LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS THROUGH COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE: A CASE STUDY OF ONE LEADERSHIP PRACTICE COMMUNITY

by

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DATE SUBMITTED: DECEMBER 2011

ETHICAL CLEARANCE

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11 November 2011

Mr S V Naidoo (895133919)
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Dear Mr Naidoo

PROTOCOL REFERENCE NUMBER: HSS/1215/011M
PROJECT TITLE: Leadership development of school principals through communities of practice: A case study of one leadership practice community.

In response to your application dated 10 November 2011, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

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

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

Yours faithfully

....
Professor Steven Collings (Chair)
Humanities & Social Science Research Ethics Committee

cc Supervisor – Dr I Naicker
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SUPERVISOR'S STATEMENT

This dissertation has been submitted with/ without my approval**.**

_____

Dr Inbanathan Naicker

December 2011

DECLARATION

I, Surendra Vethaviasa Naidoo, declare that

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated:

To my wife, Barbs Naidoo, for her understanding, constant encouragement and support during the years of studying. Her sacrifices, love and dedication in spurring me on during trying times is really appreciated. Thank you for your assistance in transcription and in helping me to bring this piece of work to fruition.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the role of Leadership Practice Communities (LPCs) in developing the leadership capacity of school principals. Given the minimal requirements to become a school principal and the increasing demands made on the principal in terms of his/her job, the question arises as to how best are school principals developed for their school leadership role. This study is underpinned by the theory of Communities of Practice and a conceptual framework on leadership development. Sense is made of how school leadership learning of principals can occur within a community of practice. This works on the premise that people with common goals and interests work together to better themselves and their institutions. This study explores whether this can be done within these structures and how best it can be formalized to assist all leaders in the education field. This study seeks to answer the following critical questions: What forms of leadership learning take place within leadership practice communities? How does the leadership practice change as a result of participation within leadership practice communities? What challenges and possibilities exist for leadership development within leadership practice communities? This study is located within the interpretivist paradigm. A case study methodology is used in this study and semi-structured interviews of a group of principals have been undertaken. This particular Leadership Practice Community was purposively selected based on convenience. Seven principals were selected based on the following criteria: secondary/primary; male/female; urban/township/rural. The findings indicate that a leadership practice community has played a major role in developing the capacity of novice and senior principals. The findings direct that this could be the way to ensure that development of school principals could be undertaken and it should be replicated by all Ward Managers with a view to developing and strengthening leadership in schools under their control.

ACRONYMS

ACE (SL)	Advanced Certificate in Education (School Leadership)
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CoP	Community of Practice
CoPs	Communities of Practice
CoCP	Communities of Clinical Practice
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
EHRD	Education Human Resource Development
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HIV	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus
LPC	Leadership Practice Community
LTSM	Learner and Teacher Support Materials
NCS	National Curriculum Statements
NCSL	National College for School Leadership
OBE	Outcomes-Based Education
PLC	Professional Learning Communities
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statements
SEM	Superintendent of Education (Management)
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team
TEMS	Teaching Economic and Management Sciences

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND AND ORIENTATION TO THIS STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In South Africa, the job of a school principal is a particularly onerous task. Schools are seen to be responsible for everything: from an individual's lack of conformity and adherence to the norms and values that society holds dear, to all the misdemeanours that trouble society. One of the common ingredients of highly successful schools is strong and effective leadership. Where this is evident, one is able to find schools that are effective in dealing with the requirements of society, and are able to mould well rounded and morally upright citizens.

In outlining the core duties and responsibilities of the job, the *Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998*, elucidates the following: the school principal's general and administrative functions, their obligations with regard to the management of human resources, their commitment to teaching, their role in the extra-curricular and co-curricular programme of the school, their interaction with stakeholders and communication responsibilities (Republic of South Africa, 1998, PAM Chapter A). Additionally, the South African school principal faces many contextual demands and challenges, including complying with a plethora of ever-changing legislation, policies and regulations; establishing a culture of teaching and learning; improving and maintaining high educational standards; collaborating with parents; dealing with diverse school populations; managing change and conflict; coping with limited resources; ensuring more accountability to their respective communities; and coping with factors outside schools that may impinge on their jurisdiction (Chikoko, Naicker & Mthiyane, 2011; Mestry & Grobler, 2004; Steyn, 2008).

Given the plethora of demands made on the school principal, one would expect that one would need a qualification in school leadership and management in order to occupy the post of principal. In many of the European countries and states in the United States of America this is the case. However, in South Africa such a qualification is not deemed necessary (Naicker, 2011). In fact, in South Africa, the minimum educational qualification for school principalship is a three year post matriculation qualification inclusive of a professional teaching qualification (KZN Department of Education, 2008). In terms of experience, all a

candidate requires is a minimum of seven years experience in education (KZN Department of Education, 2008). There is no 'unpacking' of what experience in education entails. Consequently, a classroom-based educator who has a teaching qualification and seven years experience but has never occupied a formal leadership and management position at school is eligible to apply for the post of school principal and be appointed to such a post.

Given such minimal requirements to become principal in the context of the increasingly complex demands made on the principal in terms of his/her job, the question arises as to how school principals are developed for their school leadership role. Could leadership learning through communities of practice be the answer?

1.2 RATIONALE AND MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

As an educator, with 27 years experience, I have witnessed how principals execute their duties. Being a senior manager at a school for the last five years has really been enlightening with regard to the leadership behaviour of school principals. I have been privy to the operation of many novice principals as well as senior principals through their interactions with the District Office. My experience in recent years includes how both novice and some experienced school principals are not adequately prepared to lead and manage the multitude of tasks required of school principals. Some people who occupy the posts of principalship seem to lack leadership skills and seem to have serious management deficits. As leaders of institutions, they should be setting the standards for the rest of the staff to follow. This does not seem to be the case and leadership development is therefore of paramount importance. The poor matriculation results can, in many instances, be traced back to poor leadership at the schools concerned. I am of the opinion that better leadership development can lead to school principals being better equipped to lead their schools. Given the positive correlation between effective leadership and school performance, sharpening the leadership skills of school principals can impact positively on learner outcomes.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Through my survey of literature on leadership development, Gray and Bishop (2009); Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Walstrom (2004); York–Barr and Duke (2004); Bush and Glover (2004), evidence has emerged that much has been written on leadership development.

However, not much has been researched or written on how leadership development can occur within communities of practice. This study aims to fill the gap that exists in literature.

1.4 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to explore the role played by leadership practice communities in developing the leadership capacity of school principals and seeks to accomplish the following objectives:

- To investigate the types of leadership learning that can occur in a leadership practice community;
- To determine whether leadership practice changes as a result of participation in a leadership practice community;
- To investigate the possibilities that exist for leadership development in a leadership practice community.

1.5 KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Collectively, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What forms of leadership learning take place in leadership practice communities?
- How does leadership practice change as a result of participation in a leadership practice community?
- What challenges and possibilities exist for leadership development within leadership practice communities?

1.6 DEFINITION OF TERMS

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

1.6.1 LEADERSHIP

Like many terms in the field of education, the term leadership is contested and used in different ways by different people. For the purposes of this study, leadership is viewed as a process which works towards movement and change in an organisation (Grant, 2009). In other words leadership is seen as something that challenges the *status quo*. It involves aspects

of vision, mission, motivation and transformation. Here, I am focussing on the school principal and how he/she influences, motivates and enlists the support of the staff to accomplish tasks consistent with the vision of the organisation.

1.6.2 LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Leadership development refers to any activity that enhances the capacity of individuals and groups to engage in effectively leading people and organisations (Chikoko, Naicker & Mthiyane, 2011). Leadership development builds the capacity of people to be effective in leadership roles or processes in order to benefit student learning (Gray & Bishop, 2009). Stoll (2001) believes that leadership learning requires four imperatives. These are: a learning vision, creating the right emotional climate, building an inclusive learning community and practicing organisational learning. In this study I will be looking at the leadership development of school principals within leadership practice communities and assess how they grow as leaders.

1.6.3 COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE (CoP)

This refers to a group of people who share a common interest and desire to learn from and contribute to the community with their variety of experiences (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The term is used to describe situated learning, which occurs through social co-participation. Apprentice CoP participants, who are typically newer or less experienced, may acquire more knowledge, skills, or abilities in proportion to master participants, who are usually substantially further along the learning curve regarding the subject matter under examination. However, the masters continue to learn as a result of their continued membership and participation within the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

1.6.4 LEADERSHIP PRACTICE COMMUNITY (LPC)

This refers to a CoP where leadership development is the main goal and members collaborate to develop their individual and collective leadership practice (Helsing &Lemons, 2008). In my study, a principal's Ward Forum co-ordinated by the Superintendent of Education (Management) (SEM) represents the LPC.

1.7 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of the literature review in the study was to present issues in the literature relating to leadership development of school principals through CoP. To this end, the researcher engaged in a comprehensive search of various national and international databases on current and completed research. Books and journal articles consulted were obtained from the libraries from various universities as well as from various electronic databases.

1.8 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study is located within the interpretivist paradigm and employs a case study methodology. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2009, p.253) case studies, "investigate and report the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance".

I conducted semi-structured interviews with seven purposefully selected principals in order to generate data with regard to their leadership development within a CoP. One LPC was purposively selected based on convenience. I selected a LPC of principals located close to me. This allowed for easy access to the principals. Maree (2007) views convenience sampling as a method that is used when participants are selected because they are easily and conveniently available. This allows for research that is inexpensive and also allows for a quick approximation of the truth.

1.9 CHAPTER OUTLINE

This research study is divided into five chapters.

Chapter One provides a general background and overview of the key aspects of this study. The focus of this study, the purpose of this study and the motivation and rationale for pursuing this study are presented. The aim and objectives and the key research questions that inform this study are listed followed by the definition of key terms used in this study. A brief outline of the methodology employed in this study brings this chapter to conclusion.

Chapter Two focuses on the literature reviewed with regard to the key research questions. The review commences with a discussion on the theoretical tools employed in this study. An account on the theory of communities of practice and a conceptual framework related to

leadership development is presented. This is then followed by a study of relevant literature around CoP and leadership development. Here, a study of both local and international literature is presented.

Chapter Three focuses on the research design and methodology employed in this research study in order to answer the key research questions generated in chapter 1. An account on the research paradigm covering issues of ontology, epistemology and methodology is then furnished. This is followed by an exposition of the methodological approach to the study. An account on the data collection methods, sampling, data analysis techniques, ethical issues and limitations of this study then brings the chapter to a close.

Chapter Four focuses on the analysis, findings and discussion of the data generated from the semi-structured interviews. The data is presented under themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interviews. In presenting the data, the researcher wanted to ensure that the voices of the participants were not lost; therefore, *verbatim* quotations are also used in the data presentation. A discussion of the data in terms of the theoretical and conceptual tools outlined in chapter two, as well as other scholarly works is then presented.

Chapter Five presents the main conclusions and recommendations. After careful consideration of the data, certain clear conclusions emerge in terms of the aims and objectives and critical questions formulated in chapter one. Forms of leadership learning, change in leadership practice and challenges and possibilities for leadership development are then discussed in relation to the LPC. Based on the findings outlined in chapter four and the conclusions of this study, some recommendations are then made.

1.10 SUMMARY

The chapter presented the introduction, rationale and motivation for the study, the significance of the study, aims and objectives as well as the key research questions. Thereafter definitions of key terms were furnished. The research design and methodology was also presented and was followed by the chapter outline.

The next Chapter will deal with the literature reviewed in this study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEWAND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter outlined the background and introduction to this study. This chapter focuses on the literature reviewed with regard to the key research questions formulated in chapter one.

This review commences with a discussion on the theoretical tools employed in this study. An account on the theory of CoP and a conceptual framework related to leadership development is presented. This is then followed by a study of relevant literature around communities of practice and leadership development. Here, a study of both local and international literature is presented.

2.2 THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study is underpinned by the theory of CoP and a conceptual framework developed by Gray and Bishop (2009) on leadership development. The theory and concepts identified will help us make sense of how school leadership learning of school principals can occur within a CoP.

2.2.1 COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Wenger and Snyder (2000, p.1) view a CoP as, "a group of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise". It is a grouping that comes together by what matters to them, and by what they do (Wenger, 2008). Extrapolating from the business sphere, Wenger (2008) contrasts CoPs with that of interest groups and sees that these 'semi-formalized groups' emerge to guide and enhance leadership within the business. CoPs also work on the same premise of people with common goals and interests working together to better themselves and their institutions. Stamps (1997, p.37) sums up the core principles of practice as: "Learning is social. Learning happens on the job". It was my aim to explore whether leadership learning can be done within a CoP framework and how best it can be formalized to assist leaders in the education field. Wenger (1998) proposes his CoP *social*

learning model which contends that we become who we are as we learn through social interactions in practice. He is of the opinion that we all belong to multiple communities of practice simultaneously. These may be at work, home, leisure activities, etc. Further, Wenger and Snyder (2000) in the Harvard Business Review are of the opinion that CoPs can benefit from cultivation. They respond to attention that respects their nature. He draws on the analogy of a cornstalk that cannot be pulled to make it grow faster and taller (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). We could till the soil, pull out weeds, add water and ensure proper nutrients are given. Ultimately, the tree will grow stronger. He links this to companies and institutions that grow and nurture CoPs. My aim was to research whether this holds true for the educational field where principals can be nurtured and developed within a cohort.

Wenger's model consists of four interdependent 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. Learning occurs through the social engagement of the participants, and is based on the notion that new teacher participation in intentionally formed communities will translate into novices applying such learnings from the CoP, in their own schools and classrooms. In this study my intention was to investigate whether a similar trend would influence new principals, through their participation in a LPC, to learn from their colleagues and transfer this learning to their own schools.

According to Wenger (1998, p.5) "practice" refers to the explicit and tacit shared enterprises in which people with common references can "sustain mutual engagement in action". This, in my opinion, would mirror what would happen in the LPC such as a principals' ward forum. Here school leaders would engage in issues on best practice in leading schools. For Wenger (1998, p.5) "meaning" is ultimately transformative, in that it is an experience of identity. He sees this as "a process of becoming". He is of the opinion that, through participation in a CoP, individual and group meanings are made. People experience, shape, and take on new identities. It was the intention of this study to uncover whether the principals in a LPC develop principal identities with similar trends to Wenger's theory. An integral component of identity formation is Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of legitimate peripheral participation. This concept, in the context of this study, refers to novice principals entering a LPC. It seeks to ascertain how novices from being peripheral members in a LPC undergo an identity transformation through learnings from the community to become full members of the community.

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Lave and Wenger (1991) undertook a scientific study and found that there are key characteristics that promote learning development and determine how successful the CoP is. The initial aspect refers to the domain of interest where group members share an interest in, and commit to something. The next aspect pertains to the relationships between the group members which allow them to share ideas, engage in joint activities and share information and help each other. The final aspect refers to shared practice which consists of shared resources, experiences, stories, etc. They see a CoP as being able to provide additional benefits to teams, in that these communities are much more responsive to dealing with the hectic pace of today's environment. This would be relevant to the education system that generally is slow to respond to challenges. The CoP would be able to have a speedier response. They see these structures that are able to harness the tacit knowledge available in communities using the knowledge to further the aims and goals of the institution. This seems to me to be the ideal manner in which a LPC could operate. The LPC domain of interest would be leadership development of school principals in order to improve the effective delivery of education in their schools. The relationships between the members of the LPC would be such that all operate in this grouping as principals and they would be willing to share ideas and information, and engage in activities that could develop their expertise. Whilst there would be novice principals and experienced principals in this LPC, there would be a shared repertoire of knowledge that could benefit others. The novice principals could look to their more experienced colleagues to give them guidance and direction in problematic school situations.

Egan and Jaye (2009), postulate that Wenger's (1998) model on situated learning has relevance to the way in which nursing staff and students gain clinical knowledge. They modified the term CoP to Communities of Clinical Practice (CoCP). These CoCPs were groupings that had individual patients at the locus of learning. Groups of health professionals would adopt individual patients and operate as a 'think tank' to allow all nursing staff to give their input and learn from the diagnosis that was made by more experienced staff. The patient was therefore identified as a site of student learning and the patient's well-being was of paramount importance. Similarly in a LPC, novice and experienced principals could learn together and teach each other so that the learner in the school situation would be the locus towards which they focused. This study implied that Wenger's model on situated learning was applicable to a variety of learning situations, and I believe the LPC could be an ideal vehicle to ensure *in-situ* learning. According to Wenger and Snyder (2000, p.12) CoPs add

value to organisations in various ways. They help to drive strategy, start new lines of business, solve problems quickly, transfer best practices and develop professional skills.

CoPs operate under various names and titles, but the emphasis is generally to advance the cause of their organisation. Names such as learning networks, thematic groups, tech clubs, and social clubs abound, but all have three common elements, namely the domain, the community and the practice. With the advent of the internet, the members of CoPs can exist in any country around the world and be able to link up instantly. In terms of education, the Computer Applications Technology (CAT) group is one group that has their own CoP (kzncomp@yahoogroups.com/ and http://groups.yahoo.com/group/kzncomp/). They have members from all over the province that are linked together and can communicate at the click of a button. Crucial information pertaining to course delivery, examinations, guidelines and general support is available all the time. Novice teachers gain invaluable information and support from other members at any given time and the subject as a whole develops. This has implications for the learners who now have a more confident teacher who is able to deliver effective learning. Similarly, leadership development may be undertaken through the sharing of resources by the techno-savvy individuals that are experts in their fields.

Research by Helsing and Lemons (2008) into LPCs in Hawaii has shown that CoPs, especially those that are geared towards leadership development, is playing a major role in improving individual leadership practice and improved overall teaching and learning in their schools. They believe that high-functioning LPCs are the key to profound changes in the school system. They have suggested guidelines on how to achieve educational system improvement. Helsing and Lemons (2008) suggest continuous improvement of instruction as the starting point for district leaders to implement together with good professional development. This professional development should be site-based, collaborative, intensive and job-embedded in order to be effective. These findings corroborate Gray and Bishop's (2009) findings on leadership development. They found that the LPCs had positively affected the professional culture of their schools. Teachers in those schools were seen to work more collaboratively with each other in improving instruction. This was seen to be as a result of principals being more confident, as a result of their learnings in the LPC, to hold teachers accountable for continuous growth and learning.

2.2.2 LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Gray and Bishop (2009) articulate that for leadership development to be successful, the following has to take place: assessment, challenge and support. Assessment refers to the identification of an individual's strengths, weaknesses and development needs. This implies that there has to be some sort of compulsory formalised evaluation of new/inexperienced principals in order to determine their strengths, weaknesses and type of development needed. This in turn would be problematic for the CoP since its basic premise of operation is voluntary co-operation and attendance. However, the individual principals could do a self evaluation with regard to this.

Challenge is concerned with taking people out of their comfort zones and allowing them to develop new capacities in the process. This aspect would suit the operation of a CoP since principals would be attending the LPC in order to be enlightened about deficiencies in their practice. Since they are seen as equals within the LPC, the scope for capacity development would be evident. The principals 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. Support provides the individuals with motivation to believe in themselves that they can grow and change. This would be the ideal manner to motivate and develop school principals within the CoP. While they are in their cohort, they would be able to garner support and gain confidence as they go along. They would not be scared to expose their lack of knowledge on certain matters since they are among their critical friends and network colleagues. Gray and Bishop (2009) further develop their model 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/coaching, focused learning experiences, competencies/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. Novice leaders are challenged to translate theory into practice.

Mentoring and coaching helps 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. They

believe that resources to ensure mentor training, field based learning experiences and financial incentives ensure high quality mentoring (Gray & Bishop, 2009).

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

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

Reflection on practice allows for new leaders 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 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A review of both international and national studies on CoPs and leadership development of school principals is presented.

2.3.1 INTERNATIONAL STUDIES ON COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

A review of CoPs in the business sector and the educational sector is presented.

2.3.1.1 THE BUSINESS SECTOR

There is a huge body of research on CoPs in businesses in French, British and American companies. The Hill's Pet Nutrition Community in Richmond, Indiana, United States of America, made major changes to their operating systems, profit margins, waste management and bonus payments based on input from the CoP that operated at the plant (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p.143). These informal groupings were able to come up with solutions for maximizing production whilst minimizing wastage. The plant was able to make significant savings in wasted pet food, packaging and downtime due to conveyor belt problems. Of significance, is the fact that the management refused to implement these measures when approached formally! However, technicians from various departments were able to

co-operate, informally, in a CoP, and influence the thinking of management. This group was successful because they, according to Wenger *et al*. (2002), fulfilled aspects of a CoP. They were autonomous; they decided when to meet, what to discuss, and they agreed to their own domain. Participation was voluntary and discussions were at the forefront of their practice. The core group consisted of the members that had been at their job for a long time. Newcomers were welcome and they viewed each interaction as a learning experience. These aspects are also pertinent to education and can therefore make a significant contribution to leadership and organisational development. Principals that attend the LPC are both novice and experienced individuals. This would allow them to learn from each other. Some senior principals have got into a 'rut' and have not attempted to keep up with the latest educational trends, whereas the newer novice principals have kept abreast of educational change. This would make them a valuable source of information to their senior colleagues. This co-dependence on each other to sustain and develop their leadership skills is what would make a LPC dynamic and relevant to leadership development.

The Xerox experiment, in the United States of America, involving a mixing of service personnel on one floor was very successful (Wenger, 1998 in Cox, 2005). Initially, each department operated separately and fault notification and rectification, had to follow the line function. This created major downtime for customers who were literally shunted from one department to the next. An unofficial experiment, due to refurbishment of the premises, which involved staff from the various departments being put together at one counter, had major benefits for efficiency and the reduction of downtime. All those that interacted with the customers found that they had in fact learnt new jobs and methods from their counterparts without going for any formalized training. This allowed them to give complete service to clients based on their newly acquired informal knowledge. The company therefore gained enormously in terms of customer goodwill as well as staff efficiency. This would be an ideal scenario for developing principals in the art of professionally running their schools, without being forced to attend formalised courses. By interacting with their more experienced colleagues, the newer novice principals would be fast-tracked into developing their leadership skills. Difficult and awkward scenarios could be discussed within the LPC and guidance and direction could be afforded to the principals experiencing problems.

Another example relates to Hewlett-Packard, a company which had product delivery consultants from around North America engaging in a CoP *via* tele-conferencing (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). These individuals were responsible for ensuring minimal computer downtime

and therefore decided to come together to assist one another. Facilitators from the Knowledge Support Team helped to put the group in contact with one another. The group discovered that they had many commonalities in terms of their own shortcomings and knowledge gaps. The participants in these groups found that they were learning from each others' problems and those solutions could be sourced from more experienced colleagues. They found that, in the long term, the capabilities critical to the success of the organization were developed and work was made more effective.

Strategy at the World Bank was directed positively by its decision to fund CoPs. The number of CoPs multiplied significantly due to the support of communities. These CoPs in turn supported the Bank and guided its strategy. A group of marketing and banking consultants that met regularly at the lounge at O'Hare airport, whilst awaiting connecting flights, eventually formed a CoP in the sector. The CoP constantly grew until two years later they were able to convene a conference in New Orleans consisting of 200 members and was able to create new marketing lines that grew the company's business tremendously. The ability of members of CoPs to ask others for assistance with problematic issues allows for rapid solutions to be generated. Buckman Labs, in the USA, had members of CoPs responding from around the world, to solve problems related to practice-specific queries. This rapid turn-around time for problems, gained the company valuable mileage in the pulp milling industry (Wenger & Snyder, 2000).

The transference of best practices enhances the business and creates massive amounts of goodwill. Daimler Chrysler created these CoPs known as "tech clubs" in the 1990s to address concerns that were raised during the disbanding of functional-specific departments. The fear was that the expertise within these disbanded departments would be lost. Through the "tech club", a successful migration was made, and this helped the company to cut costs by more than half and allowed it to remain solvent. These clubs have now multiplied and meet regularly to discuss a multitude of queries/questions pertaining to best practices (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p.13). The development of professional skills amongst CoPs is undisputed. Apprentices have been known to teach advanced master craftsmen and journeymen a few new ideas. Whilst the expected practice of juniors learning from seniors is clearly evident, studies have shown that learning is a two-way process. Wenger (1998) uses the example of brilliant neurosurgeons that read peer-reviewed journals, attend conferences, discuss new research and travel great distances to work alongside surgeons who are developing new techniques. This has great scope for the educational field, in that principals can share their

knowledge and allow for a two way development of leadership skills (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Networking and critical friendships are crucial to developing a strong LPC. This would allow principals to form networks with each other to assist in addressing crucial problems and queries. By creating critical friendships, principals would be able to have a support structure in place that would be available to them during critical periods. The fact that they see others having difficulties creates a camaraderie amongst principals to support each other.

McDermott and Snyder (2002) are of the opinion that CoPs are formed on a voluntary and informal basis and this is why they are successful. There is no compulsion on individuals to join. Perry and Zender (2004) in their study of the American Health Information Management Association believe otherwise. Their research shows that in order to get communities established and to sustain them, managers must be able to identify potential CoPs that would enhance the company's strategic capabilities and provide infrastructure that would assist these CoPs to flourish effectively. After five years, this organisation was able to foster and maintain over 200 CoPs, that provided efficient and effective ways to help their members share and learn new knowledge and this furthered the aims of the organisation. This has implications for the LPC. There has to be some sort of compulsion to ensure that all principals attend these meetings, otherwise there will not be an overall increase in leadership development and hence a dearth of ideas to improve schooling in South Africa.

2.3.1.2 THE EDUCATION SECTOR

Output of literature in terms CoPs in education is gaining momentum. Helsing and Lemons (2008) conducted a study with Hawaiian educators. Their findings are relevant to education in that it serves as a model for improving professional learning communities. They are of the opinion that effective and good professional development should be on-site, intensive, collaborative and job-embedded. Whilst the potential to foster a collaborative culture, improve participant professionalism, changes in thinking and practice are advantageous to education, they found that formation of these professional communities among school and district leaders was not very evident. They found that the community provided principals with a forum to discuss problems of practice, create new knowledge of effective leadership, allowed for collective learning by discussing real life dilemmas of practice and allowed for the development of a shared vision of what good classrooms, schools and school leaders could look like. Initial findings show a powerful impact on principals and their understanding

of developing their schools. They viewed themselves as rejuvenated, refreshed, optimistic and confident of their abilities as leaders. They also demonstrated greater focus and a sense of priorities as a result of the trust and transparency evident within the professional learning community. They were able to explore new ideas, think critically and face their own weaknesses productively thereby improving their mindset. Helsing and Lemons (2008, p.15) report a principal's observation of this process as "having an emerging willingness to become peer coaches and peer friends, visiting each other, sharing feedback and asking questions". At meetings, a principal may pose a problem and the other principals act as consultants, offering their suggestions and strategies to alleviate the said problem. Principals were found to maintain accountability to each other by being on time, following the agenda closely, setting goals for developing new learning and work, and following up on commitments monthly. This aspect would be very relevant to my study as the same *'modus operandi'* would apply to our principals.

2.3.2 NATIONAL STUDIES ON COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Owing to the rapid pace of change in the South African educational landscape, educators and leaders are under immense pressure to ensure that they respond to these changes. Very often the cascading of knowledge by so-called education specialists, over a very short time span, creates anxiety for the educators. The changing of the curriculum from the NATED 550 to Curriculum 2005, Revised National Curriculum Statements (RNCS), National Curriculum Statements (NCS), Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), etc has created uncertainty in the minds of seasoned educators. The implementation of many new subjects has created additional stress for educators. After undergoing training of three to four years in their specialist subjects, they are now expected to teach a new subject with very little guidance. Whilst Adler and Reed (2002, p.3) are of the view that the new policies were "based on sound research and were visionary", Chisholm (2004, p.27) is of the view that teachers "just found themselves in a new curriculum world". The setting up of groups of people concerned about their "lack" of adequate knowledge was a form of a CoP. These seasoned educators were able to air their grievances about their subjects, find solace in their fellow educators and then go about making amends to their knowledge gaps. These CoPs were, to a certain extent, responsible for the successes of the implementation of the new subjects and have been responsible for educators now feeling more at ease with the new offerings. Although Wenger and Snyder (2000, p.1) see a CoP as "a group of people

informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise", that come together by what matters to them, and by what they do, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has seen the potential that these groupings have and they have formalised these into clusters in the various circuits. Unfortunately, these are now compulsory meetings, and some educators do not appreciate the value that these clusters have. They resort to various means to abscond, attend late, leave early, etc. This has direct consequences for schools and learners. (Department of Basic Education, 2011).

Maistry (2008) set out to explore the nature of learning in a CoP in the context of curriculum change in History. He found that this group of interested teachers had set out to support each other as a result of a lack of support from the Department of Education. His research looked into the nature of learning in a CoP. This is similar to my research question which looks at: *What forms of leadership learning take place in leadership practice communities?* The study focused how on co-operation, collaboration and meaning making occurred within a CoP. Maistry (2008) found that these diverse groups of teachers, with different cognition levels and expertise, were able to support each other in a learning community. Each member's expertise and cognition level was available to others to draw upon and reflect on. This is supported by research conducted by Grossman, Wineberg and Woolworth (2001) where they found that some people know things that others do not and that the collective knowledge of the CoP exceeds that of the individual's knowledge.

School leaders need to be agents of their own learning. If leaders are not agents of their own learning and do not have a vested interest in how the programmes aim to empower them, then the programmes are doomed to falter. Gallucci (2003) in Maistry (2008) highlights the fact that CoPs are sites for teacher learning and mediators of teacher responses to institutional reform. The characteristics of these communities influenced the degree to which teachers responded to policy demands and were seen as important in teacher learning. Maistry (2008) in his article on cultivating teacher CoPs sees it as a relatively new phenomenon. He views Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) as having the potential for advancing teachers' professional development by giving expert input and quality resources. He quotes Wesley and Buysse (2001) who propagate the transforming of the traditional views of teaching and learning, where the practitioners are viewed as recipients of knowledge, into learning communities where practitioners are viewed as co-producers of knowledge. The research focuses on how a group of Economics teachers came together to empower themselves as

generators of knowledge and learning. An educator, by the name of Cindy, assumed leadership of the group and helped to shape its direction. Wenger *et al.* (2002) explained that this co-ordinator was the crucial link in the community as she was well respected and maintained a good relationship amongst members. A 'core' group of participants actively participated in discussions and helped to shape the curriculum. They helped to identify topics for discussion and moved the community along in its agenda. Others were regular attendees but were not involved as much as Cindy and her group. Wenger *et al.* (2002) call these the 'active group' who participate but do not have the regularity or intensity of the core group. Others attended, signed the register and then quietly disappeared. They are Wenger's 'peripheral participants'. Whilst literature remains silent on the benefit that these participants received, Maistry (2008) was able to determine that they had gained some insight into matters under discussion and had in fact applied some knowledge to their own teaching. He was of the view that Wenger *et al.* (2002, p.57) was correct when he stated "rather than force participation" successful communities "build benches" for those on the sidelines and this allows for free movement of the members between the core and the periphery. In this project the warmth displayed by the core and active members towards the peripheral participants was actually a catalyst for drawing them into the active group at a later stage.

In a South African context, Maistry (2010) in an empirical study into cultural capital in a teacher CoP found that his Teaching Economic and Management Sciences (TEMS) group fitted Wenger's definitions in terms of the CoP. The group had a co-ordinator, a core group of active participants and "lurkers" who made no contribution. This is an example of how a CoP may be adapted and utilized successfully in education. In an internet survey, Summerfield (2008) found that the institutions actually using CoPs to foster learning are in the minority. He is of the opinion that most people do not know how communities enhance learning and therefore they downplay its value in the learning chain. I therefore believe that the CoP that principals engage in, with their cohort, could play a major role in ensuring that they keep abreast of changing demands.

2.3.3 LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Articles by Wenger and Snyder (2008), Gray and Bishop (2009), Cox (2005), Wenger (2008), Bush and Glover (2004) and Bossi (2008) all agree that leadership is a key to having an effective learning situation. However, the manner in which development of the leader/principal is undertaken differs in each one's opinion. International qualitative studies,

using the interpretivist paradigm by Gray and Bishop (2009), show that those states that have formalized programmes of leadership development have enhanced service delivery levels in all spheres of operation. Cox (2005) in his review of four different works, found that similarities and differences amongst the authors were abundant. Concepts used by the authors were similar, yet the meanings appropriated to them were vastly different. Basic terms such as "community, learning, power, change, formality and diversity" were understood differently. The ontology of Cox's findings especially in the interpretivist paradigm shows that multiple realities may be constructed through human intervention. My aim in this study was to look at how these multiple concepts could be interpreted to assist in understanding how CoPs can be harnessed to provide situational leadership learning to incumbent principals. The South African situation has such a vast array of contexts within a school district that principals can learn from each other. Techniques for fund raising from an ex-model C school, may be excellent for that particular school, but may not work in a rural or township school. Discipline rules in a deep rural school may not be pertinent to an urban school, yet exposure to these experiences is bound to develop principals so that ultimately, they would be able to modify ideas to suit their schools and context.

Mpungose (2007), in a doctoral thesis, talks about situational leadership theories, behaviour leadership theories, participative leadership theories, transformational theories and distributive theories. His aim is to show that the dynamics of leading a school since 1994 has changed dramatically. Principals use the legislation to guide their actions, but lived experiences from colleagues is a better guiding tool. In my discussion, I will be looking at these aspects in relation to leadership learning and development. I will also be looking at how these aspects shape principals' thinking in relation to their growth.

2.3.3.1 FORMS OF LEADERSHIP LEARNING

Anderson (1989) views the principal as a key person in efforts to achieve educational excellence. His review found that administrator training and selection methods were ill-suited to developing and employing outstanding leaders. He further stated that those traditional methods such as university coursework and teaching and administrative experience have been unsatisfactory. Case studies, performance simulations and games seem to develop better leaders. Principals have voiced their dissatisfaction with university training as a preparation for principalship. These courses were found to be too theoretical and do not help them to translate theoretical knowledge into practice. This article lends credence to the

fact that formalised coursework may not be the best vehicle for the development of leadership learning of school principals.

Bush and Glover (2004) in a detailed literature review on leadership development found that high-quality leadership is the key to running a successful school. The review also determined that a contested area existed about the theories and forms of leadership development and adult learning that was essential to produce effective leaders. Whilst this contested area exists amongst researchers, Bush and Jackson (2002, pp.420-421) in Bush and Glover state that there seems to be "an international curriculum for school leadership preparation" that is being created. In a review of literature carried out for the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) by Bush and Glover (2004) it was found that leadership programmes around the world are similar in nature. The key findings of this review established that the following aspects in developing leadership were currently in use around the world: mentoring, coaching; portfolios, job-embedded leadership, leadership through critical friendships, stand alone courses, leadership learning through professional learning communities (PLC), work-based learning, action learning and other similar methods. They found that many approaches and methods were available to promote leadership development and learning, but the choice of methodology was troublesome.

Various other researchers have added their arguments to the fact that leadership is acknowledged as one of the most important requirements for successful schools. Bush and Jackson (2002) in Bush and Glover (2004) identified the common elements on leadership development and learning programmes. These include among others, leadership which must include vision, mission and transformational leadership. The programme must include learning and teaching which involves instructional leadership. Human resource management and professional development should be an integral part of the programme. Financial management must also be a part of the programme and there must be discussion on the management of external relations.

Stoll (2001) believes that leadership learning requires four imperatives. These are: a learning vision, creating the right emotional climate, building an inclusive learning community and practicing organisational learning.

Bush and Glover (2004) found that a number of key approaches had emerged from their review and are cited as follows:

Work-based learning – was seen to play a crucial role in ensuring that leaders get the requisite experience by acting in the post. Handy (1993) in Bush and Glover (2004) stated that "learning by experience, left to itself, can be a painful and tedious experience". The Scottish Qualification for Headship involved collaboration between universities and partner-employing authorities that allowed for academic coursework and work-based learning *via* a portfolio and supported by a work colleague.

Needs Analysis and diagnostics – the importance of needs analysis in determining the nature of leadership was emphasized. Whilst there seems to be limited data on needs analysis, the issue of whose needs are to be met and at which point of the career trajectory still troubles researchers. Mention has been made of 360 degree feedback, including views of colleagues about performance and development needs of leaders. Due to the complexity of the job, feedback from a variety of constituencies is advocated.

Action Learning is based on practice beyond education and provides for continuous learning and reflection by a set of people using an 'experiential learning cycle'. Smith (2001, p.35) writing from a Canadian perspective, states that action learning "embodies an approach based on comrades in adversity learning from each other through discriminating questioning, fresh experiences and reflexive insight". He is of the opinion that we can only learn about work at work.

Mentoring is a process that generally refers to the more experienced wiser person as a mentor assisting someone less experienced, generally as a younger protégé. Various researchers are of the opinion that mentoring is highly successful, effective and offers a way of speeding up the process (Hobson, 2003; Pocklington and Weindling, 1996; Daresh, 1995 in Bush & Glover, 2004).

Coaching may be defined as "a mutual conversation between a superior and a junior that follows a predictable process and leads to superior performance, commitment to sustained improvement and positive relations" (Davies, 1996, p.15 in Bush & Glover, 2004).This method generally places emphasis on the acquisition of skills. This study was undertaken in a developed context, namely the American educational situation. Bossi (2009) also in a developed context uses a large scale quantitative study of a cohort of 50 participants in

California, to provide answers to his queries on whether coaching of new principals is the way to prevent them from premature burnout. He compares new principalship to be a "swim or drown" syndrome, with many principals opting out after 3 years.

Portfolios according to Wolf *et al.* (1997, p.195) in Bush and Glover (2004) refers to "the structured documentary history of a carefully selected set of coached or mentored accomplishments, substantiated by samples of student work, and fully realised only through reflective writing, deliberation and serious conversation". Portfolios are said to have a useful role to play in formative evaluation and leadership development (Chikoko, Naicker & Mthiyane, 2011). One of the core modules in the ACE: SL is to capacitate school principals in developing the skills, knowledge and values needed to effectively lead and manage schools. Principals are expected to compile a reflective portfolio, over two years, with evidence of competence in school leadership and management. The portfolio for submission contains a comprehensive record of all the evidence produced during the six core modules and includes completed assignments, written tests, work-based projects, etc. As this was a meaning making exercise, reflective commentaries were a crucial part of the portfolio. Dunsten and Grey (2001) in Naicker *et al.*(2011, p.7) are of the view that in leadership learning, deep reflection requires aspirant leaders to consider the underlying dynamics of power and to question all assumptions and practices lest they jump to the wrong conclusions and risk making poor decisions and bad judgements.

Stand alone courses are evident in the South African context. The Department of Education has seen the need for formalised training of new principals. The ACE: SL is currently being offered by the higher education institutions (HEIs) in partnership with the Department of Education. These principals are, however, already in service and may be experiencing difficulties in keeping abreast of the dynamics of today's schools. Mncube, Naicker and Nzimwakwe (2010) explored the professional development of school principals in South Africa and their needs and aspirations. They consider the competency of principals to be a national imperative. They see the never ending demands placed on principals as a hindrance to them functioning effectively. These demands ultimately place a huge burden on principals with the result that many buckle under pressure. In a study commissioned by the Mathew Goniwe School for Leadership and Governance, it was found that most school principals had not received adequate specialist preparation for them to be able to fulfil their leadership and management roles effectively (Bush; Bisschoff; Glover; Heystek; Joubert& Moloi , 2005 in Mncube *et al*, 2010). It is therefore evident that the ACE: SL is crucial to filling the gap in

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the leadership development of school principals. The fact that it is a national imperative of the universities in South Africa shows that the emphasis on development of leadership in school principals is finally being promoted seriously (Department of Education, 2007).

Professional learning communities as advocated by Wenger *et al*. (2000) views the CoP as a grouping that comes together by what matters to them, and by what they do. He contrasts this community from the business sphere with that of interest groups and reveals that these "semi-formalized groups" emerge to guide and enhance leadership within the business. Wenger (2000), whilst espousing the benefits of CoPs, is mindful of the fact that they are not so prevalent due to three main reasons. Firstly, the term is still new to most businesses and enterprises and therefore not likely to spread rapidly. Secondly, only several dozen forward-thinking companies have taken the leap of installing or nurturing them. Thirdly, the organic, spontaneous and informal nature of CoP makes them resistant to supervision and interference and therefore difficulties may be encountered in trying to build and sustain these communities. This method is, nevertheless, the ideal form for leadership learning and development of school principals. According to Wenger *et al*. (2000), successful managers bring the right people together, provide an infrastructure in which the communities can thrive in and measure the CoPs value in non-traditional ways. They believe that these tasks of cultivation are not easy but the harvest they yield makes them worth the effort. My aim in this study was to explore the role played by LPCs in developing the leadership capacity of school principals. A review of literature by Wenger *et al*. (2000) and Gray and Bishop (2009) intimates that the Superintendent of Education (Management) can play a crucial role in bringing principals together and allowing them to thrive under his/her guidance. Whilst there will always be "lurkers" on the periphery, research has shown that these individuals also develop and practice the new ideas they have encountered being discussed by the core and active members. Ultimately, these "lurkers" evolve to become active/core members and play a significant role in the learning community Wenger *et al.* (2000).

2.3.3.2 IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP LEARNING ON PRACTICE

Different concepts are used by researchers to describe the process of leadership learning and development. Concepts such as leadership development, leadership training, leadership experience, professional development, management development and management training are used in order to improve the practice of leadership and in so doing increase the effectiveness of the organisation. Most of the research reveals that leadership learning should

be concerned with the way in which attitudes are fostered, action empowered, and the learning organisation stimulated (Frost & Durant, 2000 in Bush & Glover, 2004).Through purposeful leadership development, leaders are able to increase their knowledge base and they are able to close the gaps and knowledge deficiencies that are evident. This changes their outlook on leadership and makes them more confident in the handling of leadership positions. In the case of school principals, they become more confident to lead and manage their schools. They are aware that belonging to an LPC creates a support group that is available at any given time to lend support, both moral and in terms of resources. This surge of confidence by school principals has great benefits for the teachers they lead. Tasks are devolved to both senior and junior teachers and the principal operates in a more democratic and transformational manner. This in turn creates an institution that is constantly learning and evolving and the development of leadership skills is cascaded to many more members of staff. Leadership practice therefore changes positively due to leadership learning and all those along the support hierarchy also benefit. Ultimately, this has great benefits for the learners as their principal and teachers are all concerned with making the school a vibrant learning organisation.

2.3.3.3 OBSTACLES TO AND POSSIBILITIES FOR LEADERSHIP LEARNING

Wenger and Snyder (2000) view a CoP as a garden that demands attention in order to respect its nature. The shortcomings of a CoP can be minimized, if managers or the co-ordinators, engage in certain activities. These are said to be identification of the potential CoP in order to enhance the company's strategic capabilities. The co-ordinator is responsible for identifying the group to form the CoP. At Shell, the petro-chemical company, the person that wanted to start a community, joined forces with a consultant and then looked at problems and challenges across teams and units that were evident in the company. These problems directed the person to other individuals with similar problems and hence the CoP started up (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p. 6). This, in an educational situation, would mean that the SEM, as the co-ordinator, would be responsible for driving the process of initiating LPCs in which principals can interact and develop. The provision of infrastructure to support the CoPs to enable them to develop and apply their expertise effectively is essential. These could be viewed as serious obstacles to successful implementation of LPCs.

A CoP is said to be vulnerable because it lacks the budgets of established departments (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p. 8). Senior officials must be part of the development and have to

invest time and money in order to allow the CoP to reach its full potential. These officials must intervene and support these groupings when obstacles impede progress. Various companies have come to the aid of CoPs with finance and equipment to sustain it. The American Management Systems and the World Bank are two such international entities that support CoPs as a part of their knowledge management strategy (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p.8). Support teams from each company help with community development, knowledge fairs, library services and technical support. Infrastructure in the form of finance, venues, learning materials, duplication of documentation, transportation of guest speakers/ presenters all need serious intervention. The lack of suitable infrastructure will impede the LPC from operating to its maximum capabilities.

Finally, the co-ordinator has to use non-traditional methods to assess the value of the CoP. According to Wenger and Snyder (2000, p.1) a CoP is "a group of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise". It is a grouping that comes together by what matters to them, and by what they do (Wenger, 2008). Based on this definition it would mean that if traditional means of assessment, such as formalised reports, timetables, evaluation, etc are used then the "passion' may be taken out of the equation. Principals will not turn up because of 'what matters to them' but rather attend due to compulsion. The literature is therefore saying that non-traditional methods of assessment must be used. According to Wenger and Snyder (2000) the effects of the CoP are often delayed and results generally appear in the work of teams and business units. These results may not be visible in the CoP. They suggest that the best way to assess the value of the CoP is to listen to members stories about knowledge, performance and relationships amongst members. The gathering of a diverse range of anecdotal evidence covering many activities is suggested. At Shell, community co-ordinators collect stories from clients, interview members, and then publish these in newsletters and reports. A yearly competition allows for the best stories to be identified. Analysis of these stories revealed that the CoP had saved the company between two to five million dollars and increased revenue by thirteen million dollars in one year! (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p.10).

This has great scope for the educational field. Individual principals could present topics based on their strength and expertise. Principals volunteering to assist other novice/ inexperienced principals to set up for example, filing and monitoring systems could save the schools a large amount of money. While some literature is saying that the core and active members are vital to the CoP, other researchers are saying that the "lurkers" on the periphery

are also learning and implementing what they see happening in the LPC. The cascading effect of these positive developments could save the education system vast amounts of crucially needed finance that would otherwise be lost to external service providers.

2.4 SUMMARY

This review has highlighted the theoretical orientation to this study as well as a review of the related literature around the critical questions. The review commenced with a discussion on the theoretical tools employed in this study. An exposition on the theory of CoPs and a conceptual framework related to leadership development was presented. This was then followed by a study of relevant local and international literature around CoPs and leadership development. Aspects pertaining to business leadership was discussed and related to the educational setting. Various forms of leadership learning were then elaborated upon and finally the effect of leadership development on leadership practice was discussed.

The next Chapter will deal with the research design and methodology employed in this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on the theoretical frameworks that inform this study and the literature reviewed around the critical questions. The focus of this chapter is on the research design and methodology employed in this research study in order to answer the following key research questions generated in chapter 1:

- What forms of leadership learning take place in a LPC?
- How does leadership practice change as a result of participation in a LPC?
- What challenges and possibilities exist for leadership development within a LPC?

An account on the research paradigm covering issues of ontology, epistemology and methodology is furnished. This is followed by an exposition on the methodological approach of this study. An account on the data collection methods, sampling, data analysis techniques, ethical issues and limitations of this study is then presented.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

This study is located within the interpretivist paradigm. The interpretivist paradigm is concerned with the individual. Researchers, who work in this paradigm, want to understand the subjective world of human experience. They do this by trying to get inside the person and to understand from within, how the person experiences the world (Trauth, 2001). I have chosen this paradigm because it allows for the researcher to interact with the participants in their natural settings and thereby gain an understanding of how they view reality with regard to leadership development within LPCs. This is congruent to the ontological assumptions of the interpretivist paradigm which contends that there are multiple realities.

In terms of epistemology, the assumptions on which interpretivists operate are that most of our knowledge is gained through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings and documents (Trauth, 2001). Knowledge, according to Henning, *et.al.* (2004) is constructed not only by observable phenomena, but also by people's descriptions of

their intentions, beliefs, values and reasons, meaning making and self understanding. In this study, I engaged in a process of understanding how the participants within a LPC experienced leadership development, in other words, how did they make meaning of the leadership learning.

Methodologically, in the interpretivist paradigm, there are assumptions about the process of research. Researchers in this paradigm use qualitative methods in order to gauge perceptions of the participants. Methods widely used are observations, interviews and document reviews (Mertens, 1998).

3.3 METHODOLOGY

I will be using case study methodology in this study. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2009, p.253) case studies "investigate and report the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance". Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2009) give a detailed list of how case studies can benefit the research. They aver that the purpose of case studies is to portray, analyze and interpret the uniqueness of real individuals and situations through accessible accounts. The ability to interpret the complexity and situatedness of behaviour is a crucial trait that the researchers have to possess. Hitchcock and Hughs (1995, p.317) consider various hallmarks that distinguish case studies. They state the following: "a rich and vivid description of events is accessible whilst a chronological narrative of events is provided". A description of the events and an analysis of them are blended and individuals are focused on, and their perceptions of events are analyzed. Specific events relevant to the case are highlighted whilst the researcher is integrally connected to the case. An attempt is made to portray the richness of the case in writing up the report.

This notwithstanding, case studies have possible weaknesses. According to Nisbet and Watt (1984) in Bush (2002), the results of case study research may not be generalizable except where other researchers see the application. They are not easily open to cross-checking; hence they may be selective, biased, personal and subjective. Further, they are prone to problems of observer bias, despite attempts made to address reflexivity. It was not my intention to generalize, but rather to make meaning of how leadership learning can take place within a CoP such as a LPC.

3.4 METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

One data collection technique was used, namely interviews.

3.4.1 INTERVIEWS

I used interviews as a primary means of generating data for the study. According to De Vos (2005) interviewing is predominantly used to generate data in qualitative research since every word that people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness. Manning cited in Holstein and Gubrium (1995) states that all interviews are interactional events in which interviewers are deeply and unavoidably implicated in creating meanings that seem to reside within participants. Interviews allow participants to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view whilst allowing the human embeddedness of life to shine through (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2009).

I used a semi-structured, one-on-one interview. This method of data collection allowed me to have control over the process whilst still allowing the participants sufficient flexibility in terms of scope and depth. Semi- structured interviews allow the participant to be seen as the expert on the subject and he/she is therefore allowed the maximum opportunity to tell the story as they see fit. This method allows for the participants to share more than would be the case in a structured interview, and he/she could introduce aspects or issues that were not thought of by the researcher. Semi- structured interviews may become intense and involved and may last for a considerable period of time and therefore the participants must be put at ease. The researcher has to facilitate and guide the participant rather than dictate the encounter (De Vos, 2005). To prevent these problems, I structured my questions into themes that also had sub-questions with probes. The probes were used to give the participants guidance on answering the question and prevent them from straying too much from the theme under review.

3.5. SAMPLING

The LPC for this study was purposively selected based on convenience. I decided to sample a LPC of principals that is close to me in terms of travelling and allows for easy access. Maree (2007) sees convenience sampling as a method that is used when participants or sites are

selected because they are easily and conveniently available. This allows for research that is inexpensive and allows for a quick approximation of the truth.

Seven school principals were purposively selected. Henning *et al*. (2004, p.71) posits that this method "looks towards the people who fit the criteria of desirable participants". She goes on further to elucidate that these participants are spokespersons for the topic of enquiry. Their craft knowledge is crucial in determining whether leadership development and learning has taken place. De Vos (2005) sees the clear identification and formulation of criteria for the selection of participants as being of prime importance. The seven school principals were selected based on the following criteria: secondary/primary representativity; male/female representivity and urban/township/rural representivity.

3.6 THE LPC AND THE INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

A short narrative describing the LPC and the interview participants is presented. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the interview participants.

3.6.1 THE LPC

The LPC selected is in fact a principal's ward forum. The forum meets monthly, on a rotational basis, at various venues. The co-ordinator of this LPC is the SEM and she together with her principals set the agenda and dates for meetings. The principals that attend this LPC are from diverse backgrounds. They differ in terms of their experience as principals, their overall experience as educators, their ages, qualifications, the schools they serve, the context of their schools, the socio-economic background of their learners and teachers, etc. All these principals qualified under the various differentiated educational systems that were in place prior to 1994 and are products of some of the 19 education departments that were in existence. Many have come through the ranks and were heads of departments, deputy principals and finally principals. Some have come through as a result of the dispensation that allowed them to move from being a teacher to become a principal. The SEM has to co-ordinate this diverse group, and she has to get them to operate as a LPC.

3.6.2 THE PARTICIPANTS

Mrs Navasundrie

Mrs Navasundrie is a primary school principal who has been teaching for 32 years. She has served as a principal for the last five years. Prior to that, she served as head of department in the Junior Primary phase and then she served as deputy principal. She has two diplomas in education and has an Honours degree in educational leadership and management from a university. Her school caters for 1200 learners from grades 1 to 7. Her school has an excellent pass rate at grade 7 level.

Mr Brownsey

Mr Brownsey is in charge of a primary school that has 700 learners. He has been teaching for 28 years. He has been principal for the last eight years. Prior to that, he served in the capacity of head of department and then as a deputy principal. He has a degree in education and is currently studying for his ACE: SL. He is actively involved in various endeavours to uplift the community that his school serves. He has an excellent pass rate at grade 7 level.

Mr Raihman

Mr Raihman leads a primary school with 1200 learners. He has been teaching for 27 years. He has been acting principal for the past three years and has just been appointed to the post. He was a head of department and deputy principal prior to being appointed acting principal. His qualifications include a three year education diploma and an Advanced Certificate in Education from a college of education. He is very active in the sporting structures of the District and is constantly challenging his learners to pursue sporting ventures. There is a great demand for admission space in his school due to the excellent results they produce.

Mr Smitson

Mr Smitson has been a teacher for the past 30 years. He has been a principal for the past 20 years. He has come up through the ranks and was a head of department and deputy principal before he was appointed as principal. He leads a primary school of 700 learners. He has a three year education diploma from a college of education. His school is well resourced and

has excellent sporting facilities. He has recently sourced private sector sponsorship for the construction of additional facilities at his school.

Mr Wandile

Mr Wandile has been teaching for 31 years. He has been a principal for two years. He served as a teacher and was then promoted to deputy principal. He is highly qualified and has a host of qualifications ranging from a teacher's diploma to an Honours degree in Educational Management and a Masters degree in Management. His high school caters for 1100 learners. His school has a matriculation pass rate of around 85%.

Mrs Thabile

Mrs Thabile has been teaching for 20 years. She is currently an acting principal. She was previously a teacher and was then promoted to deputy principal. She has an education diploma and has completed various short certificate courses. She is currently studying for a diploma in School Management at a university. Her primary school has an enrolment of 700 learners and produces average results at grade seven level.

Mr Sannasi

Mr Sannasi has been teaching for 31 years and has been principal for the last 12 years. He was previously a head of department and was then promoted to principal. He is highly qualified and holds education diplomas, a Bachelor's degree in Language, an Honours degree in Educational Management and a Masters Degree in public management. He is also active in the Teacher's union and conducts various professional development courses for his teachers. His high school caters for 1300 learners and has a matric pass rate of around 94%.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data analysis involves making sense of the participant's explanation of situations, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities. There are frequently multiple interpretations to be made and this creates both a richness of data and a headache with too much data (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2009). A way around this is to undertake data reduction, in order to respect the quality of data, with the use of content analysis. Content

analysis is a process by which the many words in the texts are classified into much fewer words (Weber, 1990 in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2009). This simply means that it is a process of summarizing and reporting written data whilst preserving the main contents of the data and their messages. Researchers such as Flick (1998) and Mayring (2004) in (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2009, p.475) define the term as, "a strict and systematic set of procedures for the rigorous analysis, examination and verification of the contents of written data". Content analysis has many attractions: it is an unobtrusive technique where one can observe without being observed (Robson, 1993 in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2009, p. 475); it is systematic and verifiable; the rules of analysis are explicit, transparent and public (Mayring, 2004 as quoted in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2009, p.475); and since the data is represented as texts, verification through re-analysis and replication is possible. De Vos (2005) represents this process for convenience, as follows: collecting and recording the data; managing the data; reading and memoing; describing, classifying and interpreting; and representing and visualizing.

The semi-structured interviews were audio recorded and subjected to *verbatim* transcription. The interview transcripts were analysed by reading and re-reading them to find meaning units. The meaning units were then classified into sub-themes and themes for reporting.

3.8 ETHICAL ISSUES

In conducting research, it is vitally important for the researcher to ensure that all protocols with regard to ethics are observed. According to De Vos (2005) ethical issues may involve: the prevention of emotional or physical harm to participants; informed consent; the avoidance of deception of participants; care in not violating the privacy of participants; and the debriefing of participants amongst others.

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was applied for, and granted, by the University of KwaZulu-Natal (See p. ii). Permission was also sought, and granted, from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education to conduct this study (See Appendix 1, p.64). Further, consent of participants in this study was sought by means of an informed consent letter (See Appendix 2, p.66). In the reporting of this study the names of the participants were anonymised by the use of pseudonyms.

3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS

The main focus of the researcher is to authentically capture the lived experiences of the participants. The capturing of this data has to conform to rigorous scrutiny to ensure that the data is valid and trustworthy. The aim of trustworthiness in qualitative research is to support the argument that the inquiry's findings are "worth paying attention to" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.290). Research that is undertaken has to conform to criteria against which the trustworthiness of the project can be evaluated (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). In order to ensure that all findings are relevant, researchers have to ensure that these issues are addressed. In any qualitative research, four issues of trustworthiness, demand attention. These are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility refers to whether the data from the research findings represent a "credible" conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants' original data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.296). This is the alternative to internal validity and shows that the research was conducted in a manner that ensures that the subject was accurately identified and described (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).Transferability refers to the degree to which these findings can be applied to other projects/situations. This is the alternate to external validity or generalisability where a new investigator is able to transfer the applicability of one set of findings to another context. Triangulating multiple sources of data can be used to corroborate, elaborate and illuminate the research (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Dependability refers to an assessment of the quality of the integrated processes of data collection, data analysis, and theory generation. This is an alternate to reliability. The interpretive assumption is that the social world is always being constructed and the concept of replication is problematic (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Confirmability refers to a measure of how well the inquiry's findings are supported by the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Objectivity is removed from the researcher and placed on the data. One needs to question whether the data helps to confirm the general findings and its implications (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

I used voice recorders to capture the interviewees' comments and discussions. This allowed me to ensure the accuracy of data collected. Further, in terms of credibility, I engaged in 'member checking' which involved allowing the participants of this research to validify the transcriptions of the interviews. They were able to check for discrepancies and in this way ensure that the data is correct. Transferability of the findings to other situations would be

relevant for the development of CoPs. The use of the data by other researchers would allow transferability to another LPC. In terms of dependability, I ensured that all participants were given guidance in terms of the questioning techniques. Differences, in context of each participant's school, were negated by the interview schedule and probes. The data that was collected was done so with the highest degree of accuracy to ensure a reliable set of data. In order to ensure confirmability, the data, findings and conclusions were given to a critical reader, who holds a PhD, to check that there is congruence between the data, findings and conclusions.

3.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Generalization is of paramount importance in many research studies. However, in this study, it was not my intention to generalize, but rather to make meaning of how leadership learning can take place within a CoP such as a LPC. Since this is a small case study, using only one method of data collection, the findings cannot be generalized to other leadership practice communities.

3.11 SUMMARY

The chapter presented the research paradigm, covering issues of ontology, epistemology and methodology. It also covered the methodological approach of this study. An account on the data collection methods, sampling, data analysis techniques, ethical issues and limitations of this study was also presented.

The next Chapter deals with the presentation and analysis of the data.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter outlined the research design and methodology employed in this study. This chapter focuses on the analysis, findings and discussion of the data generated from the semi-structured interviews. The data is presented under themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interviews. Further, in presenting the data, the researcher wanted to ensure that the voices of the participants were not lost. Therefore, *verbatim* quotations are also used in the data presentation. A discussion of the data in terms of the theoretical and conceptual tools outlined in chapter two as well as other scholarly works is then presented.

4.2   ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF THE DATA

The data from the semi-structured interviews were grouped into themes and sub-themes.

4.2.1 LEADERSHIP LEARNING WITHIN THE LPC

The sub-themes that emerged during the interviews were: learning of knowledge, skills and values; forms of leadership learning; and becoming reflective practitioners.

4.2.1.1 LEARNING OF KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND VALUES

The participants were asked to respond to the knowledge, skills and values they learnt as a result of their participation in the LPC. All seven participants were unanimous in stating that they learnt a great deal. They indicated that their learnings broadened their knowledge in a number of areas such as human resource management, recruitment, conflict resolution, motivational skills and time management skills. Some of their comments on their overall learnings were:

"…we have a wealth of knowledge and skills here… there is so much that I learnt…but by meeting we do share knowledge; we do share our skills and values…"
(Mr Sannasi)

"I learnt that there are certain things that you can do and there are certain things you don't do because someone else [has] had a bad experience…" (Mr Brownsey)

"…actually for a new principal in this Forum, we learn a lot. We talk about school management, human resource management, communication and other things; it becomes healthy to ask questions as far as these issues are concerned because we learn from each other." (Mr Wandile)

"…we've broadened our knowledge being part of the Principals' Ward Forum [LPC]."(Mr Smitson)

The participants went on to relate some of the specifics of their learnings with regard to the knowledge, skills and values. With regard to knowledge, the participants indicated that they learnt how to procure learner-teacher support materials (LTSM), asset management within their schools, educator leave measures and the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on schools, among others. Some of them commented:

"…like see Asset Management… she [the community co-ordinator] had Mr Masuku [the presenter of the workshop] there… he did that with us." (Mrs Navasundrie)

"…we even invite people to share things concerning management of schools…[For example] leave measures, so you know exactly what different types of leave can be taken…" (Mr Wandile)

The participants also indicated that they learnt a wealth of skills from the LPC. The skills ranged from the handling of grievance procedures involving teachers to motivational skills. The participants commented:

"… There are so many things we learnt. Early this year the teachers submitted grievances to me. I said I will attend to those grievances when it comes from the higher authorities …, then by attending these LPCs and through interacting with the principals[in the LPC] I learnt that we have to face these challenges, then I

managed to take those grievances[and sort them].....We discuss, we share..."
(Mr Wandile)

"...I learnt what we call boldness and listening skills and decision making and accountability..." (Mrs Thabile)

More specifically, the participants commented on the human resource management skills they learnt from the LPC.

"... in terms of human resources... if there are issues that we have... we discuss it with her [the community co-ordinator], then she takes it one step further and brings in the necessary people and expertise to assist us, so that's how we gain from it".
(Mr Brownsey)

There was also a range of values that the participants developed as a result of their participation in the LPC. Key values such as punctuality, accountability and sharing were reinforced in the LPC. Some of the key comments made by the participants were:

"... Some of the values she [the community co-ordinator] talks about...she drums home the point about punctuality..." (Mr Sannasi)

"... We are made aware that the position we are holding has a great amount of accountability... that in the end, you are answerable..." (Mr Raihman)

"It's not about teaching, it's about sharing...we share things like how to go about communicating..." (Mr Wandile)

"...we learn from our colleagues.... we learn and share together..." (Mr Brownsey)

The findings indicate that a wealth of learning in terms of knowledge, skills and values takes place within this LPC. This is corroborated by Wenger (1998) who asserts in his social learning model that we become who we are as we learn through social interactions, which in the context of this study, would mean social interactions between the school principals within the LPC. Wenger (2008) also articulates that within a learning community people with common goals and interests work together to better themselves and their institutions. This is abundantly clear in this LPC. The school principals work as a collective to empower one another in order to better their schools. Stamps (1997, p. 37) asserts that the core principle in a community is that "Learning is social. Learning happens on the job". This is the gist of how

this LPC operates. Principals are being socialised and whilst this is happening they are learning from their colleagues. Wenger (1998) is of the opinion that, through participation in CoPs, individual and group meanings are made. People experience, shape, and take on new identities. This mirrors what has happened in this LPC. The data therefore corroborates the view that Wenger's theory on CoP is valid as the participants have acknowledged that there is a lot that they have learnt by participating in this LPC.

4.2.1.2 FORMS OF LEADERSHIP LEARNING

The participants were asked to respond to the forms of leadership learning they encountered as a result of their participation in the LPC. From the responses of the participants, peer learning, networking, mentoring, coaching and critical friendships were mentioned as forms of learning. Some of their comments on peer learning, mentoring and networking were as follows:

"In terms of peer learning... everybody respects everybody else and the SEM [community co-ordinator] has got a very good style of making everyone feel important in the meeting... there is a lot of peer learning [in the LPC] in terms of leadership style... We have contributed and we have learnt so there is a lot of peer learning."(Mr Sannasi)

"[It] is the ideal setup where we can network with one another. ...some of us are new to the principalship post and others are senior with more expertise, more knowledge... we communicate with one another, network with one another and we gain new ideas, sometimes innovative ideas [from the LPC] ... they are not only coaching you and guiding you on how to run and operate in a school, but also [explain] how to complete the necessary documentation. So, they don't just help you with their knowledge!"(Mr Raihman)

"...there was mentoring [in the LPC] involved which is not formalised. I will just help this guy. In terms of networking I think networking is my greatest asset, I have learnt very quickly that you cannot live in isolation as a principal of a school; you need to associate with others. I have learnt that if you don't know you need to ask ...I believe in discussing issues and learning on the job."(Mr Brownsey).

Learning through critical friendships also came through quite strongly from the participants.

In fact, all seven participants had positive experiences in terms of the development of critical friendships. Some of their comments were as follows:

"…without fail during the course of the day you get an average of three to five calls from fellow principals. When I need to check things out as well, I have got a few principals that I immediately pick up the phone [and ask] "what are you doing about this? How are you responding?" … as principals we are able to link up and find out what other schools are doing, what are the merits of it and perhaps make the best possible decision." (Mr Sannasi)

"… You phone one principal, you tell him or her that you are experiencing this problem, how can you solve it... I feel very proud to have the old principals approaching me, on how to solve some issues that they have been facing all the years … they are the people whom I contact, with whom I network. Without the Ward Forum [the LPC] I wouldn't have met them, I wouldn't have known them, we've become friends."(Mrs Thabile)

"…if I read a circular and I feel that it's not making sense to me and I feel that it has a double meaning, I pick up the phone [and call] Mrs. T, to say listen this doesn't make sense to me. I'm seeing it this way. She says you are seeing it the right way but what you're saying could mean this as well."(Mrs Navasundrie)

Some of the participants also commented on the role they played in mentoring novice principals. Together with the community co-ordinator, senior school principals from the LPC often made site visits to provide guidance to novice school principals. Some of the participants commented:

"…we [the community co-ordinator and I] went to three schools, and in each of the three schools we were able to make some recommendations... We went in with a healthy attitude, trying to tell them that these are some of the things that do work and this is what can happen." (Mr Sannasi)

The findings indicate that a range of forms of leadership learning takes place within this LPC. This takes the form of peer learning, networking, mentoring, coaching and guidance. The

senior members of the LPC and the community co-ordinator also undertake site-based mentoring in order to guide and support school principals. This is supported by Gray and Bishop (2009) when they state that leadership development initiatives can be sustained by role-embedded learning, mentoring/coaching and focused learning experiences. This high quality training and on the job application of skills, knowledge and practice is evident within this LPC. Gray and Bishop (2009, p.29) 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". The participants have corroborated this overwhelmingly in that the LPC has given them the confidence and experience to make changes in their leadership practice. The focused learning experiences that the participants are exposed to in the LPC, allow opportunities for new leaders to solve a range of school problems. It is evident that the concepts that Gray and Bishop (2009) have espoused are being put into practice by the participants on a daily basis. On the job role-play and mentoring is happening. The data is therefore in agreement with the conceptual framework put forth by Gray and Bishop (2009)

4.2.1.3 BECOMING REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONERS

The participants were asked to respond to whether the deliberations in the LPC had created scope for them to reflect on their own practice as school principals. All seven participants were unanimous in stating that as a result of their engagements in the LPC they often use the knowledge, skills and values gained from the LPC to reflect on their practice as school principals. Some of their comments were:

> "…quite often you are compelled to reflect on your practice and you admit at times, that you could be doing things differently. You could be doing things better... quite often you reflect that you are doing things better than what is actually being suggested as well and then you make those inputs…"(Mr Sannasi)

> "…when you come back from the meetings you say 'Am I doing it the right way?'… also I reflect on maybe the human relationships, maybe sometimes the approach… we are dealing with individuals and we need to reshape the way we deal with individuals because obviously not everybody responds in the same way."
> (Mr Raihman)

"...I've certainly used ideas that have been shared. I come back to my office and to my management team and say this is what is being done and could we use anything from that...?" (Mr Smitson)

The participants indicated that reflection was part of their routine. It allowed for the participants to review their actions and learnings for the day and to evaluate their decision-making capabilities. Researchers view reflection as being crucial to leadership development. Reflection by practitioners allows for leaders to practice their skills and then reflect on the consequences of their decisions. Gray and Bishop (2009) are of the view that reflection on decisions and actions allows practitioners to undergo self-evaluation.

4.2.2 TRANSFORMATION IN LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

Various sub-themes emerged, namely changes in leadership and management practice; staff perceptions of the principal's leadership and management; and the LPC and relationship building.

4.2.2.1 CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT PRACTICE

The participants were asked whether there has been any change in the way they lead and manage their schools as a result of their learnings in the LPC. Six out of the seven participants were in agreement that they learnt a great deal and that they have changed aspects of their leadership and management practice. The participants indicated that they have become more participative in their leadership style. Some of their comments were:

"Certainly there have been many changes... I have become more participative in my leadership style...We have shared ideas [in the LPC] as to how we get the entire management to participate, even level one teachers... We've started to incorporate a whole range of people, in terms of participating in school management..." (Mr Sannasi)

"...one of the changes that I have made as the principal was that we cannot have a situation where we are dictating a top down approach in terms of managing. You have to listen and the greatest skill that any manager can learn is to listen to the other person's point of view before you make a decision..." (Mr Brownsey)

"It has made me more consultative!" (Mr Wandile)

Participants were very clear in their assertions that they have transformed their leadership practice after joining the LPC. Through constant interaction with other members of the LPC, and the guidance from the community co-ordinator, they have become transformational principals with strong participatory leanings. This has led to their staff becoming empowered and being given delegated authority to undertake tasks. This lends credence to the assertion by Wenger (1998) who sees "identity change" as ultimately transformative. He sees this as "a process of becoming". He is of the opinion that, through participation in CoP, individual and group identities are transformed. People experience, shape, and take on new identities. An integral component of identity formation is Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of legitimate peripheral participation. This concept refers to novice principals entering a LPC and from being peripheral members, undergo an identity transformation through learnings from the community to become full members of the community. In terms of research conducted by Lave and Wenger (1991) the participation of the newcomer has to find a legitimate place in the practice of the community, and this place has to be such that it allows the newcomer to be peripherally involved in activities of interest, in order gradually to become a full participant. This process of increasing involvement is called "legitimate peripheral participation".

Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) found that the key characteristics to promote leadership transformation were important. There had to be a domain of interest where group members share an interest in and commit to something. The relationships between group members should allow them to share ideas, engage in joint activities and share information whilst helping each other. There has to be shared practice that consisted of shared resources, experiences, stories, etc. They see CoP as being able to provide additional benefits to teams, in that these communities are much more responsive in dealing with change. The tacit knowledge available in the CoP must be used to further the aims and goals of the institution. This is clearly evident in this LPC and it corroborates the findings by various researchers that learnings within communities is faster and the participants are willing to share both positive and negative experiences.

4.2.2.2 STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF THE PRINCIPAL'S LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The participants were asked to comment on how their staff had viewed their leadership and management as a result of their learnings in the LPC. The participant's responses to this question were mixed. Some of the participants indicated that their staff members do look at them as better leaders.

One participant commented:

> *"I would say that they do look at me as a better leader... obviously I am getting more and more empowered as time goes by. I would say from the positive responses I'm getting from the staff, they appreciate everything I am doing..."* (Mr Raihman)

A few participants indicated that this was difficult to gauge owing to the subjectivity involved. They indicated that sometimes staff members, because of certain ulterior motives, would not want to recognise their empowerment. A participant commented:

> *"...in terms of organisational theory, you will understand that there are some people that would just not be comfortable with your leadership style, and that's basically because the leadership style tends to expose their weaknesses..."* (Mr Sannasi)

Participants stated that, under normal circumstances, they would be looked down as weak by others if they had to seek guidance. The boost in confidence levels is summed up as follows:

> *"... during break times[at the LPC] where we would share our experiences, that's where you learn that you are not alone in this things, all the schools have different problems... but through interacting with the principals I learnt, that we have to face these challenges... I feel very proud to have the old principals approaching me, on how to solve some issues that they have been facing all the years that they have been principals, so it sometimes I feel honoured to find those people are the people whom I contact, with whom I network, I check when things go wrong in school."* (Mrs Thabile)

All participants indicated that they had become a part of the community (the LPC) and they had become enculturated.

Helsing and Lemons (2008) conducted a study with Hawaiian educators. They found that the community provided principals with a forum to discuss problems of practice, create new knowledge of effective leadership, allowed for collective learning by discussing real life dilemmas of practice and allowed for the development of a shared vision of what good classrooms, schools and school leaders could look like. Initial findings show a powerful impact on principals and their understanding of developing their schools. They viewed themselves as rejuvenated, refreshed, optimistic and confident of their abilities as leaders.

All the participants alluded to the fact that they were now more confident to tackle issues and problems as a result of the support that they received from their colleagues in the LPC. Prior to them joining the LPC there were very few support structures to receive guidance from. They now looked forward to their meetings and some stated that these monthly meetings, whilst time consuming, was seen as a sincere forum to take education into the future. Their comments lent support to Helsing and Lemons (2008) research about the increase in optimism and confidence levels. The participants felt optimistic and confident of their abilities as leaders and viewed themselves as change agents of institutions.

4.2.2.3 THE LPC AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

The participants were asked to comment on whether their relationship had changed with the SGB as a result of their learnings in the LPC. Most participants were in agreement that there had been some positive change in their relationship as a result of attending the LPC. A key source of strained relationships between school principals and governors has been the confusion of governance issues and professional matters. The participants indicated that the LPC has helped to clarify some of these roles. Consequently, school principals are now clearer as to their roles as school principals and that of the school governing body. Some of their comments were:

> *"School Governing Bodies - that's always a contested terrain... the area [in which] the principal functions and the School Governing Body... [The LPC] leads to a kind of greater understanding that they [the SGB] have a role to play, and as principals we have a role to play."* (Mr Sannasi)

"We've separated the governance and professional issues...at one time a teacher, who had a problem with another teacher in the same school, wrote a letter to the SGB. The SGB wanted to read it out [at a SGB meeting] and they read it out. Now after attending these meetings [LPC], I informed the SGB chairperson that this is a professional matter, so we need to address it at school ...they also are now aware they need to play a greater role as far as governance is concerned ..."
(Mr Raihman)

"... I think learning from the LPC we get it from the horse's mouth. Mr X [the manager], he's in charge of governance issues and he tells us whatever we need to know... so we learn and we get refreshed in terms of how we go about doing things in terms of procedure ..." (Mr Brownsey)

The participants were also asked to comment on whether their learnings in the LPC had impacted on their relationship with the Department of Education officials. Most participants were in agreement that there had been a substantial change in their interaction with the officials as a result of their participation in the LPC. Some of their comments were:

"For example, we have this one lady, Mrs B [a department official], who deals with infrastructure repairs. We expect her to immediately attend to the plumbing problem and so on. When Mrs B [addressed us in the LPC] she outlined the amount of paperwork she has to complete [and] levels she has to take it to. It leads to some kind of greater appreciation of the complexities around their work..." (Mr Sannasi)

"..It does help because there are questions which cannot be answered by the SEM and can be answered by the persons who are in that department... To bring somebody to talk about leave helps very much. You can now phone that person directly rather than going through others."(Mr Wandile)

The participants were asked to comment on whether their learnings in the LPC had impacted on their relationships with the learners. Some participants indicated that there had been very little change in their interaction with the learners as a result of their participation in the LPC. Others indicated that there had been some change. Some of their comments were:

"One of the things that we do at the LPC is that we celebrate the achievement of learners...the SEM heard that a learner delivered an excellent talk at the assembly. She actually brought the learner to come and address our Principals' Forum.... So to illustrate, quite a few learners have come [to the LPC], they had done exceptionally well in some music festival, so they render an item...." (Mr Sannasi)

"The attitude of the SEM...sharing with us... that actually cascades to me [which I cascade to] the learners." (Mrs Navasundrie)

The participants were asked to comment on whether their learnings in the LPC had impacted on the relationship with the parents. Most participants were in agreement that there had been a change in their interaction with the parents as a result of their participation in the LPC. They commented on this as follows:

"The SEM makes it known to us as principals that our core duty is to interact with parents. Well, I have always interacted with parents... and she tells you never put off meetings with parents. If you arrange for it, make certain that you are available to meet them … many of the parents they just love to see the principal... So let's just say my interaction with parents – it's reinforced it." (Mr Sannasi)

"… A topic that comes up all the time [in the LPC], is quality teaching and learning… we have parent meetings where we have a quality teaching and learning campaign. So we've had these meetings with parents where they are brought on board … and they are aware of their responsibilities." (Mr Raihman)

Most participants were clear that their relationships with the school governing bodies had changed for the better due to participation in the LPC. Participants were of the view that this contested terrain was no longer a battlefield due to their learnings in the LPC. Relationships with the officials from the Department had also improved tremendously and the participants were able to get a direct telephone line to the relevant personnel to sort out problems. Many participants were on a first name basis with these officials and this was possible due to the LPC. There was a little change in the relationships with parents and learners.

These findings lend support to the theory that Wenger (1998) proposed. His CoP *social learning model* contends that we become who we are, as we learn through social interactions

in practice. Wenger (1998) is of the opinion that CoPs benefit from cultivation. They respond to attention that respects their nature. He draws on the analogy of a cornstalk that cannot be pulled to make it grow faster and taller (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). We have to till the soil, pull out weeds, add water and ensure proper nutrients are given and ultimately, the tree will grow stronger. He links this to institutions that grow and nurture CoPs. The nurturing of relationships by principals with Department of Education officials, parents, School Governing Body members and learners together with the LPC is evident in the responses by participants and supports the theoretical assumptions.

4.2.3 CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES OF LPC'S FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Various challenges and possibilities emerged during the interviews.

4.2.3.1 THE CHALLENGES OF LPCs

The participants were asked to discuss some of the obstacles and or problems that they had experienced in the LPC. The seven participants indicated that they did encounter challenges that were on-going. These problems revolved largely around travel to LPC gatherings creating safety concerns, poor time management and some principals using the forum as a gripe session. Some of their comments were:

> *"There's some [in the LPC] that haven't moved past this becoming just a gripe session. They come there just to complain, complain...There's also the issue of poor time management and the SEM gets quite upset... Then some of the challenges as well are that we have to travel, and we are travelling into the township..."*
> (Mr Sannasi)

LPC meetings are generally held during school hours. Some participants were concerned that if they did not first report to school, chaos may prevail at their schools. Consequently, they report to the schools and then leave for the LPC meetings. This meant that they sometimes arrive late for the LPC meeting.

> *"The challenge is time management. ...as a new principal I find that from eight o' clock to twelve o' clock, I'm away from school. We end up getting late to those*

meetings because we go to school just to check, just to set the tone, just to see to it that everything is running smoothly before you leave for the forum..."(Mr Wandile)

The participants also indicated that some principals dominate the LPC gatherings and side-line new principals. Further, there are some who don't contribute anything at all. They remain silent. Their comments were as follows:

"There are some of them that you never ever hear their voices at all, but they're listening which is important."(Mr Smitson)

"We have certain characters that are loud. They tend to dominate and side track it but the SEM is quite astute... To put it bluntly she is able to shut these people up ...- and I think there are other challenges. There are some that come to the meeting and they sit in complete awe. They say absolutely nothing. You know, you wonder what they are doing, really!"(Mr Sannasi)

"Yes, we have one or two, and I need to say this, the male principals, they love to take over with their questioning. You know what's so annoying is that the same people will ask some very silly questions? ...the person will actually talk and time gets taken up for the unnecessary questioning."(Mrs Navasundrie)

Participants were upfront in stating that these challenges were constantly receiving attention so as not to create obstacles and prevent the LPC from convening. They did suggest some ways of overcoming some of the challenges experienced.
Some of their comments were:

"I think we should be given a time constraint- this is only ten minutes- and I don't want the same people all the time asking the questions. I want questions from different principals. ...Can we give someone else a chance? Rotation basis? So you are also making a note to that person –we are tired of your voice!"
(Mrs Navasundrie).

This comment was in response to the fact that there is dominance by certain principals in the LPC and this actually restricts the time available for others to ask questions. These principals, through their insistence on "debating" with the co-ordinator, actually instil fear into the quiet participants and ultimately prevent them from asking questions.

"…the agenda should be structured in such a way that each and every school should raise a problem that is a critical problem that they are facing… after that we group ourselves and let school A, B, C discuss how to solve the problem of school Z and then everybody will speak, everybody will share their experiences."(Mrs Thabile)

"…there are times where we should have a more interactive meeting where people are forced to share through interaction, perhaps through small groups with set topics." (Mr Smitson)

From the data it is clear that there are principals who are reticent at LPC gatherings. They do not comment until asked by the community co-ordinator (SEM) to do so. Learning, from the viewpoint of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP), essentially involves becoming an "insider." Participants learn to function in a particular community. They acquire that particular community's subjective viewpoint and learn to speak its language. In short, they are "enculturated". They are acquiring not explicit, formal "expert knowledge," but the embodied ability to behave as community members. (Brown, Duguid & March, 1991). In this LPC, participants are constantly learning. Wenger *et al*. (2002) calls these the 'active group' who participate, but do not have the regularity or intensity of the core group. Others attend and then quietly disappear. They are Wenger's 'peripheral participants'. Whilst literature remains silent on the benefit that these participants received, Maistry (2008) was able to determine that they [the participants of the LPC] had gained some insight into matters under discussion and had in fact applied some knowledge to their own leadership. He was of the view that Wenger *et al.* (2002, p.57) was correct when they state that "rather than force participation, successful communities 'build benches' for those on the sidelines and this allows for free movement of the members between the core and the periphery". In this project, the warmth displayed by the core and active members towards the peripheral participants was actually a catalyst for drawing them into the active group at a later stage. These individuals could be a part of the CoP and could engage with others from within the CoP. These leaders that are already appointed could be given the pre-requisite guidance, support, advice and direction by individuals within a CoP. Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) are of the opinion that CoP are formed on a voluntary and informal basis and this is why they are successful.

This is borne out by the participant who stated:

"I enjoy the meetings. I've yet to send my apologies. It is part of me and it is helping me run my school successfully. It's unique, is definitely unique! I think if you approach anyone from our Ward Forum [LPC] and tell them it's stopping from next month they would have a problem. They would then say, how are we going to communicate? And the communication with each other is crucial, it's absolutely vital."(Mr Smitson)

There is no compulsion on individuals to join. Perry and Zender (2004), in their study of the American Health Information Management Association, believe otherwise. Their research shows that in order to get communities into being and to sustain them, managers must be able to identify potential CoPs that would enhance the company's strategic capabilities and provide infrastructure that would assist these CoPs to flourish effectively. After five years, this organisation was able to foster and maintain over 200 CoP, that provided efficient and effective ways to help their members share and learn new knowledge and this furthered the aims of the organisation.

Maistry (2008) highlights the fact that diverse groups of teachers, with different cognition levels and expertise, were able to support each other in a learning community. Each member's expertise and cognition level was available to others to draw upon and reflect on. This is supported by research conducted by Grossman *et al.* (2001) where they found that some people know things that others do not and that the collective knowledge of the CoP exceeds that of the individual's knowledge. Orr (1990) notes that the representatives in the CoPs are remarkably open with each other about what they know and what they do not know. Within these communities, news travels fast and community knowledge is readily available to community members. Similarly the co-ordinator, by creating compulsory attendance by members of this LPC, is supported by Perry and Zender (2004) in that she ultimately attempts to make all members part of the core group.

4.2.3.2 POSSIBILITY OF THE LPC BECOMING A DEVELOPMENT AGENCY FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

The participants were asked their opinion on whether the LPC could be used as an agency to develop school principals. All participants were extremely positive about this aspect and they felt strongly that these LPCs were the ideal vehicle to develop school principals.

One of the comments was:

"I think it is a very useful vehicle to move our education forward…Mrs G, [a principal of a school], dealt with an aspect of record keeping. That week, after she dealt with record-keeping, about five principals visited her at her school to find out exactly what she means about how you keep proper records. So they visited her at her school and she was able to demonstrate to them that this is how you file your HRM circulars, this is how you file your curriculum circulars and so on." (Mr Sannasi)

This participant went on to elaborate how he, as a senior principal was also able to learn from the presentations by guest speakers. He felt strongly that all principals, not just novice principals, were gaining invaluable support and learnings from this LPC. He went on to state:

"I found that I have learnt a lot in terms of coping with leadership and change and the dynamics that prevail. In any organisation you get your core. In a school like ours it would be the principal and management. The core needs to drive the process. Immediately around that core you would get people that support the core. Then you get another circle of people that look in and do what's supposed to be done and right at the edge you'll get the fringe that just look in and observe and quite often that becomes the lunatic fringe that tends to disrupt. So all this you are able to pick up from listening to this forum." (Mr Sannasi)

The other participants lent credence to this view by stating the following:

"It's already developing novice principals because in every meeting the topics vary. It's building up a whole range of different issues which may arise during your reign as principal and also different topics, so it is actually empowering, capacitating and building you up to a certain professional level." (Mr Raihman)

"… there are so many things that you learn when experts are brought in to teach us. Even the contemporary issues… people from the department come and they teach us. It's developing. We are developed a lot in this forum. If you don't go there you miss a lot." (Mr Wandile)

All participants were of the view that this LPC was an ideal agency for the development of school principals. They alluded to the fact that all of them had learnt in this LPC. Both experienced principals and novice principals shared similar sentiments on how much they had learnt in the LPC. Wenger (1998, p.5) refers to this as explicit and tacit shared enterprises in which people with common references can "sustain mutual engagement in action". Wenger (1998, p.5) sees this as "a process of becoming". This mirrors what is happening in this LPC. The habit of the SEM [co-ordinator] in bringing in relevant officials and experienced personnel to address principals' queries was something that they were all in favour of. This then allowed them to put a face to the name of the officials. The fact that the SEM was able to get direct telephone numbers to contact these officials, was viewed very positively, and allowed the principals to get effective communication going.

4.2.3.3 FURTHER POSSIBILITIES OF LPCs

The participants were asked to comment on how the LPC could be used to professionally develop principals over and above what was currently happening. All participants were in agreement that this could be done. Some participants applauded the idea of bringing outside bodies to address relevant matters; whilst other participants were of the opinion that sufficient expertise existed within the LPC to solve problems and challenges in the Ward. Some of their comments were:

> "There's great hope for leadership development by inviting more varied speakers. To illustrate, the SEM [community co-ordinator] arranged for a company called Payghost to come and teach principals how to set up websites... you could actually put your examination papers, your exemplar papers... parents can now access your circulars, access your past year papers, be of greater help to their children in supervising and monitoring their homework... You know, initially I was wondering whether we can afford a website, now I am left with the question: can we afford not to have one?"(Mr Sannasi)

> "... [The LPC should] maybe allow principals themselves in the meeting, to deliberate on topics... have panel discussions or a mock session... Have a mock session where we do role playing. So maybe we'll get hands on experience. Also when we're having a panel discussion we get a range of views." (Mr Raihman)

"We could have meetings with sessions of more interactions, in smaller groups, people learn from each other. Even if the principals have to send through a problem before the meeting and it can be put into a pool during discussion time. It can be taken out-here's a problem from a school. This particular group discuss the problem, bring out the solutions." (Mr Smitson)

At meetings, a principal may pose a problem and the other principals act as consultants, offering their comments, suggestions and strategies to alleviate the said problem. This is evident in this LPC and supports the theoretical perspectives on leadership development as put forth by Gray and Bishop (2009). It is evident from the comments made by the participants that inexperienced principals are being given very strong helping hands to guide them through the turbulence that may be evident on a daily basis. This ultimately helps to develop the leadership potential that is inherent in principals. Wenger (2008) found that there may be many forms of leadership and that experts are needed to guide novices if these individuals could be a part of the CoP and could engage with others from within the CoP. Leaders that are already appointed could be given the pre-requisite guidance, support; advice and direction by individuals within a CoP. Leaders are challenged to translate theory into practice in the LPC. Mentoring and coaching, by senior members of the LPC, help to provide day-to-day feedback to assist the new leaders to progress. Due to the regular input from the community co-ordinator, leaders are able to shape beliefs about school change, challenges, and relationships amongst and between staff and community members and develop ethical practices. Focused learning experiences within the LPC, create opportunities for new leaders to solve a range of school problems.

4.3 SUMMARY

This chapter focused on the analysis, findings and discussion of the data generated from the semi-structured interviews. The data was presented under themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interviews. A discussion of the data in terms of the theoretical and conceptual tools outlined in chapter two, as well as other scholarly works was then presented. Leadership learning, becoming reflective practitioners, transformation in leadership practice and the challenges and possibilities for leadership development was discussed.

The next Chapter will deal with the main conclusions and recommendations of the study.

<center>**CHAPTER FIVE**</center>

<center>**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**</center>

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter dealt with the analysis, findings and discussion of the data. In this chapter the main conclusions and recommendations are presented. After careful consideration of the findings, certain clear conclusions emerge in terms of the aims and objectives and the critical questions formulated in chapter one. Based on the findings outlined in chapter four and the conclusions of this study, pertinent recommendations are made.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to explore the role played by leadership practice communities in developing the leadership capacity of school principals. Some of the individuals who occupy the post of principalship seem to lack leadership skills and seem to have management deficits. As leaders they should have been setting the standards for the rest of the staff to follow. This did not seem to be the case and leadership development was therefore of paramount importance. The following critical questions were asked and answered within this study:

- What forms of leadership learning take place in LPCs?
- How does leadership practice change as a result of participation in a LPC?
- What challenges and possibilities exist for leadership development within LPCs?

5.2.1 FORMS OF LEADERSHIP LEARNING TAKING PLACE IN LEADERSHIP PRACTICE COMMUNITIES

This question brought to light the fact that multiple forms of leadership learning do take place in the LPC. Mentoring, reflection on practice, coaching, role-embedded leadership learning, critical friendships, observation and networking seem to be the common forms of learning that take place within the LPC. Mentoring plays a major role in developing leadership because it creates the space for principals to debate and challenge issues with mentors from the LPC. Normally principals would not have this space where they can debate issues so this

is a positive feature for leadership development. Mentoring through coaching also came through as an important aspect for development. Principals found that the ability to talk to others about problems within a common space created the room for them to develop. According to the participants, leadership activities within the LPC were well planned and of a high quality, and the facilitation and support given by the community co-ordinator was excellent. Role-embedded leadership learning was seen to be of excellent value to the development of the principals as they had the canvas on which to practice their learnings. Reflection on practice was seen to be essential to leadership development. It is good for principals to reflect on their practice as it is through reflection that they become better leaders. Whilst Mr Smitson alludes to the possibility of leadership learning within the ward forum, he was loath to towards this. Due to the fact that he comes from an advantaged background and was the head of an advantaged school, he felt he gained nothing from the ward forum. He was oblivious to the reality that his school had a major portion of resources channelled to it due to the policies of the past government. He contradicts this view later on when he says that if these meetings were to stop, it would be a sad day for all.

Skills such as motivational skills, recruitment, human resource management and handling of grievance procedures were acquired by participants. Values such as punctuality and accountability were re-inforced in the LPC. These are also seen as aspects of learning by the participants because they created concrete instances where the learnings could be practiced. Critical friendships and networking were seen to play a major role in leadership development within the LPC. Principals were unanimous that the LPC was instrumental in fostering the ability to liaise with each other and create a network through which they could empower and develop each other. This aspect was seen to be the most positive outcome of belonging to the LPC. Almost all principals had acquired knowledge in aspects such as asset management, procurement of LTSM and educator leave measures among others.

5.2.2 CHANGE OF LEADERSHIP PRACTICE AS A RESULT OF PARTICIPATION IN A LPC

The majority of participants were in agreement that the LPC had changed the way they lead and manage their schools. They had developed the ability to become transformative leaders and all the participants had indicated that they were now more distributive and engaged in participatory management techniques as a result of participation in the LPC. This had led to

many devolving tasks for various projects to others on staff, hence empowering and developing more staff members.

Participants also agreed that they had become more confident in the handling of issues and relationships with a variety of groupings such as DoE officials, members of the SGB, parents and pupils. Many indicated that the separation of governance and professional matters was an area that was viewed as contested terrain. The LPC had assisted greatly in ensuring role clarity with regard to governance and professional matters. This has enabled principals to be more confident in their dealings with the SGB. The positive change in the relationships with DoE officials was evident among all participants who were now very much at ease in their interactions with officials. The fact that they came face-to-face with these officials in the LPC, allowed them to create a rapport that could bode well for all future interactions.

All participants were very appreciative of the fact that the SEM, as the community co-ordinator, went out of her way to facilitate department officials addressing principals on pertinent queries. These officials were seen to be experts in their fields and gave principals relevant information on a variety of problematic issues. Issues such as teacher leave measures and recruitment were expertly answered, and principals became confident in addressing these problems at their schools as they arose. The SEM was also responsible for presenting material to the principals that helped to develop their leadership abilities. Videos, and talks by inspirational individuals, were responsible for developing in principals the ability to think past the problems in their schools and to learn from others. Problems that seemed insurmountable previously in their schools became minor problems when viewed against the problems faced by colleagues in the LPC. Ultimately, all principals in the LPC gained knowledge, and this knowledge was used to positively transform the way they led their schools.

5.2.3 CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES THAT EXIST FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT WITHIN LEADERSHIP PRACTICE COMMUNITIES

All participants were extremely happy to be part of this LPC even though they had encountered challenges that could hamper leadership development. Challenges took the form of poor time management, travelling into areas that were deemed to present safety concerns, budgetary constraints and domination of discussions by some individuals. The fact that the meetings took place during school hours, placed constraints on the newer principals, who had to first report to their schools in order to set the programme for the day before attending the

LPC meeting. This created pressure on them since the SEM frowned upon late coming to the meetings. The fact that meetings were held at different schools also created challenges for those travelling and those that were hosting. Travelling to some venues, especially those in the townships raised safety concerns. This was overcome by travelling in groups and lift clubs. Schools that had initially started hosting provided refreshments for the school principals, which was an added cost to the hosting school. Schools, that could not afford this cost, chose not to volunteer their school as a venue and this in turn put pressure on others to volunteer. The issue of some school principals dominating discussions was also problematic. These individuals took up valuable time, by asking irrelevant and 'nonsensical' questions. The discussion that ensued discouraged other participants from contributing to the discussion. The perception was that the same individuals always dominated the discussions. All participants were of the view that these challenges were not severe and with adequate planning, could be minimized or overcome.

All participants were aware that the possibility of fostering leadership development within this LPC was extremely high. Some participants wanted to see more speakers and experts brought in to address critical queries. Participants also wanted their colleagues to form panels and address crucial problems within the schools in the Ward. They viewed this type of intervention and guidance as being more beneficial to them than bringing in outside experts. Issues in schools were seen to be best solved by people in the schools. Participants also advocated smaller groups with more interactions and more mock sessions where real problems, experienced in schools, could be discussed.

All participants were extremely enthusiastic about the fact that they had been empowered and capacitated by this LPC. The fact that the SEM sets up mini-themes for each meeting and ends with a quotation empowers the principals and keeps them coming back for more. Some principals see this LPC as a vehicle that drives the principals in their attainment of greater heights in their leadership. One principal aptly sums up what he sees as the goals of this LPC- "it's not to create ordinary principals to do ordinary work. It's to create extra-ordinary principals who are at the top of their game and excelling!" He was of the view that this LPC was the best vehicle for those who have the skills to disseminate their expertise to their own colleagues.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have implications for:

- The Department of Basic Education[DBE]
- The Provincial Departments of Education [DoE]
- SEMs
- Circuit and District Managers
- Education Human Resource Development (EHRD) officials
- Governance and Training officials

RECOMMENDATION 1

The DBE should ensure that these LPCs become mandatory for all Wards owing to the leadership learning that goes on in these LPCs.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The community co-ordinator (SEM) should convince the DoE and the District Offices that funding for the LPC should be made available. Funding can then be set aside to cover/subsidize the costs of travel, hosting and development materials. Budgetary constraints can be addressed through this method.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Expertise within the LPC should be used to develop principals and to share knowledge. Mentoring of individual principals should be more formalised so that some form of constant interaction and feedback could be given to the individual on an on-going basis. This may be done by pairing novice principals with senior principals.

RECOMMENDATION 4

The benefits of attending the LPC should not be restricted only to the Principals. All senior managers in schools should be able to access the development programmes of the LPC and should have access to programmes and interventions that are being discussed in the LPC. This would facilitate succession planning and would prevent voids in leadership due to the attrition of serving principals.

RECOMMENDATION 5

The possibilities of CoP are extremely encouraging for the educational landscape in South Africa. The data collected indicates that these ward forums are effective vehicles to motivate and guide both novice and seasoned principals in ensuring that they run their schools efficiently and effectively. Ward managers need to become more pro-active and get all their principals fully involved in the ward forums. This has great scope for development, especially in the rural areas, where principals can strengthen education through collaboration.

5.4 SUMMARY

This Chapter outlined the main conclusions drawn in this study. Further, based on the findings and the conclusions drawn in this study, relevant recommendations are made**.**

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APPENDIX 1:   PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

(INFORMED CONSENT BY PARTICIPANTS)

University of KwaZulu Natal

(Edgewood Campus)

Private Bag X03
Ashwood

3605

28 June 2011

Attention: _____

_____

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH INTERVIEWS

I am Surendra Vethaviasa Naidoo, a Masters student specialising in Education, Management and Leadership. I am studying through the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). Please be informed that I have sought the necessary permission from both the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education to conduct this study and permission has been granted. I therefore seek your permission to conduct an interview with you. The title of my study is:

Leadership development of school principals through communities of practice: A case study of one leadership practice community.

The purpose of this study is to explore the role played by leadership practice communities in developing the leadership capacity of school principals. Through my survey of literature on leadership development, there is evidence that much has been written on leadership development. However, not much has been researched or written on how leadership development can occur within communities of practice. This study aims to fill the gap that exists in literature.

The study will use semi-structured interviews. Participants will be interviewed for approximately 30 minutes and each interview will be voice-recorded. Responses will be treated with the strictest degree of confidentiality and pseudonyms will be used instead of

actual names in the reporting of data. You will be contacted well in advance for interviews. Your participation will always remain voluntary which means that you may withdraw from the study for any reason, at anytime if you so wish.

For further information on this research project, please feel free to contact my Supervisor,

Dr Inba Naicker at 031-2603461 or email at Naickeri1@ukzn.ac.za.

Your anticipated positive response in this regard is highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Mr S.V.Naidoo

(Student)

_____

Declaration

I,…………………………………………….(full name of participant) hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature, purpose and procedures for the study:

Leadership development of school principals through communities of practice: A case study of one leadership practice community.

I have also received, read and understood the written information about the study. I understand everything that has been explained to me and I consent to voluntarily take part in the study.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the research project at any time, should I so desire.

Signature of Participant:………………………………….. Date:…………………………

Signature of witness:……………………………………… Date:………………………..

Thanking you in advance.

S.V. Naidoo

APPENDIX 3- INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. **Leadership development of school principals through communities of practice: a case study of one leadership practice community.**

2. **Biographical information of participant principals**

2.1.   Age

2.2.   Gender   Male_____ Female_____

2.3.   Qualification/s

1.4   What are some of the leadership and management positions you have held?

 1.5.   Have you received any specialized training to undertake your duties as school principal? Discuss.

3. **Leadership Learning**

3.1.   What knowledge, skills and values regarding school principalship have you learned as a result of your participation in the Ward Forum?

3.2.   Tell me what forms/types of leadership learning have you experienced at the Ward Forum.

3.3.   Has the deliberations at the Ward Forum made you to become more reflective on your practice as a school principal? Explain.

4. **Transformation in Leadership Practice**

4.1.   Since you have been attending the Ward Forum, has there been any change in the manner in which you lead and manage your school? Tell me about some of these changes.

4.2. How does your staff view your leadership and management practice since you have been attending the Ward Forum meetings? Elaborate.

4.3. How has your learning from the ward forum impacted on your relationships with:

4.3.1. School Governing Body?

4.3.2. Department of Education officials?

4.3.3. Learners?

4.3.4. Parents?

5. **Challenges and possibilities for Leadership Development**

5.1. What are some of the obstacles and/or problems that you experience in this Ward Forum?

5.2. What do you think are some of the possible ways in which these obstacles and/or problems could be overcome?

5.3. As a school principal, do you believe that the Ward Forum can be used as an agency to develop principals? Explain.

5.4. What more could the Ward Forum do to professionally develop principals?

APPENDIX 4:   LANGUAGE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

25 Maple Crescent   Phone 031 – 7075912
Circle Park   0823757722
KLOOF   Fax 031 - 7110458
3610   E-mail:
    wyebanksec@telkomsa.net

Dr Saths Govender

15 NOVEMBER 2011

LANGUAGE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

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

'LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS THROUGH
COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE: A CASE STUDY OF ONE LEADERSHIP
PRACTICE COMMUNITY' by S. V. Naidoo, student no. 895133919.

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