. The school principals' responses were varied. Two of the participating school principals, Mr Goba and Mr Khumalo, said that they formed study committees to assist teachers to work in teams. The study committees constitute plans to form learning teams to improve Mathematics and language literacy teaching. Teachers help one another to improve the quality of their teaching.

Some of their comments were:

> *"We formulate what we call subject committees where we choose those teachers who are doing better in their subject. For example, we have one lady who is doing very well in Mathematics and another who is doing well in (English, IsiZulu) language teaching. These selected teachers work with teachers from grade four to seven. After the exercise we conducted assessment among the teachers to see how the team works." (Mr Goba)*

"We form committees, but when it comes to Mathematics one teacher serves as a "Professor head" of Mathematics in the school because of her wealth of experience in teaching methodology. She appraises the whole school. When it comes to language literacy all teachers are engaged. However, at the end of exercise we come together as a unit to interact as a way of assessing what we have learnt for improvement."(Mr Khumalo)

One school principal indicated that they were assessing learners first in order to come up with improvement strategies to meet learner needs:

"We start by analysing the results. The teachers will sit down and analyse each grade or individual learner's marks. We identify those learners… look at the commonalities and together we open a class…the same applies for literacy. There were two teachers allocated." (Mrs Cele)

The teachers were also asked what they had done to work in teams in order to improve mathematics and language literacy results. One teacher responded that she was a subject coordinator.

"I am the coordinator of mathematics subjects within the school. I see to it that Mathematics policies are followed." (Miss Shezi)

Some indicated that they attended workshops and capacitated the teachers who did not attend:

"…for the improvement of Mathematics we attend workshops and come back with the information, and appraise other teachers who did not attend…and see to it that information does work by applying it to our learners." (Miss Cibane)

"…we attend workshop…come back and share the knowledge and new techniques with other teachers that are not in attendance." (Miss Xulu)

Another teacher indicated that they initiated a special class for learners with learning difficulties.

> *"We had an initiative of starting another class for the learners who are struggling more especially in phonics, IsiZulu and Mathematics. We do reading, counting and activities that will test whether they (learners) are managing or improving. (Mrs Chonco)*

The responses by the school principals revealed that they use teachers as school coordinators and leaders of committee groups especially for Mathematics and Language literacy. The school principals establish subject teacher committees and monitor them to ensure that they are functional. The school principals evaluate how knowledge is shared and distributed among the teachers in order to uplift the performance of learners. Here the school principals who successfully completed ACE (School Leadership) programme, not only supports the subject committees but also actively engages in the exercise not as an authoritarian but as democrat to see that every member of the team has their share of the knowledge. The school principals also ensured that no teacher is precluded from benefiting in the subject committees.

The findings are line with leadership development theory of Lawson (2008) who posits that leadership development is a strategic investment in a structured process that provides individuals with the opportunities, training and experiences to become effective leaders in their organisations. This can be seen in the approach of most of the school principals in the study in their endeavour to develop appropriate knowledge, skills and values among the teachers through translation of the training they acquired from the ACE (School Leadership) programme. Also, the actions of most of the school principals in the study relate to the postulation by Gray and Bishop (2009) that states, assessment refers to the identification of an individual's strengths, weaknesses and development needs. The school principals in the study form subject committees for evaluation and assessment to support those teachers with teaching shortcomings to be better teachers, for quality delivery of education to learners.

According to Hord (2009, p.41) PLC involves, "learn deeply with colleagues about an identified topic, to develop shared meaning, and identity shared purposes related to the topic." This can be related to the on-going study in the way through which the various subject committees are formed among teachers. The school principals and teacher committees

identify good subject teachers to share and lead teaching of the chosen subjects among other teachers with shortcomings.

4.2.1.2 The involvement of teachers in decision-making with regard to curriculum matters

When the school principals were asked to respond to what they understood about curriculum matters, they all responded in more or less a similar way. They first gave their understanding about curriculum that they have learnt in ACE (School Leadership) programme. They narrated that there is an overt and a hidden curriculum. They further stated that they involve teachers as representatives in curriculum review, design, evaluation and assessment because teachers are the direct conveyors of knowledge in the school to learners.

They (school principals) all talked about the subjects that were offered and taught in the curriculum. Further, they regard a classroom as a space that has (content, knowledge, methodology, teaching resources, learners and teachers). In their discussions however, some of the school principals in the study explained how they plan to improve on the already existing PLCs in their various schools using the newly acquired knowledge from ACE (School Leadership) programme. All three participating school principals said that curriculum planning is not the concern of school principals only but a joint task with the teachers. They concluded by saying that teachers are involved from the grass-root to the apex level in decision-making with regard to curriculum matters.

The school principals commented as follows in respect of what they understood curriculum matters to be:

> *"The programmes and activities that are applied to teach the lessons in learning institutions. The subjects that are offered by the institution." (Mr Khumalo)*

> *"Curriculum is a core function of the schools. The subjects that are offered at the school." (Mrs Cele)*

"Is based on the subjects that are taught in a school. In other words not individual subjects but the group of subjects that are taught in that phase or school." (Mr Goba)

The teachers were asked to respond to what they understood about curriculum matters. Their responses resonated with some of the school principals' utterances. They mentioned that it was about the teaching and learning programme with the inclusion of the extra-curricular activities. And it was also the course that was offered in a grade and in a phase, and the available choice of subjects.

The teachers commented as follows:

"The word curriculum is derived from the 'greek' word which is 'curiri' which means to run the course. The course is what is being done here in each grade." (Mr Khulu)

"Everything that takes place in learning and teaching institutions including the extra-curricular activities." (Mrs Sono)

The responses given by the school principal and the teachers indicated that they understood what the curriculum encapsulated. Further, two school principals, Mrs Cele and Mr Khumalo mentioned that the Head of Departments (HODs) were responsible for the curriculum of the school. They commented as follows:

"...when we talk of curriculum matters, the person who is responsible for that is HOD..." (Mrs Cele)

"...the HOD is the principal of the teaching and learning activities." (Mr Khumalo)

Mr Goba, the school principal of Siyakhula indicated that they had the Educator Portfolio committee that discussed curriculum matters.

"We have the Educator Portfolio Committee, where all matters pertaining to curriculum are discussed. This committee is... led by the HOD." (Mr Goba)

The participant school principals' retorts on their plan to involve teachers in decision-making on the curriculum matters and their replies were as follows:

"Part of what we were taught in ACE (School Leadership) programme is that we need to involve teachers in curriculum plans, because teachers' non involvement has been a failure and common practice. But we (school principals) have agreed among ourselves to involve teachers in curriculum matters partly because we believed such participation would help them align content with learners needs." *(Mr Khumalo)*

The school principal from Esethu Primary school comments about the involvement of teachers in curriculum decision-making, by stating that:

"In my school we formed a curriculum review committees with teachers and the HODs to look into how best curriculum could be designed and implemented. My role as a school principal is that I give support, incentive and encouragement to teachers involved in the design plans." *(Mrs Cele)*

The subject committee minutes of Sithelo Primary and Esethu Primary schools corroborated what the school principals stated. The minutes revealed that teachers have portfolios which were checked by the HODs. In Sithelo Primary school, they called them teacher's files. In Sithelo Primary and Esethu Primary schools the HODs appreciated the good work done by the teachers. In Esethu Primary school, the HOD commented about areas that required immediate attention. These areas included, some teachers did not have work schedules, start and end dates and subject policies. Some learners' works were unmarked. The quantity of work completed by learners was far too little. Some learners had not completed their corrections in their exercise books. In Siyakhula Primary school it was not established whether the HODs were monitoring teachers work because there was insufficient evidence in a form of the school staff minutes.

The school principals were further asked to respond to how they ensured that teachers were involved in decision-making with regard to curriculum matters. Some school principals responses indicated that teachers from different phases convened meetings where decisions about teaching and learning were taken.

The school principals commented as follows:

>*"The foundation phase teachers meet from time to time. They take decisions about the activities, the improvement of teaching and learning in the foundation level. The intermediate phase and senior phase meet together as well."(Mr Khumalo)*

>*"The foundation phase and the intermediate phase…they meet monthly (to take decisions).This is monitored by the HOD." (Mrs Cele)*

At Siyakhula Primary school all curriculum related decisions were taken by the Educator Portfolio committee.

>*"We have a committee which is called the Educator Portfolio Committee, where all matters pertaining to curriculum are discussed."(Mr Goba)*

Another school principal, Mrs Cele voluntarily revealed that in order to involve teachers in decision-making, she called the meetings.

>*"I call meetings when I want to involve the teachers. Mine is to guide them. I don't take decisions as a person" (Mrs Cele)*

The teachers were asked to respond about their involvement in decision-making with regard to the curriculum matters. Some of the teachers' responses indicated that in their schools they were involved in decision-making. They revealed that they convene meetings as phases and plan together.

The teachers commented as follows:

>*"We come together as the staff to discuss and share ideas."(Mrs Shange)*

>*"We meet as a phase to discuss issues that we experience as we do our daily activities." (Mrs Hlela)*

>*"We plan together as a phase and also the teachers of the same grade plan together. We do quarterly reports about how the learners are progressing."(Mrs Shozi)*

Some teachers' responses indicated that the curriculum is formulated by the Department of Education and it is their task to implement it:

> *"Our decisions as teachers are based on the mission and vision from the Department of Education, we can't go beyond." (Miss Cibane)*

> *"The curriculum is designed by the curriculum planners, ours is to accommodate the curriculum according to our own environment, as we are in the rural areas." (Miss Shezi)*

The responses given by the school principals indicated that teachers were involved in decision-making within the various PLCs, for examples in curriculum planning, design, assessment, evaluation and implementation. Mrs Cele, school principal from Esethu primary reported that teachers were invited to meetings that discussed issues that required their input. According to Hirsh and Hord (2008), teacher involvement in school decision-making and academic planning provides the school principal with partners that can assist in managing and leading the school.

At Siyakhula Primary school they have an Educator Portfolio Committee, where all teachers are represented and have equal chances to be heard. The responses given by the teachers varied. Teachers held meetings where crucial curriculum decisions were taken. Some teachers reported that they did not have much to do because the curriculum is pre-designed and their task was to implement. Others indicated that they met regularly to plan together, to discuss issues and share ideas. The school staff minutes of Sithelo Primary and Esethu Primary schools corroborated what was said by the school principals and teachers. Hord (2009) supports that in a PLC the team or community members need to convene regular meetings of the grade, level or for academic subjects. In groups members need to focus on their learner needs, their curriculum and instructional practices that appropriately address their learners' needs. Cuddapah and Clayton (2011), support what these schools were doing. They state that learning communities and cohort models expand opportunities for quality improvement and types of support that individuals require.

Mrs Cele and Mr Khumalo, school principals, revealed that their schools were small.

> *"I have two phases here at school, the foundation and the intermediate." (Mrs Cele)*

"We work together, fortunately the advantage is the size of the school, I am able to stretch my arms and reach all the corners." (Mr Khumalo)

The size of the two schools made it possible for the effective establishment of PLCs because the school principals were able to easily draw staff into learning communities owing to the small size of the school. They were hands on and were part of all the initiatives and developments that took place in their schools. The staff minutes of Sithelo Primary and Esethu Primary school revealed that the school principals were actively involved in all matters in their school. They held staff meetings regularly. The involvement of school principals in the study supported the idea of shared beliefs, values and vision of what the school is and doing (Hord, 2009).

This was not the case at Siyakhula Primary school. The school principal revealed that the Deputy Principal was responsible for curriculum matters of the school.

The school principal commented as follows:

"In our school, as you see this is a big school. I have the school management. There are four Head of Departments (HODs) and one Deputy Principal (DP). The DP is responsible for the curriculum management of the school."(Mr Goba)

The school principal, Mr Goba, further revealed that he was part of the Institute for Learner Support Team (ILST) committee and the other committees report to the ILST. He was able to know what was happening in the school from those reports.

The school principal commented as follows:

"...the ILST committee comprised of the school principal, DP and four HODs. They (DP and HODs) need to report to this committee on what has been done or decisions taken." (Mr Goba)

Siyakhula Primary school is a large school. The School Management Team (SMT) seems to be involved in doing much of the work. The school principal was not directly involved in the school curriculum, but rather the DP was involved. The school principal did not mention his

role at the school. Brill (2010, p. 18) argues that, "the school principal is the conduit, the connection, the spark, the stick and the carrot, ensuring that effective teaching and learning is taking place for every learner, in every classroom, every day." The leadership style of Mr Goba, the school principal of Siyakhula Primary school, is contrary to what the ACE (School Leadership) programme advocated for the establishment of PLCs. The school principal should be a mentor and role model. He should not be completely absent from important decision-making meetings.

4.2.1.3 The involvement of teachers in the promotion of effective learning

When the school principals were asked to respond on how they ensured that the teachers were involved in the activities that promoted effective learning, the responses given by the school principals varied. The school Principal (Mr Khumalo) of Sithelo primary school commented that they had school committees that ensured proper teaching resources were available. Further, he said that there is the creation of teacher support team. This provides for active learning strategies that include a wide range of activities that share the common element of involving teachers in understanding learning. Thereby, this encourages networking of the teachers in school teaching activities. The school principal further stated that involvement of teachers in the creation of PLCs support networking which in turn promotes effective learning.

The school principal commented as follows:

> *"We have the LTSM committee, where teachers choose the books for procurement. We encourage networking within the school and outside the school." (Mr Khumalo)*

The response given by another school principal indicated that teachers' punctuality was very important in promoting effective learning.

> *"I stress the issue of punctuality. The teachers need to be at school between half past six and seven. We don't need any teacher after seven. They need to be there early so they can welcome their learners." (Mrs Cele)*

She went to say that if the teacher is not at school, the learners immediately lose concentration and focus.

> *"A young learner becomes retarded if an elder (teacher) is not there."(Mr Cele)*

The school principal of Siyakhula Primary believed that it was the duty of the DP to ensure that teaching and learning occurred. He stated:

> *"...the DP must go around and see what is happening in each and every class... the DP must see to it that all classes start on time...after break all learners go back to class on time. Teaching must take place according to our timetable." (Mr Goba)*

This indicated that the school principal was not involved in the curriculum matters of the school. The school principal did not directly ensure that teachers were involved in the activities that promoted effective learning. He relied on the DP for curriculum management and implementation in the school.

The teachers were asked to respond on how they were involved in activities that promoted effective learning. The teachers' responses indicated that they had Institute for Learner Support Team (ILST). In the school's ILSC, active learning strategies are used to engage learners with learning difficulties. Further, teachers encouraged learners' punctuality and that they must come to school everyday. Some teachers were dividing learners and teaching according to their abilities.

One teacher commented as follows:

> *"We have committees, the Learner Support Committee (LSC) where we come together and take note of those learners with learning difficulties and discuss how we can help them to improve their learning skills." (Mrs Shezi)*

Another teacher revealed that they involved learners in activities that promoted effective learning.

> *"We involve the learners in many activities that promote learning..."(Mrs Shange)*

Another teacher revealed that they encouraged punctuality and learners not to absent themselves.

> *"We encourage them (learners) to come early to school and not to absent themselves. If a learner is absent the parent must phone or write a letter to the teacher saying why the learner is absent."(Mrs Hlela)*

Some teachers were doing group teaching to promote effective learning.

> *"We do group teaching where we divide learners and we teach them according to their abilities. Even those (learners) who have learning difficulties, we attend to them." (Mrs Shozi)*

> *"...to make our teaching and learning effective, we pick those learners who are best, average and slower in all classes. We group them and one teacher will teach the best, another teaches the average and another teaches the slower." (Miss Mthiya)*

The responses given by the school principals revealed that they were involving teachers in the promotion of effective learning through committees. The teachers themselves acknowledged that they were working in committees that discussed teaching and learning issues. Within these committees they took decisions that enhanced learning. The methods they used to enhance learning is group teaching, where they divided learners according to their abilities.

Cuddapah and Clayton (2011, p.64), state, "Learning is generated in the social engagement of participants." This is revealed in the study how school principals engage teachers in entertaining learners' with learning difficulties. Hord (2009) argues that learning is a habitual activity where the group learns how to learn together continually. Bush (2009) posits that while there may be many other ways of learning as well, group learning strategies may be employed to promote learning because, learning networking is more effective when it is structured and has a clear purpose. The main advantage of school principals in setting up teachers committees is that, it is "live learning" and provides strong potential for ideas transfer (Bush, 2009). Such learning improves teacher effectiveness which ultimately benefits the learners.

4.2.2 THE PLCs THAT EXIST IN SCHOOLS AND HOW THEY ARE SUSTAINED

With regard to the issue of the PLCs that exist in schools of the school principals who successfully completed the ACE (School leadership) programme, three themes emerged from the data. The first theme was the types of teacher committees that exist in schools. The second theme was the impact of the subject committees on improving learner performance. The third theme was how school principals ensure that professional teacher committees are sustained.

4.2.2.1 The types of teacher committees that exist in schools

The school principals were asked to respond to the type of teacher committees they had at their schools. Their responses were varied. Some mentioned many teacher committees while others mentioned very few committees. Some of the committees formed by the school principals were Learner Support Team (LST), Irregularities Committee (IC), Subject Committee (SC), Curriculum Review Committees (CRC), Quality Learning and Teaching Committee (QLTC), Assessment Committee(AC), Learning and Teaching Support Material (LTSM), Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS), Institute for Learner Support Team(ILST), Cultural Activities Committees(CAC)and Welfare Committee (WC).

The school principals commented as follows:

> *"We have an AC, IC, LTSM, QLTC, ILST, WC, Foundation phase and Intermediate phase committees."(Mrs Cele)*

> *"We have CAC, WC, QLTC, ILST, IC and LTSM," (Mr Khumalo)*

> *"The ILST and SC." (Mr Goba)*

The teachers were also asked to respond to what type of professional teacher committees they had at their schools. Their responses varied. Similar to the responses of school principals, some mentioned many teacher committees while others mentioned very few committees.

The teachers commented as follows:

> *"We have a number of committees. The Examination and Assessment, ILST, LTSM, Foundation Phase, Intermediate Phase, Subject committees, Result and Analysis and Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS)." (Mr Kunene)*

> *"We have the Learner Support Committee, ILST, IC and LTSM." (Mrs Sono)*

> *We have IQMS committee, Welfare committee, foundation and intermediate phase committee." (Mrs Shange)*

> *"We have subject committees."(Mr Khulu)*

The formation of these committees by the school principals is evidence that they are implementing ACE (School leadership) programme learning in their schools. Korn (2007) cited in Eison (2010) states that "interactive academic groups' formations produce superior educational outcomes in schools".

4.2.2.2 The impact of the learning committees on improving learner performance.

The school principals were asked to describe the impact of the learning committees on learner performance. Their responses were varied. One school principal indicated that committees dealt with the teaching and learning aspects. They identified learners and provided them with necessary support. The issue of late coming by learners was also discussed.

This is what Mrs Cele, had to say:

> *"The committees discuss learners, the teaching and learning of the school analyse results…identify slow learners and provide them with necessary support…foundations phase and intermediate phase committees, they tell the QLTC that learners are coming late." (Mrs Cele)*

The teachers were asked to describe the impact of the learning committees on learner performance. They were of the view that learning committees had a positive influence on learner performance. They discussed their classroom challenges, analysed learner results and gave attention to learners with learning difficulties.

This is what the teachers had to say:

"In the subject committees, we sit down and discuss the challenges that we are facing in the classrooms about the learners with learning difficulties…*". (Mrs Shozi)*

"The results analysis committee sits down and analyses the results. We look at what we didn't achieve and formulate a programme for those things."(Mrs Shezi)

"We identify learners with learning difficulties and then we involve their parents. We give learners more homework. In that way their performance becomes better." (Mrs Sono)

The teacher committees formed complement each other. In fact one could not survive without the other. The success of one committee meant the success of the other committees. The school principals and teachers responses indicated that the teacher committees were instrumental in improving learner performance.

The school staff minutes of Esethu Primary school revealed that meetings were held to discuss learner performance. They also revealed that the school principal, Mrs Cele, collected the previous year's exercise books to check if the teachers were doing class work accordingly. She came up with two areas that required urgent attention from learners work. Their corrections were to be done thoroughly. Learners need to be rewarded and acknowledged for their good work. The teacher could either make a written comment or indicate by putting a star. According to Ferguson (2013), when teachers are meeting to discuss learner performance, learner attainment is likely to improve. The teacher presents his or her areas of concern about the learners' performance to the group. The PLC group gives its ideas and suggestions about how learners' performance could be improved. By working collaboratively, teachers develop new skills, explore and utilise enhanced instructional resources, and grow in shared commitment and motivation to improve learner performance (Fullan, 2005). All of these factors support one of the objectives of PLCs that look into how it transforms the school system in terms of enhancing learner performance.

One school principal revealed the following information:

> *"The Learner Support Portfolio Committee (LSPC) focuses mainly on learners who come from the poor families with educational learning barrier. The committee recommended that such learners should be given extra attention by organising extra classes in subjects where they are weak for them to measure up with other brilliant learners."* (Mr Goba)

The school principal of Esethu Primary school voluntarily revealed that:

> *"We open a morning class that starts at 7h00 for learners with areas of development in Mathematics and language (isiZulu)."* (Mrs Cele)

The teachers of the same school corroborated what was said by the school principal. The teachers commented as follows:

> *"We started morning classes for learners who are struggling more especially in IsiZulu and Mathematics."* (Mrs Chonco)

The teachers of Esethu Primary school supported the idea expounded by the school principal, Mrs Cele. They were rendering morning classes to assist learners with learning difficulties to catch up. The class commenced at seven o'clock and lasted for thirty minutes everyday. In these classes, they offered isiZulu and Mathematics with different programmes from the one offered in the classroom during official contact time. Ferguson (2013)is of the view that literacy development must be encouraged by the PLCs. Also, Hirsh and Hord (2009) are also of the idea that the PLCs assist teachers to determine when they need to give time and effort to learning, which might include new instructional strategies. These studies justify the PLCs actions in terms of extra classes organised for the learners with learning difficulties.

4.2.2.3 How school principals ensure that professional teacher committees are sustained

The school principals were asked how they ensured that the teacher committees were sustained. Their responses indicated that they reviewed teacher committees yearly and organised training workshops for teachers.

The school principal from Sithelo primary had this to say:

> *"The school creates a culture of collaboration among the teachers to ensure that teacher committees are sustained. This helps to achieve collective purpose of learning for all. We ensure that we review our teacher committees at the end of each year. We organise training workshops for teachers by inviting district officials." (Mr Khumalo*)

The school principal, Mr Goba from Siyakhula primary school had this to say:

> *"We ensure that we know what each learner needs to learn."(Mr Goba)*

However, Mrs Cele the school principal of Esethu primary school had the following to say:

> *"The strategies we employ to sustain PLCs are: organising training, seminars and conferences among the teachers for improvement to discharge their duties. These strategies of training helped teachers even school principals to remove shortcomings in teaching. Again, we appraise and acknowledge hardworking and committed teachers by giving them certificates and trophies for a job well done." (Mrs Cele)*

The school principals gave different views. According to Wallace and Thomas (2006) international evidence suggests that educational progress depends on teachers' collective capacity and its link with school-wide capacity for promoting learner performance. It is essential to say that teachers' collective capacity through PLCs is critical for learner attainment. Developing PLCs hold considerable promise for capacity building for sustainable improvement in education (Stoll, McMahon & Thomas, 2006).

4.2.3 THE IMPACT OF PLCs ON TRANSFORMING SCHOOLS

With regard to the issue of the PLCs on transforming schools, two themes emerged. The first theme was the role of PLCs in helping to improve school effectiveness. The second theme was the role of PLCs in helping to improve relationships amongst the staff members.

4.2.3.1 The role of PLCs in helping to improve school effectiveness

The school principals were asked to respond on how the PLCs helped in improving school effectiveness. Their responses varied. The school principal revealed that the teachers were in class on time teaching and learners learning. Another principal's response indicated that they looked after needy learners.

One school principal commented as follows:

> *"During teaching time you will not find the movement of either teachers or learners up and down the school." (Mr Khumalo)*

Another principal commented as follows:

> *"We go as far as looking at the learners themselves. We volunteer…and we buy them, shoes, track suits … So after you have done that as a school you will see the learner performing vibrantly."(Mrs Cele)*

The teachers were asked to respond to how the PLCs helped in improving school effectiveness. One teacher indicated that PLCs had helped in the improvement of their decision-making skills as staff. Their level of cooperation was increased.

The teacher commented as follows:

> *"We come together and share ideas. There is no one who takes a sole decision all by himself or herself. The cooperation and involvement of staff has improved." (Mrs Shange)*

At Siyakhula Primary school one teacher stated the fact that as teacher they are not involved in the school decision-making process. They are expected to carry out decisions taken by the SMT. This is what the teacher had to say:

> *"The questions that you are asking us are a bit unfair to us. None of us is in SMT. Things are happening in the school but most of the time the SMT sits as a collective and comes up with a strategy. Then those activities are given to us. We do things that we were instructed or told to do. As teachers we don't have experience in as far as coming up with a strategy, we don't have that*

The response given by the teacher, Mr Khulu was confirmed by the absence of school staff minutes. At Siyakhula Primary school in 2012, in a period of twelve months, they had five staff meetings minutes and in 2013 from January to June, they had one staff meeting minutes. The staff minutes revealed that in 2012 the staff meetings discussed the Post Provisioning Norm (PPN), School Governing Body (SGB) elections, the inclusive education workshop attended and the Annual National Assessment (ANA). In 2013 the staff met in January to discuss ANA, learners academic performance, the PPN and music. The school was not holding staff meetings. Hord (2009) argues that there must at least one staff meeting each month or more often if possible to study school data, define goals and determine what learning they need to achieve these goals. Further, Hord (2009) argues that the staff needs to decide how to go about their learning, sharing and discussing team-group learning. This simply shows that without PLCs, where teachers share their individual and collective learning and teaching capacity, schools will lack effectiveness mostly in the area of learner performance.

4.2.3.2 The role of PLCs in helping to improve the relationships amongst the staff members

The school principals were asked to explain to how the PLCs had helped to improve relationships amongst the staff members. The school principals responses indicated that they were working hard to keep the staff glued together. There were numerous activities they were doing to engage the staff that aimed at the improvement of the relationships. Further, they stated that they had created school schemes that are improving directly and explicitly confront the issue of seclusion by creating multiple avenues of interaction among teachers and promoting inquiry-oriented practices while working towards high standards of learner performance.

This is how the school principals responded:

"We have a welfare committee that takes care of staff members during times

of bereavement. We do sporting activities, but on a small scale. The challenge

is, we don't have a playground." (Mr Khumalo)

> *"On Monday and Thursday in the afternoon we pray together. We have our staff uniform. We do party functions for our loved ones where we contribute for gifts. We do secret pals"* (Mrs Cele)

> *"During the end of each term we close early so that we have a small party."* (Mr Goba)

The teachers were asked to explain how the PLCs had helped to improve relationships amongst the staff members.

The teachers from Esethu Primary school revealed that they were involved in a number of activities that aimed to improve staff relationships.

> "*We do team teaching, if the teacher is not at school…we teach the learners. They (the absent teacher) provide us with work…We introduced the staff uniform… That makes us to be a team. Again if someone is not right, we visit him/ her."* (Mrs Hlela)

> *"…we have secret pals where we buy something for someone that will cheer him or her up. We even organise small parties for birthdays."* (Mrs Chonco)

> *"We give him or her (teacher with birthday) presents…We eat together, we share our breakfast."* (Mrs Shozi)

The teachers of Sithelo Primary school revealed that the relationship among the staff was improving because of the activities they were engaging in. They were supporting one another during times of sorrow.

> *"We give support to someone (teacher) in difficulties, like someone who is sick we visit him/ her at home, or in the hospital."* (Miss Shezi)

The teachers of Siyakhula Primary school revealed interesting information:

> *"We care for one another. When one teacher is sick, it takes two to three days for us (teachers) to receive information."* (Mr Khulu)

"We are in a modern school; there is no other way that we meet other colleagues here at school during contact time. Even without the contact time, for instance, there are grade two there but it took so many days to meet with them." (Miss Cibane)

According to the study by Fullan (2005) when working collaboratively, teachers develop new skills, explore and utilise enhanced instructional resources, and grow in shared commitment and motivation to improve learner achievement. Also in Elmore's (2000) study, teacher interaction within a formalised structure for collegial coaching provides the means for confronting the issue of isolation in PLCs. Through such interaction, teachers continue to build a culture of mutual respect and trustworthiness for both individual and school improvement, and they also exhibit increased commitment to their work. Furthermore, the core practices of successful school leaders in PLCs is to set direction, build relationships, develop people, redesign the organisation, and manage the instructional programme (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006).

The participants revealed that at Sithelo Primary and Esethu Primary schools, the PLCs helped to improve the relationship among the staff. It was evident that teachers were doing things together and supporting one another. At Siyakhula Primary school, the school principal revealed that they were closing early every term to have a small party. The teachers of the school, however, never mentioned any gathering of some sort that was taking place among the staff. It was only through subject committees that teachers had an opportunity to work together. The study done by Hirsh and Hord (2008) argue that it is the duty of the school principal to solve logistical problems and provide structures to build relationships. Hord's (2009) argues that development of relationships can assume a focus on a shared purpose, mutual regard and caring, and an insistence on integrity and trustfulness. It is important that the staff meet because learning is not just an accumulation of skills and information, but a process of becoming (Hord, 2009). Thus through participation in CoP where individual and group meaning are made, people experience, shape and take on new identities (Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011).

4.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter I have presented data, and discussed the findings generated from the semi-structure interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis. The data was presented under themes that emerged during interviews and document analysis. The findings indicate that two school principals from the three sampled were able to translate the learning from ACE (School Leadership) programme to establish and sustain PLCs in their schools.

The next chapter will deal with the summary of the study, conclusions and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter dealt with the data presentation, analysis and discussion of the findings derived from the semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis. This chapter focuses on three issues, a summary of the study, conclusions and recommendations that are made within the context of the three critical questions that inform this study, namely:

- How have school principals used their learning from the ACE (School Leadership) programme to establish the PLCs?
- What PLCs exist in schools of principals that have completed the ACE (School Leadership) programme and how do they sustain them?
- What impact do PLCs have on transforming their schools?

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

In the preceding four chapters the following was the main thrust:

Chapter One introduced the study by providing a brief background and outline which provided the problem statement for the study. The rationale and the motivation were clearly stated. The significance of the study was given. The aims and the objectives of the study were explained, namely:- to find out if the learning from the ACE (School Leadership) programme has enabled school principals to establish PLCs; to find out what PLCs exist in schools of the school principals who have successfully completed the ACE (School Leadership) programme and how they are sustained; and to find out the extent to which school principals were succeeding in transforming their schools through PLCs. The key research questions were explained. The key terms used in the study were defined and the review of literature was outlined. Research methodology, delimitation of the study and the chapter outline was briefly presented.

Chapter Two reviewed the literature. A broad discussion on the ACE (School Leadership) programme in South Africa was included. The vision, purpose, rationale and modules of ACE (School Leadership) programme were discussed in detail. Leadership development landscape and PLCs were presented. A detailed account of what constitutes PLCs; the school principals and PLCs and the influence of PLCs on school development was presented. The dimensions of PLCs and its impact on learner success were closely looked at. The chapter was concluded by discussing both international and local studies on PLCs. The theoretical underpinnings the study was outlined. The two theories used, Leadership Development theory and PLCs drawing from CoP were discussed in detail.

Chapter Three unpacked the research design and methodology. The paradigmatic location of the study which was the interpretive paradigm using a qualitative approach was introduced and outlined. An argument for employing case study methodology was presented. The methods of data production used in the study that included semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews as well as the document analysis were discussed. Piloting of the data collection instruments and data analysis was explained and discussed. The issue of sampling was dealt with in detail. Three primary school principals from the Ilembe Disctrict participated in the study. The trustworthiness and the ethical issues were adhered to. The issue with regard to the limitations of the study were attended to.

Chapter Four dealt with data analysis, findings and discussion. The findings and discussion under three broad headings that are linked to the key research questions were presented. Under each research question, data was presented under themes that emerged from interviews and document analysis. Theoretical tools and relevant literature in data discussion were used. The findings revealed that two school principals of three interviewed were able to establish and sustain PLCs in their schools.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS

In the conclusion of the study, I presented my findings and analyse them. What follows next, are the conclusions with regards to the research objectives as outlined in chapter one. These include:

5.3.1 PUTTING ACE (SCHOOL LEADERSHP) PROGRAMME LEARNING INTO PRACTICE IN TERMS OF ESTABLISHING PLCs

School principals as leaders of schools have to translate theory into practice, that is, what they learnt from ACE (School Leadership) programme into practice in their schools to establish and sustain PLCs. This is evident in the study when the knowledge and skills that the school principals had acquired from the ACE (School Leadership) programme reflected in their schools for example, in the establishment of different professional teacher committees. In conclusion therefore, from the findings, two of the school principals (Esethu and Sithelo primary schools) were able to establish PLCs in their schools. The two school principals from the above primary schools were able to establish PLCs because they involved teachers in improving curriculum delivery. Mr Goba of (Siyakhula primary school) did not manage to establish well-grounded PLCs in his school. At Siyakhula primary school, the school principal involved HODs and the DP only in matters of curriculum delivery. This is the principal who did not take the lead and see the importance of involving all teachers in matters of curriculum delivery.

At Esethu and Sithelo primary schools where PLCs were established, teachers were used to lead and coordinate teacher committees. These teacher committees aimed at improving Mathematics and language literacy amongst learners. In ensuring that teachers' works as well as learners' performance were improving teachers, maintained portfolios. The strategies that were used by Esethu and Sithelo primary schools in establishing PLCs in their schools included group teaching, the emphasis on punctuality and networking. The teacher committees focused on the whole school and not on the teachers' specific grades only. At Siyakhula primary school, there was no evidence of teacher coordinating committees. All these structures of PLCs at Sithelo and Esethu primary schools focus on improving both learners performance and teacher curriculum delivery. Findings of the study agree with the postulation by Glickman (2002) who stated that the school principals develop PLCs by making sure that the various teacher committees and learners have the support and resources they need to be successful in the school community.

5.3.2 THE PLCs THAT EXIST IN SCHOOLS AND HOW THEY ARE SUSTAINED

The study reveals that there were inconsistencies with regard to the number of PLCs that existed in the schools. At Siyakhula primary school teachers were not fully involved in the establishment of PLCs. This resulted in a school not having PLCs which are essential and necessary for effective learning and teaching. Esethu and Sithelo primary schools where teachers were involved in establishment of teacher committees, helped in the establishment of more relevant PLCs. At these two primary schools various PLCs exist and these are; LST (Learners Support Team), SMT (School Management Team), SCT (Subject Committee Team), TPC (Teacher Professional Committee), CRT (Curriculum Review Team), and IQMS. The PLCs are key concepts in improving teacher performance (Roy & Hord, 2006). Therefore, on the existence of PLCs in schools, Fullan, (2005) stated that when teachers work corroboratively, they develop new skills, explore and utilize enhanced instructional resources, and grow in shared commitment and motivation to improve student achievement. I conclude that the success of the school is dependent on the establishment of all professional teacher committees. Further, these committees are interrelated. The core practices of successful school principals in the establishment of PLCs are to set directions, build relationships, develop people, redesign the schools, and manage the instructional programme (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006).

At Esethu and Sithelo primary school were reviewing their committees yearly to ensure that they were sustainable. Further, the school principals were organising trainings, seminars and conference for teachers. The school principals added that they motivate, inspire, encourage and support teachers not only on academic issues but also on personal relevant issues that might impede their school performance. This was not the case with Siyakhula Primary school, their focus was with the ILST committee. Developing PLCs hold considerable promise for capacity building for sustainable improvement in education (Stoll, McMahon & Thomas, 2006).

5.3.3 THE IMPACT OF PLCs IN TRANSFORMING THE SCHOOL

I conclude that at Esethu and Sithelo Primary school the PLCs had positive influence in transforming the school. The teachers developed learners holistically. Their schools became centres of learning excellence. The issues that were dragging the learner and teacher

performance were addressed at school staff meeting and monitored. Those issues included the late coming by both teachers and learners. The monitoring of these issues uplifted and improved the school effectiveness. At Siyakhula Primary school, the staff (teachers) was not holding meetings regularly to discuss issues that affect the school. I conclude that the impact of PLCs in schools helped to improve school effectiveness. According to Hord (2009), there must at least be one staff meeting each month or more often if possible to study school data, define goals and determine what learning they need to achieve these goals.

I conclude that at Sithelo and Esethu Primary school, PLCs were instrumental in ensuring that teachers were united. The activities that the teachers indulged in together promoted good relations. The findings revealed that at Sithelo and Esethu Primary school they had the welfare committees (alternatively called home affairs). These committees were effective in developing good human relations amongst the teachers. This impacted positively on learner performance and the school effectiveness. Hord (2009) argues that the staff need to decide on how to go about their learning, sharing and discussing team-group learning. Also in Elmore's (2000), study about teacher interaction within a formalised structure for collegial coaching provides the means for confronting the issue of isolation in PLCs. The teacher principal relationships were improved.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The establishment and sustaining of PLCs are of utmost importance in all schools. The following recommendations and suggestions for further research are made in the light of the research questions.

5.4.1 PUTTING ACE (SCHOOL LEADERSHP) PROGRAMME LEARNING INTO PRACTICE IN TERMS OF ESTABLISHING PLCs

Conclusions revealed that the PLCs of Siyakhula primary school were not well established. In order to address this problem, the following recommendation is made:

- Mentoring of school principals should not stop when they finish attending ACE (School Leadership) programme. The Circuit Managers (CM) should be an integral

part in ensuring that the school principals translate learning through establishing PLCs and visit schools regularly to see how the schools are doing.

5.4.2 THE PLCs THAT EXIST IN SCHOOLS AND HOW THEY ARE SUSTAINED

Conclusions revealed that at Siyakhula primary school they were not holding staff meetings. This resulted in the school having very few professional teacher committees. In order to address this problem the following recommendation is made:

- The school principals should make dedicated time for meetings with the staff at least once a month.

5.4.3 THE IMPACT OF PLCs ON TRANSFORMING SCHOOLS

Conclusions revealed that at Siyakhula primary school, PLCs failed to transform the school and unite the teachers. In order to address this problem the following recommendation is made:

- School principals should engage as full members of the PLCs. They must treat PLCs as their own creation. This will allow them to engage teachers in various activities to improve teacher relationships.

When schools set up effective PLCs the prospect exists for enhanced school effectiveness to ensure improved learner outcomes.

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APPENDIX 1

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20 May 213

The District Director

Department of Education

Ilembe District

Durban

4001

Dear Sir/ Madam

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN KWAZULU-NATAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS UNDER ILEMBE DISTRICT

My name in Maureen Thokozile Simamane. I am doing Masters degree, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood Campus specialising in Education Leadership Management and Policy. The requirement towards completion of this degree is that I should conduct a research study related to my research focus. The title of my study is:

School Leadership Development and Professional Learning Communities: A case study of three primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal.

In my study I intend to explore the extent to which principals, who participated and successfully completed the Advance Certificate in Education (ACE) School leadership Programme offered at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in the period from 2007 to 2009 has enabled them the create Professional Learning Communities (PLC) in their schools. To gain the understanding I will be exploring the experiences of the school principal in three primary schools. I will also explore the involvement of teachers in the school.

I have through purposive sampling process chosen to conduct this study at three primary schools in the Ilembe District. I intend conducting semi-structured interviews with the school principal, for approximately thirty minutes, in each school. I intend conducting focus group interviews with five teachers (no Deputy principal and Head of Departments) only Post Level one teachers, for approximately thirty minutes per focus group in each school. Both interviews will be voice-recorded. I will also do document analysis, where I am going to view and analyse staff minutes and subject committee minutes for Language and Mathematics starting from January 2012 up until June 2013.

Participation is voluntary which means that participants can withdraw at any stage during the research study process, if they wish so. Any data collected in this research study will be treated in a confidential manner. Pseudonyms will be used instead of real names in the reporting of data. All participants will have access to the information, should they wish. All information collected will be stored safely as useful education information.

For further information on this research project, please feel free to contact my Supervisor, Dr Inba Naicker at 031-260 3461 or email at naickeri1@ukzn.ac.za. My contact details are as follows: Mrs M T Simamane at 073 238 0085 or email at simamanemt@gail.com.

Your anticipated positive response in this regard is highly appreciated.

Yours Faithfully
Mrs M.T Simamane (Student)

APPENDIX 2

<div align="right">

University of KwaZulu-Natal

(Edgewood Campus)

Private Bag x03

Ashwood

3605

01 August 2013

</div>

Attention: The School Principal

Ilembe District Primary School(s)

Dear Sir/ Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH INTERVIEWS AND YOUR PARTICIPATION.

I am Maureen Thokozile Simamane, a Masters student with the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus), specialising in Education Management Leadership and Policy. I seek your permission to conduct research interviews at your school and with you. The title of my study is:

School Leadership Development and Professional Learning Communities: A case study of three primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal.

In my study I intend to explore the extent to which principals, who participated and successfully completed the Advance Certificate in Education (ACE) School leadership Programme offered in the University of KwaZulu-Natal in the period from 2007 to 2009 has enabled them the create Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in their schools. To gain the understanding I will be exploring the experiences of you the school principal. I will also explore the involvement of teachers in the school.

I have through purposive sampling process chosen to conduct this study at your school. I intend conducting semi-structured interview with the school principal, for approximately thirty minutes. The focus group with five teachers at your school (no Deputy Principal and

Head of Departments) only Post Level one teachers, for approximately thirty minutes. Both interviews will be voice-recorded. I will also do document analysis, where I am going to view and analyse staff minutes starting from January 2012 up until June 2013. The dates and time will follow in due course.

Your participation is voluntary which means you can withdraw at any stage during the research study process, if you wish so. Any data collected in this research study will be treated in a confidential manner. Pseudonyms will be used instead of real names in the reporting of data. All participants will have access to this information, should they wish. All information collected will be stored safely as useful education information.

For further information on this research project, please feel free to contact my Supervisor, Dr Inba Naicker at 031-260 3461 or email at naickeri1@ukzn.ac.za. My contact details are as follows: Mrs M T Simamane at 073 238 0085 or email at simamanemt@gmail.com.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours Faithfully

Mrs M.T Simamane (Student)

Declaration

I,.. (full name of participant)
hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project for the study:

School Leadership Development and Professional Learning Communities: A case study of three primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal.

I consent to participating in the research project. I understand my participation is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw at any stage or time, should I wish to do so.

Signature of Participant: .... Date: ....
Signature of witness: .... Date : ....

Thank you in advance
M.T Simamane

APPENDIX 3

University of KwaZulu-Natal

(Edgewood Campus)

Private Bag x03

Ashwood

3605

01 August 2013

Attention: To Teachers

Ilembe District Primary School(s)

Dear Sir/ Madam

REQUEST FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH PROJECT.

I am Maureen Thokozile Simamane, a Masters student with the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus), specialising in Education Management Leadership and Policy. The title of my study is:

School Leadership Development and Professional Learning Communities: A case study of three primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal.

In my study I intend to explore the extent to which principals, who participated and successfully completed the Advance Certificate in Education (ACE) (School Leadership) Programme offered in the University of KwaZulu-Natal in the period from 2007 to 2009 has enabled them establish Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in their schools. To gain the understanding I will be exploring the experiences and the involvement of the teachers in the school.

I have through purposive sampling process chosen to conduct this study at your school. I intend conducting focus group interviews with five teachers at your school (no Deputy Principal and Head of Departments) only Post Level one teachers, for approximately thirty minutes. I humble request your participation.

Your participation is voluntary which means you can withdraw at any stage during the research study process, if you wish so. Any data collected in this research study will be treated in a confidential manner. Pseudonyms will be used instead of real names in the reporting of data. All participants will have access to this information, should they wish. All information collected will be stored safely as useful education information.

In the meantime I have sought permission to conduct research with the Department of Education and your school principal. For further information on this research project, please feel free to contact my Supervisor, Dr Inba Naicker at 031-260 3461 or email at naickeri1@ukzn.ac.za. My contact details are as follows: Mrs M T Simamane at 073 238 0085 or email at simamanemt@gmail.com.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours Sincerely
M.T Simamane (Student)

APPENDIX 4 – SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

   1. Biographical information of participant principals

1.1. Age

1.2. Gender   Male:_____   Female:_____

1.3. Qualification/s

1.4. How long have you been in the teaching profession and how long have you served as an HOD, DP and Principal?

   2. Putting ACE (School Leadership) learning into practice in terms of establishing PLCs.

2.1. In the school the principal cannot do it all. Tell me what have you done to assist teachers to work in teams in order to address certain issues in the school: for example to improve mathematics and language literacy results.

2.2. Explain what is curriculum matters? How do you ensure that teachers are involved in decision making with regard to curriculum matters?

2.3. How do you ensure that teacher get involved in activities that promote student learning?

   3. The PLCs that exist in school

3.1. What type of professional teacher committees do you have here at the school? What has been the impact of these committees on improving learner performance?

3.2. How do you ensure, as the school principal, that the professional teachers committees are sustained?

   4. The impact of PLCs in Transforming the school

4.1. How have the PLCs helped in improving school effectiveness?

4.2. How have the PLCs helped to improve relationships amongst staff members?

Thank you for participating.

APPENDIX 5 – FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION: SCHOOL TEACHERS

1. **Putting ACE (School Leadership) learning into practice in terms of establishing PLCs.**

1.1.   In the school the principal cannot do it all. Tell me what have you done as teachers to work in teams in order to address certain issues in the school: for example to improve mathematics and language literacy results.

1.2.   Explain what is a curriculum matter? As the teachers in the school how are you involved in decision making with regard to curriculum matters?

1.3.   As the teachers in the school, how are you involved in activities that promote student learning?

2. **The PLCs that exist in school**

2.1.   What type of professional teacher committees do you have here at the school? What has been the impact of these committees on improving learner performance?

3. **The impact of PLCs in Transforming the school**

3.1.   How have the PLCs helped in improving school effectiveness?

3.2.   How have the PLCs helped to improve relationships amongst staff members?

Thank you for participating.

25 Maple Crescent
Circle Park
KLOOF
3610

Phone 031 - 7075912
0823757722
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E-mail:
wyesonkaeo@2.ekorsa.net

Dr Saths Govender

28 DECEMBER 2013

LANGUAGE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This serves to inform that I have read the final version of the dissertation titled:

'SCHOOL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES: A CASE STUDY OF THREE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KWAZULU-NATAL' by M.T. Simamane.

To the best of my knowledge, all the proposed amendments have been effected and the work is free of spelling and grammatical errors. I am of the view that the quality of language used meets generally accepted academic standards.

Yours faithfully

DR S. GOVENDER
D Paed. (Arts), B.A. (Hons), B Ed.
Cambridge Certificate for English Medium Teachers
MPA, D Admin.

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