Professional learning communities and teaching and learning culture in three secondary schools in the Pinetown District.

By

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ABSTRACT

The need for working together of educators in schools is up-and-coming. In the olden days teachers has been working in isolation and this practice has limited their opportunities of sharing information and benefit from other educators. Therefore, introduction of professional learning communities has given educators platform to learn from one another and share whatever information that they have. School principals as leaders can play a significant role in promoting PLCs in schools. As a result a qualitative case study was undertaken to explore the role of professional learning communities and teaching and learning culture in schools. The focus of the study was based on the assumption that these principals would have encouraged educators to share information in professional learning communities after they completed an Advance Certificate in Education - School Leadership (ACESL) which promoted PLCs.

The study has made use of semi-structured interviews to generate data. Interviews were recorded and transcribed before they were analysed. The data from transcriptions was coded and themes were developed from the coded data. The documents were analysed through critical analysis which was done to ensure reliability and conformability of documents. The results of the study reveal that, (i) educators from these schools have never heard about PLCs before so it means that their principals have never implemented what they have learnt from ACESL. (ii) Even though the PLCs were not formally introduced to the educators but there is an indication that educators work as teams and team teaching is encouraged in some of the schools. (iii) IQMS assists the SMT to identify areas of development and develop educators. (iv) Teaching and learning cannot only be promoted by encouraging educators to attend to their classes and interact with one another; learners also need some form of encouragement. (v) Parents need to be involved in the education of their children because it is important for them to know what their children are doing in school. (vi) Some principals invest on resources that will assist educators to improve their teaching.

DECLARATION

I, Sibongile Aurelia Shange, declare that:

I.   The research reported in this dissertation apart from where otherwise indicated is my original work.

II.   This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination of any other university.

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This dissertation was submitted with/without my approval.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my late mother who was passionate about education and went back to school to upgrade her nursing profession at the age of forty.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABBREVIATIONS	
ANA	Annual National Assessment
IQMS	Integrated Quality Management System
PLC	Professional Learning Communities
SMT	School Management Team
SDT	School Development Team
USA	United States of America
EPLC	Effective Professional Learning Communities
NSC	National Senior Certificate
ACESL	Advanced Certificate in Education School Leadership

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CHAPTER 1
ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1   Introduction

Professional development is not the solution for all problems, although it lies at the heart of almost all educational endeavours to advance teaching and learning (Ono & Ferreira, 2010). Yet professional development is still seen as the best means to change teaching practice (Ono & Ferreira, 2010). Apart from courses offered by educational institutions, workshops and seminars; teachers can still develop themselves professionally through working in collaboration with other colleagues and form professional learning communities.

This chapter is an orientation to the study; therefore it is setting the scene for the discussion of key issues relevant to the study. The chapter provides background and rationale for the study. Two research questions that give direction in the study are also indicated. Furthermore, this chapter provides the significance of the study; an explanation of how professional learning communities operate; the literature that was reviewed in the process of conducting the study is also outlined, as well as the underpinning theoretical framework. It also provides a transitory review of the research design and methodology used in the study. Lastly, the layout of the study, which spells out what each chapter of the dissertation entails, is given.

1.2   Background to the study

Coe, Carl and Frick (2010) state that, 'The culture of teaching and learning in many countries, including South Africa, has traditionally been one of isolation. Once teachers enter the classroom, the tendency is to close the door and leave it that way." Similarly, Maloney and Konza (2011, p. 76) also state that, "…teachers in many schools still work in relative isolation." However, there is a great amount of studies which have established that teachers can help each other and develop professionally from other colleagues' experiences. This is supported by Hord (2008, p. 13) as he indicates that "The transfer of new learning to the classroom is enabled by the practice of peers helping peers." This idea implies that teachers

can invite or call into one another's classrooms with the intention of monitoring, take notes, and share observations; in doing this, teachers are expected to be truthful and open about what the teacher knows and does not know. Drawing from the above citations, it can be inferred that working collaboratively, sharing information and experiences can assist the teacher to get assistance and support from other teachers.

Furthermore, Malony and Konza (2011) state that teachers will have concern in understanding students well, generating information about their professional practice, becoming better teaching practitioners, and getting better the environment in which educational practice is imbedded. In the school where I currently work as a post level one educator. I have observed that educators do not share information with other educators and we do not work together; therefore we may not be regarded as a community of learners. The teachers in the school where I work enter the classroom and close the door and leave it that way. However, Hord (2008) states that peers helping peers can enable the transfer of new learning to the classroom. Teachers are encouraged to do class visits to monitor, share observation and take notes. When this culture is well developed in the community of learners, teachers are truthful and openly share what they already know and do not know and areas where they need professional support.

The concept of professional learning communities suggests that there is teamwork and teachers do not work in isolation. Sargent and Hannum (2009) state that Teachers must frequently work together and share their professional experiences, for instance, through teacher partnership in planning lessons; during activities of shared study and dialogue about teaching practices; or during activities of peer observation. This indicates that teachers participating in professional learning communities work together, plan together and support each other in their teaching practices. In support of this, Hord (2009) states that there are six research-based dimensions of professional communities. These dimensions are; shared principles, principles and dream of what should the school be like in a long run; joint and helpful leadership; helpful structural environment; helpful relational environment; group learning and sharing of practices by peers.

1.3   Rationale of the study

When I look at the Annual National Assessment (ANA) results of my school as well as that of the province, the performance of the learners is very low. The Department of Education, the principals, as well as other relevant stakeholders, need to create, sustain and enhance the culture of teaching and learning in schools so that the performance of learners will improve. One way of improving the performance of learners is through teacher empowerment. One of the possibilities of empowering teachers is through the establishment of communities of learners among teachers (Hord, 2009).

The focus of the study is on the connection between communities of professionals who are learning collaboratively and the culture of teaching and learning in schools. Professional development of educators plays a fundamental role in the creation of teaching and learning cultures in schools (DuFour, 2011). One may argue that the more the educators are capacitated the better they perform in class and they also gain confidence to stand in front of the learners and teach. One way of facilitating professional development of teachers is through PLCs. Sargent and Hannum (2009) make it clear that in PLCs teachers interrelate and work together regularly around subject of culture of teaching and learning and participate in developing and using knowledge about enhanced practices for student learning.

1.4   Aims and objectives

The objectives of the study are:
- To investigate the contribution of PLCs to the teaching and learning culture.
- To determine the strategies that teachers put in place to promote a culture of teaching and learning.

1.5 Research questions

In exploring professional learning communities and teaching and learning culture in three secondary schools in the Pinetown District, this study used the following research questions:

- What is the contribution of PLCs to the teaching and learning culture in schools?
- What strategies do teachers put in place to promote a culture of teaching and learning in schools?

1.6   Clarification of key concepts/terms

Vescio, Ross and Adams (2006) state that the concept of a PLCs is founded on a business sector's foundation concerning the organization's capacity to learn. Scholars like Sargent and Hunnum (2009, p. 25) use the concept of professional learning this way "Teacher professional learning communities, or communities of practice can be defined as environments in which teachers interact and collaborate regularly around issues of teaching and learning and engage in the production and consumption of knowledge about improved practices for students."

However, Rismark and Solvberg (2011) posit that establishment of communities of learners implies that the focus of schools and teachers is on professional development, and this is likely to enhance student learning. I have used the concept of professional learning communities this way "it is a structure where by professionals come together and share knowledge for teaching and learning to take place as it should be." Schmoker (2006, p.106) indicated that PLCs have been labelled everything from "communities of practice" to "self managing teams." However, Senge (1990, p.3) takes his definition from the business sector as he describes a core theory of a learning community as "people continually expand their capacity to create desired results." Senge's viewpoint was applied to education sector with the admonition that every organization's emphasis should be on learning than on simply infrastructural improvements. Reichstetter (2006, p.1) provides the following detailed definition "A professional learning community is made up of team members who regularly collaborate toward continued improvement in meeting learner needs through a shared curricular-focused vision."

When looking at different explanations of communities of learning professionals, the terms joint, collaborative, and shared are usually connected with learning and leadership (Hord, 2009). Eaker, DuFour, and DuFour (2002, p.23) came up with their explanation of leadership in a PLC context, as they state that "Administrators hold important leadership positions, but in a professional learning community the view of leadership is extended to include teachers."

1.7 Literature review

Countries like the United States of America, China and Sweden have implemented PLCs as a way of developing teachers professionally in their schools (Sargent & Hannum, 2009). Some of the schools in South Africa have also started to implement professional learning communities (Coe, Carl & Frick, 2010). The principals of some of these schools which have started with the implementation of PLCs completed their Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) in PLC at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Therefore, this study focuses on PLCs and teaching and learning culture. It seeks to understand the contribution of PLCs in teaching and learning culture in schools. International and national literature will be reviewed in this chapter. The aim of this chapter is to offer some insight about critical issues and major trends relating to PLCs and teaching and learning culture.

1.8 Research design and methodology

Since the study intends to understand the role of PLC and teaching and learning culture in schools; the study is therefore located in the interpretive paradigm. Guba and Lincoln (1985) describe Interpretive paradigm as a paradigm whereby the researcher does not aim to predict what people will do, but rather to describe how people create meaning of their worlds, and how they create sense of their particular behaviour. In terms of epistemology in this study, the knowledge on the effectiveness of PLC's on teaching and learning culture in schools will be constructed based on what the principals and teachers say. The study has adopted a qualitative approach. Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 3) attest that, "qualitative research consists of a set of

interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning."

In terms of methodology, the study has made use of a case study. According to Rule and John (2011, p. 4) "A case study is a systematic and in-depth investigation of a particular instance in its context in order to generate knowledge." The case in the study is three secondary schools. In this study the researcher has looked at the case of PLC's and teaching and learning culture. According to Rule and John (2011) a case study gives researchers an opportunity to have an in-depth examination of a particular instance, rather than sketchily looking at numerous instances. A case study is going to give me an in depth understanding of the effectiveness of PLC's on teaching and learning culture.

In generating data, the researcher has made use of an interview method. Dowling and Brown (2010) claim that an interview enable researchers to deeply discover complex issues, they facilitate the personal engagement between researchers and participants during data generation, interviews further provides researchers an opportunity to give clarification, probe and to prompt during the process. A semi structured interview was chosen as it will grant the researcher an opportunity to probe while using a prearranged guide.

In this study, the researcher interviewed three secondary school principals and one teacher from each school at KwaMashu and Inanda Townships. In selecting the research sample the researcher purposely selected these school principals and teachers because the researcher wanted to focus on the principals who have developed a culture of teaching and learning in their schools.

The data was recorded using a digital recorder. Once the data was recorded, it was transcribed verbatim into written format and analysed qualitatively.

1.9 Limitations

In the study that I am doing there could be some limitations that I might encounter. The first limitation could be that I might find that the principal who had done Ace in PLC in the school that I am researching is no longer in that school. The second limitation could be that there are no minutes of the meeting so I would not know whether the meetings between the principal and staff did take place and what transpired in those meetings. Furthermore, the educators that I will interview will be tempted to say the good things about their principal because they are friends with the principal.

1.10 The structure of the study

This section outlines the manner in which the report of the study on the role that is played by professional learning communities in enhancing the culture of teaching and learning in schools is structured. This report is divided into five chapters and these are summarised below.

Chapter One

This chapter is the general idea of the study. It provides the background and purpose of the study. The two research questions that guided the study are also provided. Furthermore, this chapter provides the significance of the study, an explanation of what professional learning communities can be understood to be. It also provides an overview of the literature that was reviewed in the process of conducting the study, as well as the underpinning theoretical framework. It also provides a brief review of research design and methodology that was used and the demarcation of the problem.

Chapter Two

This chapter reviews literature on professional learning communities and teaching and learning culture in schools and also how professional learning communities and teaching and learning culture connects. In addition, a critical review of national and international literature that is relevant to the research topic was done.

Chapter Three

This chapter presents a detailed explanation of research design, methods and procedures that were followed in carrying out the study, and research instruments that were used for generating data for this research.

Chapter Four

This chapter presents and discusses data that was generated through semi-structured interviews with the participants. The themes that emerged from analysing data generated are presented and discussed.

Chapter Five

This chapter presents a synthesis of the key findings of the research on the basis of which recommendations were made.

1.11   Chapter summary

This chapter introduced the theme of research project namely, professional learning communities and teaching and learning culture in schools. It presented the background and rationale of the study, research questions and the importance of the study. Brief descriptions of the concept of professional learning communities, teaching and learning culture, research design and methodology are done. The next chapter offers a review of the literature on professional learning communities and teaching and learning culture in secondary schools.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter intends to explore the literature on learning communities of professional as well as the teaching and learning culture in schools. The main intention is to gain understanding of the role played by professional learning communities on improving the teaching and learning culture in schools. The review of related literature considers both the national and the international perspectives. The literature review is organised into eleven major components. The first component is the discussion of the concept framing the study; discussion of the origins of Professional Learning Communities; the chapter looks at the importance of Professional Learning Communities; roles of Professional Learning Communities are discussed; the international perspective of Professional Learning Communities; Professional Learning Communities in the South African context; the chapter also discusses challenges of Professional Learning Communities; benefits of Professional Learning Communities on both teaching and learning are discussed; debates on creation of professional learning communities and promotion of teaching and learning culture and lastly leadership and school culture.

2.2 Conceptual framework

This study is framed mainly by the model which was established by Shirley Hord. She established a model which she calls, six research-based proportions of professional learning communities. Hord (2009) states that these dimensions are, shared values, beliefs, and vision of what the school aspires to be; supportive and shared leadership; supportive structural conditions; supportive relational conditions; collective learning and peers sharing their practice to gain feedback.

Scholars like Bolam, R. McMahon, A. Stoll, L. Thomas, S. , Wallace, M. , Greenwood, A. , Hawkey, K. , Ingram, M. , Atkinson, A. , Smith, M. , (2005) came up with eight key descriptions of an effective professional learning community (EPLC): shared principles and

dream; joint accountability for students' learning; static collaborative learning; individual and communal professional learning; reflective professional enquiry; honesty, partnerships and networks; complete membership; common reliance, admiration and support. However this study is underpinned by Hords' model.

2.2.1 Shared beliefs, values and vision of what the school should be.

This study is underpinned by shared values, beliefs and the future visualization the school. Hord (1997) posits that mutual philosophy, principles and dream of what the school should look like and operate is very important because in this dimension the staff members are stimulated not only to take part in the development of dream, but also to utilise the dream as a guideline in making decisions relating to teaching and learning within a school. Hord (1997, p.119) explains that the manner in which the staff grows into a learning community of professionals that involves the development of commitment and capacity of all individuals in a group; as a PLC endeavours to "push for learning of high intellectual quality." As a result, PLCs bring about a great input in student achievement. What Hord is saying shows that if the staff is empowered and highly qualified they will be able to produce learners who are of high intellectual quality. Hord (1997), further claims that each and every member of the staff is accountable for his/her behaviour, but the common good is placed on par with private ambitions.

2.2.2 Shared and supportive leadership

In the shared and supportive leadership Hord (1997), states that the principals' involvement in professional growth is more important that the principals' omnicompetence. This original association forged among school principals and teachers leads to a joint and collegial leadership in the school, where all develop competently.

Furthermore, Boyd (1992) identifies the similarity which is very strong with people or human factors. These strong comparables are: optimistic teacher approach towards education, student, and transformation; students' heightened attention and commitment with learning (this may be

construed as both an outcome and an input, it seems); norms of unbroken significant examination and constant development; extensively shared dream or reasoning sense; norm of participation in choice making; mutual association among members of staff; optimistic, considerate student-teacher-administrator associations; a communal sense within the school; and two factors beyond the school staff-supportive community approach; and community members as associates and partners. Boyd (1992) mentions physical and people as highly interactive and influential factors.

2.2.3 Supportive structural conditions

The other dimension that underpins this study is supportive structural conditions. Hord (1997) attest that officially reorganizing the utilization of time in schools so that members of staff are guided in their working together is a main issue to be resolved by reorganization of schools. She further states that time is a resource and the shortage of time, is one of the most complicated struggles faced by schools and districts." For teachers to meet and share whatever information they have they need time.

In this dimension Hord (1997) posits that if the school is small and physical closeness of the teachers to one another, teaching roles that are inter-reliant, communication arrangements, school independence and teacher enablement are some of the factors that support learning community. The shortage of resources is the most important obstacle in sustaining changes in schools. These resources do not only involve money but time as well.

Tolerance with performance efforts and student achievement result to a willingness to allow the time essential for change. When the managerial outline of the school generates a focal point on protection and control rather than teaching and growth, it hinders the growth of change (Boyd, 1992). Crowded, uncontrollable schools provide for this undertaking of control and make a setting that reduces teacher career satisfaction and limits. The inert features of the school are significant due to their influence on the development of approach and philosophy, the relationship facilitation, and the development of a shared and extensive culture.

Boyd (1992), states that physical arrangements also can add to students' feelings of remoteness and estrangement. Dropping out of students can be attributed to these feelings of remoteness and estrangement. Boyd (1992) further states that research on school connected issues has focused mainly on the manner in which students behave in school, on the notion that students are the ones who should adjust in order to fit in the school environment.

2.2.4 Supportive relational conditions

The other dimension is supportive relational conditions. Hord (1997) states that dropping staff separation, rising staff ability, providing a compassionate and resourceful environment, and enhancing the standard of the school's programs for learners play a significant role in constructing help build a conducive background for change and development. She therefore claims that helpful circumstances verify when, where and how the staff often comes together as an entity to perform the learning, choice making, problem solving and original work that symbolize a professional learning community. Furthermore, Boyd (1992) states that barriers to school improvement effort are caused by organizations in the school that add to teacher separation and the emotion that the individual cannot create a difference. A change in the physical plan of schools in order to make it possible for professional interaction among teachers will lessen the separation.

2.2.5 Collective learning

Collective learning is another dimension which is also important. Hord (1997) states that introspective dialogue, in which staff conducts discussion about students and teaching and learning, identifying related concerns and difficulties. She thinks that as principals and teachers seek information by questioning one another they form a community. This question helps the teachers and principals to thrash the alienation caused by different specialisations of grade level and subject matter.

Seo and Han (2012) further states that the other element is collaboration. Collaboration channels the extent to which teachers shared their practice and worked together in order to

improve teaching and learning: (a) Teachers in this school respect and trust each other; (b) Teachers in this school discuss student guidance and share ideas with their colleagues; (c) Teachers in this school discuss instructional practices and share ideas and suggestions for improving student learning; (d) Teachers in this school have colleagues observe their classrooms; (e) Teachers in this school visit other teachers' classrooms and observe peers; and (f) Teachers in this school work in teams in order to improve instructional practice.

2.2.6 Peers sharing their practice to gain feedback

The last dimension is peers sharing their practice to gain feedback. Hord (1997) states that re-evaluation of a teacher's behaviour by colleagues are the benchmark in the learning communities of professionals. This process is not to assess however it forms part of the "peers helping peers." Such review is performed often in class visits done by teachers who come to observe, script notes, and discuss observations with each other. Hord (1997) further states that the procedure is founded on the wish for individuals and community development and is facilitated by the joint respect and dependability of staff component.

This model is relevant for understanding PLCs and teaching and learning culture in schools. It is imperative that in professional learning communities, learners learn and for learning to be of quality teachers must be empowered. Teachers need to share their ideas and be supportive. Therefore, this model is suitable in my study.

2.3 Origins of Professional Learning Communities

According to Thompson, Gregg and Niska (2004) the concept of PLCs started in the business sector with the belief that organisations can learn. Another perspective of the origins of professional learning communities is provided by Wenger (1998). He asserts that the most important thing behind this hard work is based on the argument that PLCs are a means of connection whereby sharing and transmitting important and valued information brought by individuals and groups and that they provide firms with a very important source of

organizational learning and incremental improvement as community members will enhance their practice through the gained knowledge.

Vescio, Ross and Adams (2008) share similar sentiments with Gregg and Niska (2004) as they claim that the idea of professional learning communities is founded on the principles borrowed from the business sector; these principles involve organizations' capacity to learn. The concept of learning organizations was modified to fit into the education sector thus it is professional learning community. This is because the education sector wanted to instil a culture of collaboration and cooperation among teachers. Another perspective is provided by Rosenholtz (1998) in both the public education sector and the private corporate world; attention in the eighties began to focus on the pressure of work settings on workers. Hord (2008) claims that during the 1980s, our education fraternity started to introduce team teaching and open classrooms, educators began to talk about teachers' workplace and its effect on teachers' self-esteem, knowledge and skills and other characteristics. Hord (2008) further posits that a change of working in isolation and the breaking of the physical barriers to teacher interaction gave teachers an idea of coming together to work with each other and share their experiences. Professional learning communities are branded by a set of magnitude of attributes such as shared values, vision and beliefs; shared and supportive leadership; supportive structural conditions; supportive relational conditions; collective intentional learning and its application; and peers sharing (DuFour, 2004 & Hord, 2008).

2.4 Importance of Professional Learning Communities

This section begins with the importance of PLCs. In a paper that was presented by Hord (2009) Professional Learning Community is described through defining each word that makes up the concept. Professionals – are people who are in charge and responsible for conducting a successful instructional program to learners so they can learn effectively. Learning – is the performance in which professionals employ in order to improve their understanding and skills. Community – are people coming together in a form of a group and engage in meaningful activities with an intention of learning from one another.

My contention in this study is that every teacher must be given time to meet and talk with other teachers in a professional learning community setting. There is a group of researchers such as Hord (2008), DuFour (1999), Seo and Han (2012) and Steyn (2013) who claim that professional learning communities are about teaching and learning in schools. They further claim that teachers learn from each other when they work collaboratively. Hord (2008) claims that people everywhere generally have the same opinion that the idea behind schools is learning and the proper learning is informed by quality teaching. Similarly Rismark and Solvberg (2011) attest that to qualify to be a learning community of professionals calls for schools and teachers to change their focus to teacher collaborative learning within schools in order to improve student learning. In addition, Sargent and Hannum concur with other researchers as they claim that in professional learning communities, teachers work together and collaborate often around issues of teaching and learning. Critiques of this conceptualisation like DuFour (2004), also state that ensuring that learners are taught should not be the most important task in schools, but ensuring that they learn is the important task.

Vescio *et al.* (2008) on a review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning. Using 11 research articles, the study found that teaching practices of teachers who participate in PLCs changes and improves. Similarly, Steyn (2013) found that collaboration among teachers in schools may provide exposure to new ideas and opportunities to learn together and enhance their professional development. These findings strengthen the significance of professional learning communities. Seo and Han (2012) attest that in PLCs, school administrators and teachers constantly look for information to empower themselves and the new knowledge helps them to improve their practices. The main objective is high accomplishment and ongoing development for all learners regardless of their individual circumstances. In addition, the purpose of PLCs is to enhance professionals' effectiveness and student learning.

2.5 Roles of Professional Learning Communities

For many years considerable empirical research has been conducted on learning communities of professional so as to understand the roles of PLCs. In a study conducted in China by Sargent and Hunnum (2009), shares the same findings with the study done in Korea by Seo and Han (2012) as they find that teachers do collective lesson planning and they are also encouraged to share their professional understanding and practice as well as learn from each other.

Another role of PLCs was depicted in a paper that was presented by Thompson, *et al.* (2004) as they share the same view with Morrissey (2000) when they claim that as educators work collaboratively to accomplish what they cannot achieve when they work in isolation, they make an environment that brings up common cooperation, emotional support and personal growth through PLCs. Furthermore, DuFour (2004) posits that in PLCs, teachers work in groups, engaging in a continuous exploration which promotes in-depth reciprocal thinking and learning. This process consequently brings about improvement in the levels of student achievement. Furthermore, Hipp, Huffman, Pankake and Olivier (2008) envision a professional learning community with peers who come together and scrutinize one another to provide criticism on their professional practices, to assist in student learning, also to raise their capacity. Hord (1997) claims that a successful school is the school that has developed the community of learning professionals, where teachers learn from one another and share a mutual responsibility of improving their teaching practices in order to improve student learning.

Louis, Kruse and Raywid (1996), posit that in the schools where PLCs have been formed successfully, the principals' focus has been on asking questions rather than coming up with solutions. However DuFour (1999) argues that the questions principals pose tend not to address the issues of school improvement but often deal more with "administrivia." Moreover, (Hord, 2008) asserts that a major theory of the professional learning community idea deals with continuous and cooperative learning of the school faculty. A collaborative learning culture of professionals that involves procedures and practices enhances and promotes

capacity building among teachers. Concurring with Hord's view, Cowan (2003), states that the channel for learning communities of professionals in schools enhancement takes place when joint effort to accomplish shared objectives becomes purposeful, planned, and imperative.

The main purpose for group learning is to be appropriate. This means that fresh knowledge you acquired and the manner in which you impart that knowledge in the learning environment must be in line with the school's dream of improving student achievement (Hord, 1997). DuFour and Eaker (1998) recognize the five features of effective learning teams. The basic component of these teams is a mutual trust in student learning. The next component is open communication which is due to the expression of trust which enables peer support and collaboration. Application and adherence are essential characteristics of collective learning teams to an organizational protocol. The acceptance of responsibility for decision-making by teachers becomes the next characteristic. Lastly, continuous assessment and reflection of the teams' progress adds value in retaining of the collective learning process.

DuFour and Eaker (1998) claim that being more of an asset for your organization depends on how much has been learned or how much capability one has for learning. With PLCs, the hypothesis advocates that teachers' awareness is the main creative power in modern education. An unspoken reference to human capital theory ensures that PLC's dialogue is able to link educational system's success to specific personal qualities of teachers. This connection means that educational outcomes are a responsibility of each and every teacher.

Even though the idea of ongoing learning suggests individual accountability, supporters of PLCs openly share out tasks for development of individuals. For example, DuFour (2005) constantly and repetitively emphasises the belief that teachers advance their classroom practice individually and collectively. In view of statements such as this, advocates of professional learning communities associate prosperity of schools with each and every teacher's eagerness to learn and uphold change. Consequently, each teacher is constructed as being predominantly, perhaps exclusively, accountable for their students' success. Reichstetter (2006, p. 2) claims that "The development of professional learning communities gives educators an opportunity for them to deal with external pressures, focusing inward on

their school to address the needs of students and to experience the personal contentment that comes from being a professional in control of the important decisions about teaching and learning."

2.6 International perspective of Professional Learning Communities

Seo and Han (2012) claim that at present, a number of educators and policy makers recommend formation of PLCs in schools. Many countries have adopted PLCs because they believe that they facilitate change in teachers' practices and improve the performance of the learners in class. Seo and Han (2012), state that the concept of professional learning communities has been formally adopted in Korea in 2011 by the Minister of Education, Science and Technology. The superintendent of the Seoul metropolitan Office of Education announced plan and called for transformation of the schools into learning communities. Koreans believe that school administrators are to be encouraged to build a collegial bond with teachers in order to share leadership, power and decision-making as well as to establish a conducive environment which will allow for ongoing interaction among teachers. In Korea, teachers have been encouraged to share their professional knowledge and practise, learn from one another and work collaboratively with colleagues to improve student learning.

The other developed country that has adopted PLCs is USA. In the study conducted by Thompson, Gregg and Niska (2004) they state that many K-12 schools are striving to turn into PLCs with an expectation that learners' learning will be developed. This was based on the assumption that when elders commit themselves to talking collaboratively about taking action towards teaching and learning, improved learner learning and learner achievement will be realised. These findings were corroborated by another study done by Hipp, Huffman, Pankake and Olivier (2008) in two schools one PreK-8 and the other a middle school counter Thompson, Gregg and Niska (2004)'s argument when they say the staff in both schools continued with their obligation to re-culture their schools in ways that bring school development through numerous, significant cooperative process.

Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson and Orphanos (2009) counter Thompson, Greg and Niska (2004) when they claim that teachers in U.S. report that there is limited professional teamwork in crafting sharing practices and curriculum. However, the teamwork that occurs tends to be weak and not focused on reinforcement of teaching and learning. In addition, these American teachers find most of the professional development activities offered to them not assisting. Teachers give reasonably high marks to content-related learning opportunities; with 6 of 10 teachers (59 percent) saying this training was helpful to them. But less than half of the teachers discovered that professional development received from other areas is valuable. Significant difference exists between schools and states in both support and opportunities for professional learning.

Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson and Orphanos (2009) further attest that the number of secondary school teachers who attend professional development organised at a district level is higher than the number of their counterparts in the elementary schools. Among states, Arkansas, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Vermont had considerably great number of teachers partaking in professional learning compared to the states standard. U.S. teachers report a tiny professional teamwork in crafting sharing practices and curriculum, and the teamwork that takes place appears not to be strong and unstable on reinforcement of teaching and learning.

In the project done in London By Bolam, R. McMahon, A. Stoll, L. Thomas, S. , Wallace, M., Greenwood, A. , Hawkey, K. , Ingram, M. , Atkinson, A. , Smith, M. , (2005) find that *pupil voice* is another important element of PLC membership. As the project advanced, it transpired that teachers in the case study were taking into cognisance the views and opinions of pupils at a varying extent, using different approaches. This was true of all types of schools, including nursery and special schools. Hence, they propose the inclusion of this aspect in the future thinking and practice about the membership and operation of PLCs.

2.7 Professional Learning Communities in the South African context.

The idea of professional development of educators in numerous developing countries has been deserted due to financial constraints; as a result there is a heavy emphasis on pre-service education. However, when professional development is provided, the cascade approach is utilised to reach masses of participants in a short space of time (Ono & Ferreira 2010). According to Ono and Ferreira (2010), the lack of adequate teacher professional development in South Africa probably has more serious effect than others. This is further reinforced by de Clercq (2008) as de Clercq attests that many recent assessment research studies together with education departments have pointed out that in South African schools, teacher performance remains low and contributes considerably to the weak performance of learners in the last decade. Ono and Ferreira (2010) do not speak well of professional development as the most recent programmes are delivered through workshops, seminars, conferences or courses. However, these efforts have been condemned as being fragmented, short, disjointed encounters that are not put in the context of a real classroom situation (Ono & Ferreira, 2010).

South Africa is one of the developing countries that have been conducting professional development programmes through cascade training. Ono and Ferreira (2010, p. 61) refer to cascade training as "training-the-trainer" and this ensures that the communication "flows down" from expects and boffins, ultimately to the teachers. These researchers argue that when message is transmitted through cascade training, chances are high that the crucial information may be watered down or misinterpreted. They further maintain that cascade training saves money because those who have been trained can then train others and by so doing money will be saved. This is the approach that the South African Department of Education adopted and relied on when OBE, Curriculum 2005, Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) and CAPS were introduced. As a result these researchers propose that there must be a balance between child and adult learning. Ono and Ferreira (2010, p. 62) further maintain that "professional development programmes should be knowledge centred, learner centred, community centred and assessment centred to get the most out of teacher learning."

2.8 Challenges of Professional Learning Communities

An empirical study which was conducted by Maloney and Konza (2011, p.83) titled: Becoming a community of professional learning or not; revealed that "when differences in philosophical perspectives arose, some teachers did not appear to have the confidence to voice their opinions or challenge the more dominant views. It also revealed that the actively participating teachers found the experience worthwhile and positive for stimulating an examination of their educational practices, others found the experience daunting and did not feel empowered to disagree with colleagues."

Furthermore, Maloney and Konza (2011) claim that when attendance of group meetings was done after school and also optional, only the minority of staff attended and this could limit the growth of understanding. Whereas, Steyn (2013) states that schools need to guide educators to partake in appropriate continuing professional development programmes and to support and provide access to such programmes. However, Sargent and Hannum (2009) claim that the making up of space and time into teachers' busy lives as well as institutional incentives make teacher professional communities promising and worth educators' effort.

The most recent study was conducted by Steyn (2013) on building professional learning communities to improve continuing professional development in South Africa, this researcher indicates that studies confirm the important role that teacher collaboration plays in increasing school and student performance; however, there are barriers to achieve this. Isolation between teachers may hinder the development of such practices and therefore limit the opportunities for teacher to develop their professional knowledge. Maloney and Konza (2011), similarly claim that some of the educators took an inactive part or avoided group meetings. If teachers isolate themselves and refrain from attending professional learning communities, these communities become a futile exercise.

DuFour (2006) also states that even when educators and school managers make a good reliance effort to evaluate their schools, they face major hindrances. All schools have their individual organizational ethos; the norms, principles, prospects and practices that make up

the standard for a school and direct the educators' work within the school. Both school managers and teachers are naturally so absorbed in old ways of doing things; and they find it difficult to change from their traditional way of doing things to conventional practices from a fresh, critical viewpoint.

In the study done by Horn and Little (2009), on Attending to Problems of Practice: Routines and Resources for Professional Learning in Teachers' Workplace Interaction. Using two groups, Algebra group and Academic literacy group, the study found that both groups were populated by active, competed, dedicated, considerate teachers who took their professional responsibilities seriously. Yet these groups were found to differ in the opportunities for learning they constructed through the micro-level discourse routines they employed in responding to expressed problems of practice (normalising and related moves) and the meso-level participation routines they used to organize major parts of their work together such as (check-in and lesson walk-through). However, in the study they argue that differences in the generativist of the group discourse results from each group's collective orientation and its contextual resources and constrains and cannot be attributed to the individual teachers' professional and personal disposition.

Other studies that have been conducted in the Chinese context include Sargent and Hannum (2009). Through this study these scholars find that there is a likely link between the capability of teachers to set up and sustain professional learning communities and the availability of financial resources in their schools. However, these scholars quickly added that there is no experimental research that they know that had been conducted to investigate this relationship. These scholars state that poorly resourced schools may find it difficult to support teachers financially to attend PLCs activities that take place externally. They also added that teachers' research projects may also be negatively affected if reference material and computers are no easily accessible to teachers. Similarly, Ono and Ferreira (2010) conducted a study in the South African context. They posit that professional growth of teachers has been ignored because of finance problems and heavy emphasis on pre-service education which involves "training-the-trainer." The chances are, when information is cascaded in this approach; crucial information may be watered down or misinterpreted or even distorted.

The other challenge according to Fullan (1996) is that when teachers are given more tasks to do, their stress levels usually increase, suffer exhaustion and they become miserable at work. Fullan (1996) credits this occurrence of teacher empowerment to disjointed leadership and over-saturation. Fullan suggests a more all-inclusive interaction and joint leadership method.

2.9 Benefits of Professional Learning Communities on both teachers and learners

In the study done by Sargent and Hannum (2009) on Doing More With Less: Teachers Professional Learning Communities in Resource - Constrained Primary Schools in Rural China, reveals that it is probable that in the course of the organization of PLCs, teachers may have the chance to be involved in influencing educational standards of practice in China. They further state that it is surely possible that the implementation of curricular and educational priorities is the strong role of state policy that frames teachers' perceptions of issues facing their own schools and their own practice.

The study done in the US by Hord (1997) offers further benefits of Professional Learning Communities. Hord (1997) posits that within the disciplines that are characterised by PLCs, the teachers had worked collaboratively and altered their method of teaching in class. Consequently, they engaged learners in more challenging learning activities, and learners attained better academic results in math, science, history and reading as compared to students in traditionally planned disciplines. The study found that teachers and other staff members experience more contentment and greater self-esteem, while the rate of absenteeism become lower and students drop out decreases. Teamwork method in professional learning can encourage school alteration that goes beyond individual classrooms. Students in the school get assistance when all teachers learn together. However, in the study done in Korea by Seo and Han (2012) they found that collaborative practice such as having colleagues observe their classrooms, visiting other teachers' classrooms and observe peers and work in teams was relatively lower than other elements of collaboration.

The benefits of professional learning communities have been differently justified by different scholars. There are researchers who claim that professional learning communities are established with the aim of advancing learners' performance and teacher practices. Among them are scholars like Vescio, Ross and Adams (2008) who maintain that partaking in a learning community results to change in teaching way. Similarly, Ono and Ferreira (2010) posit that professional growth is the priority of nearly every educational endeavour to improve teaching and learning.

Furthermore, DuFour (2006, p.9) attest that, "Schools that take a plunge and actually begin doing work of a PLC develop their capacity to help all students learn at high level far more effectively than schools that spend years preparing to become PLCs through reading or even training." However Hord (2004) attest that a fundamental principle of a professional learning community is to facilitate and promote capacity building through determined professional empowerment. In the professional learning community framework both the principal and teachers must be involved for competence building to be a success (Hord, 2004). The expected results of the school based PLC is to involve both educators and school management in decision making and problem solving. The main assignment of the PLC is to employ the organizations' ability to enhance student achievement (Hord, 2004).

2.10 Debates on creation of PLCs and promotion of Teaching and Learning Culture

Hipp, *et al*. (2008) conducted a study which investigated the common connection among professional learning communities and school society. In the study they find that school society results from interpersonal relations among the educators, group of educators, managers and others, as well as the joint philosophy, approach and worth of school personnel. Deal and Peterson (1990) similarly claim that culture symbolizes the shared hypothesis, philosophy, principles, as well as the behaviour that comprise the standards for the school that profiles how professionals act, reflect and experience. Basically stated organizational culture is the way things are prepared around here. Masitsa (2005) also emphasises that in order for all stakeholders to be able to take responsibility of everything they need to be involved in the formulation of the mission and dream of the school.

In the American context, a study by Mohabir (2009) found that a number of variables as well as the arrangement of the school and objectives, communal systems, and traditions of the organization that linked student achievement to principal leadership were recognized. It has been brought to a conclusion that dreams, mission and objectives are the most important paths that the principals need to take in order to influence student achievement and shape the school's direction. Bausmith and Barry (2011) concur with Mohabir (2009) when they say PLCs are normally characterized by a set of attributes or dimensions like shared philosophy, principles and dream.

A culture of the school is not stagnant but it is a recurring contact in which principles, attitudes, and talents repeatedly support one another (Hipp,*et al.* 2008). Weeks (2012), confirms that as he also indicated that the establishment and shaping of the culture of the school that maintains teaching and learning culture emerges through a joint learning experience, expectations, expectations, values and beliefs between teachers, students, parents and other pertinent role players as well as the sharing of ideas. Hipp, *et al.* (2008), further claim that as schools change into PLCs, the conceptualization of the professional learning communities turns out to be entrenched within the culture of the school also an organization surfaces providing equally a guide and foundation for learning approaches, objectives and outcomes. In addition, Vescio, Ross and Adams (2008), concur with other researchers as they claim that there seemed to be traits intrinsic in PLCs that worked to encourage transformation in teaching cultures. Collaboration, teacher authority, a focus on student learning, and continuous teacher learning are the four categories that these traits can be broadly organized into. However, in a literature research study done by Nsibande (2005), found that within South Africa very limited research had been undertaken to determine what actually constitutes a culture of learning in schools.
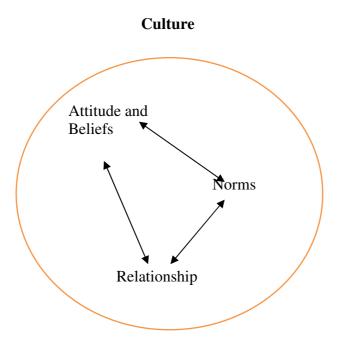
Fullan (1992) argues that any effort meant to advance a school but fails to consider school culture will not bear any fruit since the culture of the school controls willingness for alteration. The core of the culture of the school has been illustrated as the foundation of essential hypothesis as well as the philosophy shared by members of an organization that function automatically, furthermore describe the organization's analysis of its surroundings and itself. Fullan (1992) proposes that a culture should focus on people instead of organizations; improve learning; believes in collaboration; takes a holistic move towards problems; balances the welfare of all stakeholders; makes people think that they can transform their surroundings; makes time for learning; promotes easy communication; and has available influential leaders.

2.11 Leadership and School Culture

The relationship between leadership and effective school cultures has been established in research literature (Mestry, Pillay & Schmidt, 2012; Du Plessis, 2013; Bhengu & Mthembu, 2014). Van der Westuizen (1999) defines school culture as something that is 'in built' or at the heart of the various structures of the institution and it exposes or tests the effectiveness of the roles of each structure and the leadership and administration of the school. It is also the image of all the structures of the school therefore it determines the success or failure of leadership and management of the organization. Contrary to what Van der Westuizen (1999) has said, Thurlow and Bush (2003)' claim that culture is an elusive concept in practice and may be easier to feel than to describe in school. They claim that there are four features of an organization that may contribute to their individual culture. These features are principles and philosophy, shared standards as well as meanings, habits and rituals, and heroes and heroines.

Moreover, Boyd (1992) claims that a school tradition is conceptualized to include the three elements shown in figure 1 below. These elements are the attitudes, particularly relating to schooling, change, learners and other persons. The other element is cultural norms of the school, which is made up of set of informal, verbal rules guiding the behaviour in the community and in the school as well as interactions of individuals within the school. The example of this element is the manner in which communication occurs between teachers and

learners; teachers and other colleagues; as well as teachers and school management. Hargreaves (1992) claims that relationships are undeniably component of the school culture. He further indicates that experiences of school leaders and personal characteristics may also be considered as part of school culture.

Culture

Figure 1

The interrelatedness and the relations of the cultural elements together with the environmental sciences of the school should be kept in mind that they produce the context in which school improvement labours are undertaken. The infrastructure of the school interrelates with the philosophy, approach and principles of people. Approach and philosophy held by individuals manipulate the norms and associations in the school, and, on the other hand, cultural norms influence approach and philosophy. Relationships among people in the school are prejudiced by and exercise power on other basics of the school culture.

2.12 Chapter Summary

In this study an overview was provided of local and international literature on PLCs and teaching and learning culture in schools. In addition, this chapter has also incorporated conceptual framework that underpinned the study. In the literature study it became evident that PLCs are established with the aim of advancing learners performances and teacher practices. It also became evident that school culture results from relational connections between teachers, group of teachers, administrators and others, and combined philosophy, approach and principles of school. The next chapter provides details about the design and methodology that was used in the study

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter offered the literature review on the role played by PLCs on teaching and learning culture in schools. This chapter presents and explains the methodological processes that were followed in generating and analysing the data. This chapter explains in details the research paradigm, research approach, research design, data generation method, sampling, venue of the interviews, data analysis, ethical issues as well as trustworthiness.

3.2 Research paradigm

Since the study intends to develop an understanding of the effectiveness of PLCs on the culture of teaching and learning in schools; this study is therefore located in the interpretive paradigm. Guba and Lincoln (1985) describe Interpretive paradigm as a paradigm whereby the researcher do not aim to predict what people will do, instead this research paradigm focuses on the people's understanding of their world and the manner in which they make sense of their individual actions. The aim is to get an in-depth understanding of how people make sense of environments in which they live and work. Nieuwenhuis (2007, p. 60) further states that, "the ultimate aim of interpretivist research is to offer a perspective of a situation and to analyze the situation under study to provide insight into the way in which a particular group of people make sense of their situation or the phenomena they encounter." Similarly, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) attest that the vital attempt in the framework of the interpretive paradigm is to know the biased world of human experience. Drawing from the above scholars, I look at the interpretive paradigm worldview that involves deeper understanding of human behaviour and human experiences. In terms of epistemology in this study knowledge on the role played by PLCs on teaching and learning culture in schools will be constructed based on what the principals say.

3.3   Research approach

The study adopted the qualitative research approach as it aims to get an in-depth understanding from participants. According to Nieuwenhuis (2007, p. 50) "Qualitative research attempts to collect rich descriptive data in respect of a particular phenomenon or context with the intention of developing an understanding of what is being observed or studied. It therefore focuses on how individuals and groups view and understand the world and construct meaning out of their experiences." In this study the researcher is interested in understanding manner in which school principals view and understand their contexts and construct sense out of their experiences in schools. Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 3) attest that, "qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning." This approach was considered suitable for this study because the aim is to get a thorough perceptive of the role played by PLCs on teaching and learning culture in schools.

3.4   Research design

The study has used a case study. Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 301) state that, "A case study is an intensive analysis of an individual unit (as a person or community) stressing developmental factors in relation to environment." Moreover, Rule and John (2011) aver that a case study is a methodical and in-depth study of a particular case in its background in order to produce information. Similarly, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) attest that the case study researcher scrutinize the quality of an individual component. The reason of such scrutiny is to examine deeply and to evaluate thoroughly the different occurrences that make up the existence of the unit.

The case in this study is three secondary schools. This research study looked at the role played by PLCs on teaching and learning culture in three case schools. According to Rule and John (2011) a case study permits a researcher to deeply scrutinize a specific occurrence rather than looking at the number of occurrences superficially. A case study methodology gave the researcher an in depth understanding of the role played by professional learning communities on the teaching and learning culture.

3.5   Data generation method

The method that the study has used to generate data is interview. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000), state that there are four kinds of research that may be used as research tools. The first one is prearranged interview. This type is the one in which the contents and procedures are organised in advance. The second kind is semi-structured interview whereby the interview is an open situation, having greater plasticity and liberty. The third type is non-directive interview. In this type the research method gains from a healing or psychiatric interview. The last one is a focused interview. In this type the participant is encouraged to talk about the topic under study and there are no set questions.

Dowling and Brown (2010) assert that an interview enables the researcher to look at multifaceted matter in detail, they facilitate the individual engagement to the researcher in the collection of data and they let the researcher to give explanation, to probe and to prompt. The type of the interview that the researcher used in this study is a semi-structured interview. Rule and John (2011, p. 65) state that, "A semi-structured interview would involve a set of pre-set questions which initiate the discussion, followed by further questions which arise from the discussion. This style of interview allows for more flexibility during data collection and creates space for the interviewer to pursue lines of enquiry stimulated by the interview."

3.6   Sampling

In order to comprehend the effectiveness of PLC's on teaching and learning culture in schools; the study made use of Secondary school principals and educators as partakers. To satisfy the objectives of this research study, the researcher has selected three secondary school principals as well as one educator from each school. These school principals have attended and completed ACESL. The targeted schools are situated at KwaMashu and Inanda townships.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) mention two umbrella methods of sampling. The first method is probability sampling. Researchers use this method in a quantitative research whereby a large population is used and generalisation is possible. Probability sampling has various methods of sampling. The first method is simple random sampling whereby the researcher selects participants at random from the list of population. The second method is

systematic sampling. In this method the researcher systematically select the participants from the population. The third method is stratified sampling and it involves dividing the population into homogeneous groups. The fourth method is cluster sampling which can be used when the population is big and extensively spread. In this case a specific number of participants can be selected and then be tested from those selected participants. The last one is stage sampling which is an extension of cluster sampling. It involves selecting the samples in stages that is taking samples from samples.

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) the second umbrella method of sampling is non-probability sampling which is used in a qualitative research. This method is often used in small scale survey because regardless of the disadvantages that occur from their non-representativeness, they are far less complex to set up and they are significantly less costly. There are five chief kinds of non-probability sampling. The first one is convenience sampling which is occasionally called unintentional sampling. In this sampling method, people within a close proximity are selected to participate in the study and this process is led by the researcher. The second method is quota sampling which tries to get representatives of the different elements of the entire population in the proportions in which they happen. The third method is purposive sampling whereby the researcher handpicks the participants who are satisfactory to the searcher's needs. The fourth method is dimensional sampling which is a further modification of quota sampling. The last one is snowball sampling whereby the researcher discover a small number of participants and use them as informants to discover others who meet the criteria for inclusion to the study.

 In this study a bigger family of sampling known as non-probability method was used because my study is a small scale survey. The researcher does not intend to generalise the findings and also this method is far less complicated to set up and it is considerably less expensive.

From the bigger family of sampling the researcher has used purposive sampling in selecting the research sample. The researcher has purposely selected these school principals and educators because the researcher wanted to focus on the principals who have developed culture of teaching and learning in their schools. According to Rule and John (2011, p.64) purposive sampling is where people selected as research participants are intentionally selected because of their appropriateness in advancing the intention of the research. As a

result the participants are chosen based on the relevant experience, knowledge and interests in relation to the case.

Similarly Christiansen, Bertram and Land (2010, p. 43) indicate that in the purposive sampling the researcher makes precise choices about who to include in the sample. The researcher focuses on a specific group, keeping in mind that the cluster does not symbolize the wider population; it basically symbolizes itself. This is all right if the researcher does not desire to generalise the results further than the group sampled. Furthermore, Christiansen *et al.* (2010) attest that purposive sampling is often done by convenient sampling which means choosing sample which is easy for the researcher to reach. The researcher chose purposive sampling because this method allows the researcher to hand pick the participants to be involved in the study based on the relevant characteristics, visit the participants in their sites easily because they are not out of reach and as a researcher I have no intention to generalize the findings.

3.6.1 Profiling of participants and schools

This study was carried out in three secondary schools in the Pinetown District of KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa. The principals of these three schools as well as one educator per school were interviewed. One school is situated in a semi-rural area and the other two schools are located in the township. The two schools which are in the township are well resourced whereas the other school in the semi-rural area is under resourced.

3.6.2 Mrs Best

The first participant is named Mrs Best for anonymity purposes. She is the principal of Kusile Secondary School (KSS) and this is also a *pseudonym*. KSS is ranked quintile three and is located in a semi-rural area within the Pinetown district. The school is not well resourced. They only have two computers and no Science laboratory whereas they offer Physical Science as one of the subjects. The enrolment of the school is 456 and they only have eight rooms used as classrooms. One room is used as the office for the principal and then the other room is used as a staffroom for nine educators as well as two HODs. Mrs Best has been the school head for eight years and they managed to produce 67% pass in matric in 2013.

3.6.3 Mr Super

The second participant is named Mr Super which is his *pseudonym*. He is one of the educators in KSS. He assumed his duties in this school in 2010. He teaches English and Social Sciences.

3.6.4 Mr Zebra

The third participant is named Mr Zebra for anonymity reasons. He is the principal of Mawande Secondary School (MSS) and this is also a *pseudonym*. MSS is ranked quintile four and is located in one of the townships within the Pinetown District. The school is reasonable resourced with a number of resources such as a computer room and a Science laboratory with all the equipments needed. The enrolment of the school is 1 090 learners who are accommodated in twenty classrooms. The school has thirty four educators with four HODs and two deputy principals.

3.6.5 Mr Leo

The fourth participant is named Mr Leo for anonymity purposes. He is one of the educators in MSS. He has been a Science teacher for 15 years in this school.

3.6.6 Mr Romeo

The fifth participant is given a name Mr Romeo as his *pseudonym*. He is the principal of Shakespeare Secondary School (SSS) and this is also a *pseudonym*. SSS is ranked quintile four and is also located in one of the townships within the Pinetown District. The school is well resourced for academic also resources for extra-curricular activities, of which is not usual in the township school. The enrolment of the school is 1 340 with 42 educators, 2 deputy principals and 6 HODs.

3.6.7 Mrs Juliet

The last participant is named Mrs Juliet for anonymity reasons. She is one of the educators in SSS and she teaches Consumer Studies. She has been a teacher in this school for 9 years.

3.7 Venue of the interviews

The interviews were conducted in the respective school principals' offices to allow for privacy and freedom. The office could be considered as the most comfortable environment which allows the principals to operate in their natural environment which forms part of their daily lives and work context. The educators were interviewed in their chosen physical spaces where they felt more comfortable. The interviews were conducted during specific times chosen by the principal and the educators of that particular school.

3.8   Data analysis

However, in the context for this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The semi-structure interviews were digitally voice recorded to the computer and cell phone for back up purposes. The voice recorder was replayed over and over to try to transcribe the interviews verbatim (word for word).

Once the transcripts were done then data reduction was done. Data reduction engages classifying and arranging data into codes or groups and then looking for patterns or associations between these categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Coding is defined by Maree (2007) as the practice of reading cautiously through your transcribed data, line by line and separating it into significant analytical components. This simply means that each time you find a significant section of text in a transcript; you allocate a code or tag to indicate that particular section. After coding, the analysed data was structured into themes. A table of emerging themes was then drawn up, allocating the identified areas of text to each heading. Lastly, conclusions and verifications were drawn from the analysis with the aim of clearly communicating the findings in relation to the original research questions.

Furthermore, in this study triangulation was done in order to ensure trustworthiness. The type of triangulation that is used is data triangulation whereby the researcher will compare what the principals are saying and what the educators are saying. Maree (2007) states that triangulation is another measure that could be used to ensure trustworthiness.

3.9   Ethical issues

Concerning the ethical issues, the researcher first wrote a letter to the University ethics committee seeking permission to conduct the study. The second letter was to the department of education seeking permission to conduct the study in schools. The third letters were to the principals of schools as gatekeepers seeking permission to conduct the study in their schools. In terms of ethics the researcher must respect the autonomy of all the people participating in the research (Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 1999). The participants were given consent forms and they were informed that partaking in the study is voluntary and that if they want to be removed at any time they are free to pull out. They were guaranteed that their names and the names of their schools will be anonymous only *pseudonyms* will be used. In addition, the participants' right to privacy was through the promise of discretion and participants were also asked to respect the confidentiality of the other participants. The information will only be used for the study purposes. The data generated during the interview will be destroyed after the submission of the dissertation. The audio tapes will also be destroyed.

The other principle observed is the principle of nonmalficance. Blanche *et al.* (1999) point out that the researcher should do no harm either physical, emotional or other harm to any participant. Therefore, in my study I endeavour to work within the parameters of the research problem and do no harm to the participants. Furthermore, the principle of beneficence is observed. This research will be of social benefit even though the participants may not directly benefit from participating. The participants will be informed about the value of the study.

3.10   Trustworthiness

According to de Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2002) all researchers must react to standards that stand as criteria against which trustworthiness of the project can be assessed. These canons are paraphrased as follows: how reliable are the particular findings of the study; how exchangeable and relevant are these findings to another setting; how can we be certain

that the findings would be simulated if the study were conducted with the similar participants in the similar background; how can we be certain that the results are reflective of the subjects and the enquiry itself?

3.10.1 Credibility

Qualitative research design is adopted by this study, therefore, in ensuring that generated data is credible, the researcher made use of controllable sample of participants. In this study three principals and one educator from each school are interviewed to generate data. These participants were interviewed in their respective contexts to ensure comfortability and repose. The interview sessions with the participants were recorded in order to keep the first hand data. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) one of the most significant issues in establishing trustworthiness where the researcher guarantees that what has been reported is truthful and precise is to ensure credibility. Firstly, the interviewer visited participants with an intention of clearing up the reason of the study and obtaining permission to conduct the study. During the visits, the researcher encouraged the participants to participate freely in the interview sessions as the discussions will be kept confidential. Secondly, the interview guides were not disclosed to participants prior to interviews; therefore they had no predetermined responses, which may have been made up. Thirdly, the transcriptions were sent to participants to check if they were represented well. In support of this, Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) indicate that credibility and control of researcher bias can be ensured by participant review of interview transcripts.

3.10.2 Dependability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) made a number of arguments that are useful in shoring up dependability claims. The first argument that they have made is that there is no credibility without dependability. Even though they believe that this argument has merit but it is very weak. It may only serve to establish dependability in practice but does not deal with it in principle. In order to address the dependability issue more directly, they argue that the process within the study should be reported in details thereby enabling the future researcher to repeat the work. The second argument made by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is overlap method which represent the kind of triangulation but it is noted that triangulation is typically

undertaken to establish validity not reliability. The third technique suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is stepwise replication which requires an enquiry team of at least two or preferable multiple persons who can be divided into two inquiry teams. The last technique proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is that of inquiry audit whereby an auditor is called in to authenticate the accounts of a business or industry. For the purpose of this study, the research design and its implementation, the detail of data generation addressing what was happening in the field, were detailed so as to enable the readers of this research report to develop an understanding of the methods and their effectiveness.

3.10.3 Confirmability

The confirmability concept focuses on the researchers' objectivity; as Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicate that the concept of confirmability is the qualitative investigator's similar concern to objectivity. In ensuring confirmability in this study, the researcher has firstly adopted the qualitative research approach and a case study research design. Both research approach and design informed the manner in which the study was conducted, therefore all data presented in this study was generated from participants. In discussing data the researcher tried to be as objective as possible. In support of this, Shenton (2004) attests that steps must be taken to help guarantee as far as possible that the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher. Secondly, in this study both educators and principals are interviewed to generate data and the responses of educators will be used for triangulation. As Shenton (2004) argues that the role of triangulation in promoting such confirmability must be emphasised, to reduce the effect of investigator bias

3.10.4 Transferability

As claimed by Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) transferability refers to the amount of similarities between the research place and other places as evaluated by the reader. Likewise, Lincoln and Guba (1985), also regard transferability as the extent to which the results of the research can be applied in similar contexts. However, Shenton (2004) argues that the results of a qualitative development are detailed to a small number of particular environments and individuals; it is therefore not possible to show that the results and conclusions are appropriate to other situations and populations. Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) share

the same views as Shenton (2004) as they argue that the judgement of transferability may be made by a reader based on the similarities of the participants, schools, resources, policies, culture and other characteristics of the research site against the reader's own place. In order to warrant the transferability in this study, firstly, the number of participants was disclosed. Secondly, all participants and participating schools are profiled in Chapter four in order to give the picture of their contexts. Therefore, readers who may come from the similar context as that of the participants may transfer the findings of this study to his or her context. Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) claim that giving detailed information on context and background is important for transferability.

3.11 Chapter summary

This chapter has examined the research design and methodology adopted in the study. This chapter forms a framework of the study as it has outlined the procedure that was followed in conducting the study. Therefore, the chapter has discussed the research design, research approach, and data generation methods, context of the study, data analysis, ethical issues and trustworthiness measures.

CHAPTER 4
DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the research design and methodology that was used in generating data that was used to answer research questions. This chapter presents data generated from semi-structured interviews of principals and teachers perceptions of PLCs and teaching and learning culture in their schools. In presenting the data I used themes.

According to De Vos (2005) there are four types of data triangulation. These are data triangulation, investigator or observer triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation. This study utilized data triangulation which allows the researcher to compare what the participants are saying. Since the researcher has interviewed the principals and educators, the researcher has compared what the principals are saying with what the educators are saying. Data triangulation is chosen for this study because it addresses the issue of validity or trustworthiness of the data and increases the researcher's confidence about the findings of the study (De Vos, 2005). To increase trustworthiness of the study, the researcher compared the information obtained from the principals and the information obtained from educators. Furthermore, the data was analyzed through literature that was reviewed as well as conceptual frames that informed the study and were discussed in chapter two.

This chapter is divided into five themes, and these are as follows: (a) The way in which educators are developed professionally. (b) The role of school principals in promotion of teacher leadership in schools. (c) Promotion of teaching and learning culture in schools. (d) Challenges experienced by both principals and teachers in developing PLCs in schools. (e) The contribution of Advance Certificate in Education: School Leadership (ACESL) in enabling the principal to change leadership style. The profiles of the participants are presented in chapter three. The themes are presented next and the chapter summary concludes this chapter.

4.2 The way in which educators are developed professionally

This study is about PLCs and the culture of teaching and learning in schools. In the PLCs educators learn from each other and they share what they have experienced in class in order to empower one another. Rismark and Solvberg (2011) attest that being a PLC means that schools and teachers focus on workplace learning for the benefit of student learning. Professional development of educators is important because when educators are developed professionally, teaching and learning improves in schools and the educators become confident to stand in front of the learners and teach them because they are empowered to do so through teacher development (Hord, 2009). Ono and Ferreira (2010) posit that professional development lies at the heart of almost every educational attempt to advance teaching and learning.

Developing educators professionally is important in this study, but the way in which educators are developed is more important. However, due to the nature of this study, developing educators was assumed to be occurring, and that is why my attention is focused in the manner in which it occurred. This is due to the fact that the principals that participated in this study had done and completed ACESL which among other things encourages principals to develop educators professionally.

It emerged from the data that principals have different views in the manner in which educators are developed professionally. One principal is of the view that workshops be conducted outside the school by people from outside maybe the NGOs whereas principals in two schools are of the view that educators are to be developed within the school by the School Development Team (SDT) which is responsible for Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS). Mr Zebra who is the principal of MSS is of the opinion that educators need to be developed by people from outside the school. He also believed that for the development to take place, the development workshop must also be conducted in a venue outside the school premises for the educators to take that workshop seriously. Mr Zebra felt that this kind of a workshop serves two purposes. The first purpose was to make educators distress which mean that they will be outside the stressful environment (school) in a welcoming atmosphere and the second purpose was to empower and capacitate the educators. This is what he said:

> *We request the SGB to make funds available for educator development workshops and in most cases we book a conference centre outside the school premises so that they will take it seriously. The last workshop was at Port Edward Hotel and that workshop served two purposes. The first purpose was to make teachers distress and the second purpose was to empower and capacitate educators* **(Mr Zebra, principal of MSS)**.

However, the principals from two other schools were of the opinion that educators need to be developed through IQMS. They believed that IQMS assists them to identify areas of need especially the areas where educators need assistance and support. In addition, they were of the view that IQMS assists them in monitoring the success of the school. This is what one of the participants had to say:

> *...the school management team plan which indicates the dates at which staff will be developed by the school development team (SDT) and also using the personal growth plans from the IQMS they inform the school on what areas teachers need to be developed* **(Mr Romeo, principal of SSS).**

Sharing Mr Romeo's view was Mrs Best, though in her response she did not mention the SDT *per se*, but she said us. Mrs Best mentioned that according to her understanding in her school they develop educators using IQMS method whereby they draw the year plan and do class visits in order to identify areas that needs development. It emerged from my conversation that in KSS IQMS is done and is implemented according to the specification of the department of education whereby all the necessary meetings that is pre-evaluation and post evaluation meetings are held on time, then educators will benefit from this program. They do not just do paper work whereby educators just fill in IQMS forms so as to get one percent which is the incentive of doing IQMS. They do class visits and give the educator a feedback of the lesson. Furthermore, the educators will improve their teaching if the problems that were identified are dealt with by relevant stakeholders. It is also important that everyone who is involved in the implementation of IQMS must know the role that s/he is expected to play. Her sentiment is captured in the following quotation:

We draw a year plan and in the year plan we allocate dates for staff development then we identify areas of need after they have submitted to us the areas where they need development then we start drawing development programmes (**Mrs Best, principal of KSS**).

Data that was generated from interviews with the educators was used to triangulate information given by principals of these schools. The data generated from the educators' interviews when they were asked whether the principals encourage them to meet on regular basis to improve the culture of teaching and learning revealed contrary sentiments from those expressed by the principals. In one school it emerged that the principal meets with the HODs then the HODs cascade whatever information given to them by the principal into their departments. In two schools it revealed that the educators meet briefly only when there are burning issues. Mrs Juliet of SSS said:

We meet every month, at least once a month but sometimes if there are burning issues we meet more than once a month (**Mrs Juliet, teacher at SSS**).

According to Mrs Juliet, it appears that there is no professional development of educators that takes place in her school. They only meet once a month only when there are issues that needs to be ironed out. Her sentiments were echoed by Mr Super the teacher from KSS. In his response he pointed out that briefings are called when the principal had picked up something which is not right. This is what he had to say:

We normally have briefings during break times or if need be we have briefings in the morning when she has picked up something not right or maybe when she has discovered something that she feels we need to know (**Mr Super, teacher at KSS**).

On the other hand, Mr Leo's view revealed that their principal encourages them to meet even though their meetings are very brief but they do meet and discuss teaching and learning also how they can improve themselves when they deliver the subject matter in class. In their discussions they are expected to share ideas and come up with strategies of developing themselves. In our discussion it also emerged that it is not only the SMT that leads these discussions also the educators are free to share their experiences in class and these experiences are the ones that other educators learn from. This is what he had to say:

We have brief meetings where we talk about teaching and learning in the school and allow us to come up with strategies to improve our teaching in class (**Mr Leo, teacher at MSS**).

From the above excerpt it appears that there is a little interaction among the educators. Sargent and Hannum (2009) claim that in professional learning communities, teachers network and collaborate frequently around teaching and learning matters. The literature reveals that professional learning communities need to be given time to meet and share ideas in order to enhance the teaching and learning excellence in schools. On one hand, according to Mrs Juliet teacher at SSS; Mr Leo teacher at MSS and Mr Super teacher at KSS, what their principals are doing in their schools is contradictory to what scholars are saying. In their schools they do not meet regularly around issues of teaching and learning they only have briefings or brief meetings especially when there are burning issues according to educators from SSS and KSS. In the other school MSS; they meet briefly to strategies on how to improve their teaching and learning though their meeting is brief and it is not a workshop but they do learn from each other.

It is therefore incomprehensible how it could be that teachers only have briefings when there are issues of concern and not fully flashed workshops where they are capacitated. On the other hand, the principals are saying different things from what the educators are saying when they say they organise staff development workshops whereas educators are saying they only meet briefly. One of the principals, Mr Zebra states that they conduct capacity workshops outside the school premises in order for educators to take them seriously and other two principals say they rely on IQMS to identify areas of development.

Hord (1997) states that reducing staff separation, increasing staff ability, providing a kind and creative surroundings, and getting better the quality of the school's programs for students help build a background which is conducive to change and improvement. She therefore claims that supportive conditions verify when, where and how the staff frequently comes together as an entity to do the learning, decision making, problem solving and creative work that characterise a professional learning community. In this sense, literature supports the principals' views that teachers need to meet, learn from each other and be capacitated in order to be able to perform their work as best as they possibly can.

From the discussions above it is clear that the principals are saying different things that they do in their schools when they workshop educators whereas the educators expressed varied perspective of what the principals said. It appears that it is in only one school (MSS) where the principal and the educator share the same sentiment that the educators are developed and capacitated even though the teachers from that school said that they meet briefly to discuss how they can improve their teaching and learning skills.

4.3 The role of school principals in promotion of teacher leadership in schools

This study intends to understand the experiences of principals in promotion of teacher leadership in schools. Therefore, the roles that the principals play in developing and maintaining teacher leadership in schools are important in the study. Seo and Han (2012) state that the concept of professional learning communities has been formally adopted in Korea in 2011 by the Minister of Education, Science and Technology. The superintendent of the Seoul metropolitan Office of Education had announced plan and called for transforming schools into learning communities.

Koreans believe that school administrators are to be encouraged to build a collegial relationship with teachers in order to share leadership, power and decision making as well as to create an environment in which teachers can engage in continuous professional learning and development. In Korea teachers have been encouraged to share their professional knowledge and practise, learn from each other and work collaboratively with colleagues to improve student learning. It appears from these researchers that school administrators who are developing and maintaining teacher leadership in the schools are expected to motivate teachers, share leadership and power and decisions as well as create a favourable environment for professional learning to occur.

Generally, the data suggested that different principals played different roles in developing and maintaining teacher leadership among teachers. It appears that one principal is of the opinion that his SMT is responsible for doing leadership roles whereas two principals believes that delegation empowers and develop other educators. The following excerpt reveals what Mr Romeo is doing in his school to promote teacher leadership:

This is done through delegation, every teacher is given a chance to show what his/her talent or skills, be it in extra-curricular or in curricular management, but we do delegate duties to everyone in the school. That delegation done to that person is part of empowerment and skills development (**Mr Romeo, principal of SSS**).

According to Mr Romeo, it appears that delegation in his school does take place and it is not only confined in curricular activities, even in extra-curricular activities there is delegation which is according to persons' talent and skills. Mr Romeo believes that this kind of delegation that takes place in his school does not only empower educators it also develops their leadership skills and educators are able to excel in the field that they are good at. Mrs Best, principal of KSS also felt that peoples' strengths and skills should be identified and be recognised. He believes that could be done through delegation. She described her thought in this way:

We have committees and then we identify areas where a person has more strength and then that person becomes the chairperson of that committee (**Mrs Best, principal of KSS**).

However, data reveals that the other principal has a different view when it comes to teacher leadership. He does not believe in delegating work to other staff members either than his SMT. In our discussion it emerged that he believes that the SMT is paid to take the leadership role; this is what he had to say:

...we have the SMT, where there is a principal, 2 deputy principals and 5 HODs and each department has an HOD and in each subject there is a subject head. Those are the only leaders that we have as far as curriculum is concerned (**Mr Zebra, principal of MSS**).

Data that was generated from interviews with the educators was used to triangulate information given by principals of these schools. The data analysis of the educators' interviews when they were asked whether the principals promote teacher leadership in their schools revealed different sentiments from those expressed by the principals. All the teachers

from these three schools reveal that it is only the SMT that is given leadership roles in schools. This is what one of the teachers had to say:

> *He works through the different departments. He calls meeting with the HODs and shares with HODs who then go to different departments* (**Mrs Juliet, teacher at SSS**).

Mrs Juliet's sentiments are also reiterated by Mr Leo when he said, *"It is through HODs that he delegates the work"*.

Both Mrs Juliet and Mr Leo are supported by Mr Super when he states that the principal calls his SMT and delegates work to them. This is what he said:

> *...she delegates HODs with some work that needs to be done. Sometimes the HODs will give educators specific tasks to perform which they duly do* (**Mr Super, teacher at KSS**)*.*

From the discussion above it appears that the principals of SSS and KSS are saying something different from what the educators are saying. Educators from both schools state categorically that their principals delegate SMT only whereas the principals are saying they delegate educators and educators are given a chance to show their talent and skills. However, the educator from KSS concurs with what their principal had said. They both state that HODs are tasked to do work that needs to be done.

What these principals are doing in their schools is totally different from what the PLCs' gurus are saying. Hord (1997) posits that shared philosophy, principles and dream of what the school ought to be is very important because in this dimension the staff is encouraged not only to be involved in the process of developing a shared dream, but to use that dream as a guideline in decision making about teaching and learning in the school. Hord (1997) explains that the level to which the staff develops into a professional community that engages and develops the commitment and ability of all individuals into a cluster attempt that "pushes for learning of high intellectual quality" is the key to student success.

4.4 Promotion of teaching and learning culture in school

This study intends to understand how principals promote teaching and learning culture in schools. Therefore, the role that the principals play in the promotion of teaching and learning culture is important in the study. From the discussion with the participants, it has transpired that most participants are of the view that it is the responsibility of the principal, educators, parents as well as learners to promote teaching and learning culture in the schools. Vescio, Ross and Adams (2008), state that there seemed to be characteristics intrinsic in professional learning communities that work to endorse changes in teaching cultures. These can be generally prearranged into four categories that include; teamwork, a focus on student learning, teacher power, and uninterrupted teacher learning.

It appears from the researchers that for a school to be able to promote teaching and learning, it needs to have certain characteristics such as teamwork, a focus on student learning, teacher power, and uninterrupted teacher learning. From the discussion with the participants it has transpired that working together has assisted them in promoting teaching and learning within the school. It is also evident that principals try by all means to provide educators with relevant aid that will assist them in promoting teaching and learning in their classes. In this regard, this is what one principal had to say:

> *...we make sure that teachers have necessary resources that will assist them when delivering the subject matter in class. We also encourage them to interact with other teachers sharing the same learning area* (**Mr Romeo, principal of SSS**)**.**

Sharing Mr Romeo's view is Mrs Best who also believes that teachers need to work together and assist each other where there is a need. Team teaching is evident in these two schools. Though in her response, she highlighted the fact that she also has a class to teach, so as a subject teacher she sets a good example to her educators by being where she is supposed to be. She also believes that by involving the parents in the education of their children helps because it is important for the parents to know what their children are doing in school. Her sentiment is captured in the following quotation:

> *I encourage teachers to attend to their classes by honouring my own periods, by so doing I set a good example myself. I also encourage teamwork. When you are*

teaching the same subject in school, I encourage them to assist one another. I also make sure that when a learner does something wrong in the school or do not have what is required by the school, I call the parent of that learner (**Mrs Best, principal of KSS).**

According to Mr Zebra, it appears that teaching and learning cannot only be promoted by encouraging educators to attend to their classes and interact with one another, learners also need some form of encouragement. Mr Zebra came up with the different idea as he indicated that he monitors late coming and loitering around of learners because he believes that for teaching and learning to take place, learners must be in class ready to be taught. This is what he had to say:

> *I took it upon myself to monitor late coming of learners and learners who are loitering around during teaching time. I believe that learners need to be in class all the time and people need to account if they are found not to be where they are supposed to be* (**Mr Zebra, principal of MSS).**

Data revealed that it was not only principals who view the promotion of teaching and learning culture important. Even the educators believe that teaching and learning culture needs to be promoted in schools. Mr Leo, who is the educator at MSS, expressed the view that basic things like coming early of learners to school, checking whether learners are clean and well dressed when they come to school and report them to their parents when they misbehave is also important in schools. This is what he had to say:

> *We emphasise basic things like coming early to school, cleanliness of learners and if there are learners who play truancy we report them to their parents. The principal also make sure that teachers have all the things that they need in their lessons in class. Our work is supervised by the SMT who check whether we are up to date with the curriculum* (**Mr Leo, educator at MSS).**

Sharing Mr Leo's view was Mr Super. He also believes that the culture of involving parents especially when there are problems assists them. From the conversation that we had it also emerged that the learners are afraid of their parents, they do not want their parents to know that they are troublesome in school. This is what he said:

We make sure that teaching and learning take place in our school by working hand in hand with the SMT and request all the resources that we need from them. We also involve parents of the learners especially when we have problems with certain individuals who do not want to do their work. We also hold meetings in our departments and check whether we are following our work programmes and how far are we with the syllabus **(Mr Super, teacher at KSS).**

The other teacher Mrs Juliet of SSS was of the opinion that they get their work schedules from the beginning of the year and embark on their programmes without wasting time. This is what she said:

From the beginning of the year we formulate a working plan (work schedules). Everybody knows what to do and when. We get the programme every first day of the term then we know who is responsible for what and it's how we do our work **(Mrs Juliet, teacher at SSS).**

From the discussions above it appears that it is important in all three sample schools to promote teaching and learning culture in schools. Both principals and educators from these three schools concur with what Vescio *et al*. (2008) said when they mention the fact that there seemed to be characteristics inbuilt in professional learning communities that worked to encourage changes in teaching cultures. These can be generally organised into four categories that include; teamwork, a focus on student learning, teacher power, and uninterrupted teacher learning. Collaboration occurred among educators from all three schools and this is witnessed by both educators and principals from these schools. KSS principal even said that he encourages educators to assist one another. What the principal from KSS is saying collaborates with Hord's (1997) last dimension which is peers sharing their practice. She states that reviews of a teacher's actions by colleagues are the standard in the professional learning community. This process is not to evaluative but is part of the "peers helping peers." In addition, teacher authority is also evident in MSS where both educators and principals agree on the same thing when they say they monitor late coming of learners. In SSS both the principal and educators share the same view that educators need to be provided by necessary resources that will assist them in class to promote teaching and learning culture.

4.5 Challenges experienced by both principals and educators in developing PLCs in schools

In the data analysis it emerged that after completing ACESL, the principals of these three schools never introduced professional learning communities. They only rely on the departments that exist in their school when they want to share information with the educators. Yet it must be noted that after completing ACESL these principals were expected to introduce PLCs in their schools and be seen as the leaders in empowering educators. Both principals and educators share the same sentiment in this regard. What these principals have done is not in par with Hord's (1997) assertion in one of her conceptual theories. In the shared and supportive leadership, Hord (1997), states that the principals' omni competence is abandoned in favour of principals' involvement in professional development. This new relationship forged between administrators and teachers leads to a shared and collegial leadership in the school, where all grow professionally. From the generated data it is evident that what Hord (1997) has said is not implemented in these schools. This is what one of the principals had to say when asked whether there were any challenges in forming PLCs in his school:

> *There are no challenges; it is just that we have never formally introduced Professional Learning Communities in our school* **(Romeo, principal of SSS).**

Sharing Mr Romeo's view is Mr Zebra. Though in his response he mentioned that they only rely on the departments that they have in his school. It is also evident from his response that educators would not have had problems when PLCs were introduced in the school, they would have embraced them and work co-operatively. The following excerpt reveals what is happening in his school:

> *Since we do not have PLCs in our school that were formally launched, we only have departments so I cannot say we have challenges in that regard because teachers work co-operatively in their departments. I assume that if we had PLCs they would have co-operated as well in those PLCs* **(Mr Zebra, principal of MSS).**

However, Mrs Best mentioned that the school is situated in a very remote area where transport is a problem and that hindered the introduction of PLCs in her school. Since most educators use public transport the educators do not have time to meet after hours and share with other educators whatever information they have. Hord (1997, p. 32) states that time is a resource and "time, or more properly lack of it is one of the most complicated problems faced by schools and districts." For teachers to meet and share whatever information they have they need time. This is what Mrs Best had to say:

> *The only challenge that we have in our school is that most educators live far from the area where the school is situated so transport is a problem and doing after hour's work becomes the problem otherwise we could have introduced PLCs but not yet* **(Mrs Best, principal of KSS).**

From the discussions above, it appears that the principals do not have challenges in forming PLCs the only challenge that they have is not being able to apply what they have learnt in ACESL. From the educators point of view it appears that the educators will not have problems if PLCs were introduced in their schools. This is what one of the educators had to say:

> *I do not think there is something that could have stopped us if they were introduced but we have never even talked about them. It is for the first time that someone mentions something like PLCs to me* **(Mrs Juliet, teacher from SSS).**

According to Mrs Juliet nothing could have stopped them from forming PLCs if they knew about them. They were never introduced to them and they have never heard about them before. Sharing the same sentiment as Mrs Juliet is Mr Super. He said:

> *We have never talked about PLCs in our school but I do not think we will have a problem if they are formed* **(Mr Super, teacher at KSS).**

Mr Leo, teacher at MSS also felt that if PLCs were introduced in his school educators would have participated in those learning communities and they could have shared information because the educators in this school are very professional and if something is introduced in

his school educators respond positively because their goal is to produce the best and competitive learners. His sentiments are echoed in the following excerpt:

> *Educators are very professional in that manner. When we talk about work they focus and respond positively. That is what is done within the school but unfortunately we do not have PLCs* **(Mr Leo, teacher at MSS).**

From the discussions above it appears that in all these three schools there is no evidence of PLCs. Whereas, Steyn (2013) states that schools need to guide teachers to participate in appropriate continuing professional development programmes and to support and provide access to such programmes. It is evident from the responses of both principals and educators that PLCs were never formed and educators have never heard about PLCs before so it means that after completing ACESL, these principals never implement what they had learnt from ACESL. According to DuFour and Eaker (1998), the variables that often disrupt a school's attempt to apply reforms including learning communities are the complications of reform, failure to maintain focus on the mission, and the incapability to articulate the function and characteristics of the restructuring effort among its membership. Generally the lack of leadership skills to build up the necessary human and resource capacities is a core deficiency.

4.6 The contribution of Advance Certificate in Education: School Leadership (ACESL) in enabling the principal to change leadership style.

The principals who participants in this study have all attended and completed ACESL and one of the goals of this programme was to enable them to change their leadership styles in schools. In this study the educators were asked a different question from the principals' because the researcher wanted to get educators' point of view as well as principals' point of view on whether there are any changes in the way the principal leads and manages the school. When educators were asked whether since their principals has completed ACESL would they say that the way the principals leads and manages the school has changed. This is what one of the educators had to say:

> *He invites a number of people to help us so as to improve our teaching. We have got an I-box. He also bought some few laptops for us to use* **(MR Leo, teacher at MSS).**

The data reveals that Mr Leo's principal who is Mr Zebra has decided to invest on resources that will assist educators to improve their teaching and these resources are going to enable the educators to get more information that they need. Their principal also invites people to come to his school to capacitate the educators and workshop them on how to use the new technology that they have in school. It also emerged from our discussion that before their principal attended and completed ACESL he was not keen in spending money on resources such as laptops.

However, in Mr Super's school since their principal attended and completed ACESL she encourages them to meet all the time and share their experiences so as to learn from each other. She also encourages them to do team teaching by telling them to assist each other when someone is teaching grade 11 that person can assist someone who is in grade 8 so that by the time those learners come to grade 12 they will be ready and well informed. This is what he had to say:

> *She encourages us to meet all the time telling us that we need to learn from each other, for example if you are teaching grade 11 and 12 and there is a teacher who is teaching grade 8, you might feel the need to come together and talk about how you can best prepare those learners in grade 8 so that by the time they get to grade 12 they are ready to face the challenges. By so doing we are working as PLCs. We do that and it has never been a problem so I think there are no challenges or there will never be challenges in our school if we form PLCs* (**Mr Super, teacher at KSS**).

What Mrs Best, principal of KSS is doing in her school is what is expected to be done in schools with principals who attended and completed ACESL. Mr Super also mentioned that he does not foresee any challenges in forming PLCs in his school it is just that they were never told about them. However in Mrs Juliet's school since their principal attended and completed ACESL he encourages them to meet in their different departments and support each other. This is what she said:

> *In different departments people* support *each other* (**Mrs Juliet, teacher at SSS**).

However, the principals were asked a different question from the one that the educators were asked. The principals were asked what is it that they regard as constituting change in the way school principals manages their schools. It emerged from the discussion that there is a drastic change in the manner in which the educators are behaving. It also emerged that even the participation of learners has also improved since the principals completed ACESL. This is what one of the principals had to say:

> *We start by looking at the behaviour of educators followed by learners' participation in their school work, observing them coming early to school and attending school every day. I have also observed how educators conduct themselves while doing their work. We always talk about changes and how it affects the work that we are doing* (**Mrs Best, principal of KSS).**

Data revealed that it was not only the educators who have changed the way they do their work even the learners are cooperating and they participate. Mrs Best who is the principal of KSS expressed the view that there are changes in her school. However Mr Zebra believe that change is brought about by the way they monitors the curriculum. Finishing the curriculum is the main thing in his school because he believes that if teachers are well developed and empowered it will be easier for them to deliver in class and finish what they are expected to do on time. This is what he said:

> *I think the first thing is curriculum because our core business here is curriculum. How we monitor the curriculum if teachers are well developed to deliver the curriculum that's how change might be achieved* (**Mr Zebra, principal of MSS).**

Mr Romeo is of the opinion that running as a school as an organisation depends on a number of things. The first thing that he mentioned is the fact that resources play the most important role in changing the school to be a better place. He felt that if the human resources are people who are not qualified to teach a certain learning area then it becomes a problem because that person does not have the knowhow of that learning area. He also believes that the physical resources are also important.

> *Running a school as an organisation will depend on a number of contextual factors. Number one, it will depend on the resources that you have, be they*

physical, financial or be they human. If it is human resources for instance you don't get qualified educator for a required learning area you just employ to fill in the post that will have an impact in your managerial skills particularly in curriculum **(Mr Romeo, principal of SSS).**

Mr Romeo concurs with what Hord's (1997) dimension of supportive structural conditions when Hord posits that minute size of the school and physical closeness of the staff to one another, teaching roles that are mutually dependent, communication structures, school independence and teacher empowerment are some of the factors that support learning community. The deficiency of resources is a main obstacle to sustained change efforts. These resources include not only money, but also time. Patience with implementation efforts and student outcomes turns to a readiness to allow the time essential for change. From the response of the educators it emerged that there is collaboration in these schools and there are PLCs though they were not introduced formally because the educators in KSS are encouraged by their principals to do team teaching whereby you find an educator who is teaching grade 12 same learning areas assisting an educator who is teaching grade 8. Whereas in MSS their principal invites people to come and capacitate them as a staff and that is networking which is one of the principles of PLCs.

4.7 Chapter Summary

Presentation of data generated through semi-structured interviews of principals and educators was made in this chapter. The data was offered in five themes and these were mentioned and discussed. The next chapter presents the summary, findings and makes recommendations.

CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has presented data in themes and discussed the data generated from both the principals and the educators. In this chapter findings drawn from the data are made. Eventually in this chapter recommendations are made based on findings.

5.2 Summary of the study

This study has explored the role played by the PLCs and teaching and learning culture in schools. This was a case study of three secondary school principals who have attended and completed Advanced Certificate in Education (ACESL) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The first chapter is the overview of the study. It provides the background and purpose of the study. The two research questions that guided the study are also provided. Furthermore, this chapter provided the significance of the study, an explanation of what professional learning communities can be understood to be. It also provides an overview of the literature that was reviewed in the process of conducting the study, as well as the underpinning theoretical framework. It also provided a brief review of research design and methodology that was used and the demarcation of the problem.

The second chapter reviewed literature on professional learning communities and teaching and learning culture in schools and also how professional learning communities and teaching and learning culture connects. In addition, a critical review of national and international literature that is relevant to the research topic was done. The third chapter presents a detailed explanation of research design, methods and procedures that were followed in carrying out the study, and research instrument that were used for generating data for this research. The fourth chapter presented and discussed data that was generated through semi-structured interviews with the participants. The themes that emerged from analysing data generated are presented and discussed.

The last chapter summarises the study, presents a synthesis of the key findings as well as recommendations.

5.3 Presentation of findings

The findings are presented and summarised under each research questions that were stipulated in the first chapter. This is meant to indicate the extent to which the data has successfully answered the key research questions that guided the study.

5.3.1 What is the contribution of PLCs to the teaching and learning culture in schools?

The findings below detail the findings regarding contribution of Professional Learning Communities to the teaching and learning culture in schools. After discussing six themes that emerged from the data it was evident from the responses of both principals and educators that PLCs were never formed and educators have never heard about PLCs before so it means that after completing ACESL, these principals never implemented what they had learnt from ACESL. For instance educators from these three schools share the same thing that is happening in their schools when they say; nothing could have stopped them from forming PLCs if they knew about them. They were never introduced to them and they have never heard about PLCs before. **4.5 in Chapter 4** provide more details.

Contrary to this it emerged that even though the PLCs were not introduced formally to the educators but there is an indication that educators from these three schools do work as teams and team teaching is encouraged in their schools. Collaboration occurred among educators from all three schools and this is witnessed by both educators and principals from these schools. KSS principal even said that he encourages educators to assist one another.

The data also reveals that the principals from two schools are of the opinion that educators are developed through IQMS since they do not have fully fletched PLCs. IQMS assist them to identify areas of need especially the areas where educators need assistance and support. In addition, IQMS also assist them as a school to monitor the success of the school. More details about these issues can be found in **Section 4.3 of Chapter 4.** Therefore the finding is that structures that are put in place by the department of education, for example school development team which monitors the implementation of IQMS are the ones that are responsible for teaching and learning to take place in schools not the PLCs since PLCs do not exist in these schools.

5.3.2 What strategies do teachers put in place to promote a culture of teaching and learning in schools?

The main finding is that by involving the parents in the education of their children helps because it is important for the parents to know what their children are doing in school. For instance Mr Leo and Mr Super believe that the culture of involving parents especially when there are problems assists them and it also emerged that the learners are afraid of their parents, they do not want their parents to know that they are troublesome in school.

The data shows that teaching and learning cannot only be promoted by encouraging educators to attend to their classes and interact with one another, learners also need some form of encouragement. Mr Zebra came up with the different idea as he indicated that he monitors late coming and loitering around of learners because he believes that for teaching and learning to take place, learners must be in class ready to be taught. **4.5 Chapter 4** provides more details. It was therefore founded that for teaching and learning to take place teachers need to be in class teaching and learners need to be in class learning.

The data reveals that Mr Leo has decided to invest on resources that will assist educators to improve their teaching and these resources are going to enable the educators to get more information that they need. The principals also invite people to come to their schools to capacitate the educators. More details about these issues can be found in **Section 4.6 of Chapter 4.** Therefore the finding is that if the school has relevant and enough resources, it will be easier for educators to present interesting lessons that will make it easier for learners to understand what they are learning in class.

The findings also reveal that the principals are saying different things that they do in their schools when they workshop educators whereas the educators expressed varied perspective of what the principals said. It appears that it is in only one school (MSS) where the principal and the educator share the same sentiment that the educators are developed and capacitated even though the teacher from that school said that they meet briefly to discuss how they can improve their teaching and learning skills.

5.3.3 Recommendations

The findings of this study divulge that the principals who attended and completed ACESL never shared what they learnt in ACESL with their educators that is why educators revealed that they knew nothing about PLCs. The study also revealed that there are strategies that are put in place to promote a culture of teaching and learning in schools. Based on the above findings, it is therefore recommended that the PLCs be introduced in schools. Various studies on PLCs reveal that teachers interact with one another and collaborate regularly around issues of teaching and learning so the school should not only rely on the departmental meetings for information about their subjects. They can benefit by interacting with educators who are from other departments so that is why it is important for schools to have PLCs. The core function of the PLCs is for educators to learn from each other and be capacitated so it is crucial that the formation of PLCs within the school is promoted.

5.3.4   Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the findings and the recommendations that are focussed to the principals of schools. This chapter begins by providing the summary of the complete study before presenting the findings. These findings are organized under the research questions.

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APPENDIX A

REQUEST PERMISSION FROM GATEKEEPERS

Dear Sir/Madam

APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

At present I am pursuing my Master of Education Degree at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal. A prerequisite for this degree is that one must also do a dissertation which requires one to do a research. My research title is: Professional learning communities and teaching and learning culture in three secondary schools in the Pinetown District.

I request your permission to conduct research at your school. The principal will be interviewed separately and the educators will also be requested to participate in a semi-structured interview at the time and place that is convenient to them. Anonymity will be ensured. Participation is voluntary and the participants will be free to withdraw at any point without any negative consequences.

The information will be treated with the strictest of confidentiality and will be used for the purpose of this study only. The data generated during the interview will be destroyed after the submission of the dissertation. The audio tapes will also be destroyed.

Further information and any queries about this study, you may contact me at:

Cell: 079 5997 837/ 031 765 8930 or Email: mabongi@ravemail.co.za

You may also contact

(1). My supervisor: Dr T.T. Bhengu at: Cell:083 947 5321/ 031 260 3534 or Fax 031 260 1598 or Email: bhengutt@ukzn.ac.za

(2). Academic Leader (Research): Prof P. Morojele at:

Thank you

Yours in Education

_____

S.A. Shange

APPENDIX B: PERMISSION LETTER FROM THE GATEKEEPERS

29 August 2014

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH AT OUR SCHOOL

Your letter requesting permission to conduct research in our school has a reference. Permission is hereby granted on the condition that it will not disturb our teaching and learning programme. I fully understand the nature of your study as you have explained to me and understand the contents of your letter. I agree to my school's participation in the study. Your assurance of confidentiality and anonymity is acknowledged and appreciated.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you well and success in your studies.

Thank you

Yours in education

_____
Signature

APPENDIX C: DECLARATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SECTION FOR CONSENT OF PARTICIPATION

I _____(Full Names of participant), hereby

confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project,

and I do / do not consent to participate in this research project which is conducted by

Sibongile Aurelia Shange entitled: Professional learning communities and teaching and

learning culture in three secondary schools in the Pinetown District.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire. I
am also aware that there are neither any foreseeable benefits nor risks associated with my
participation in this study.

_____   _____
SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT   DATE

APPENDIX D: Interview Guide for Principals

Professional communities of practice

1. Tell me, how do you professionally develop your staff within the school to improve teaching and learning culture within your school?

[Possible probes include the following]

- Workshoping of the staff
- Coaching
- Encouraging reflection on practice
- Modelling
- Observing good practice
- Inviting guest speakers
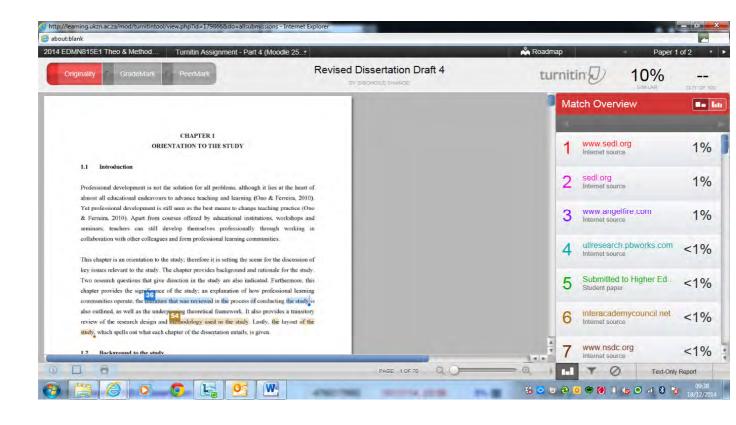- Encouraging reading of relevant literature
- networking

Success in transforming the school

2. In what ways have you responded to issues of quality participation, access and equality in your school? Please elaborate

_____
_____
_____
_____

Leadership and the promotion of Collaborative Culture

3. How do you promote teacher leadership in your school? Please elaborate

_____
_____
_____
_____

Educational Change- leadership and management

4. What are some of the challenges that you have faced in managing change in your school?

_____
_____
_____
_____

APPENDIX E: Interview Guide for the Educators

Professional communities of practice

1. Since completing the ACE (School Leadership), would you say that the way the principal leads and manages the school has changed? If YES/NO, please elaborate on your answer

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

2. Since completing ACE (School Leadership), would you say that the principal encourages staff to meet on regular basis to improve culture of teaching and learning? If YES/NO, please elaborate on your answer

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. How would you characterise reflection on teaching and learning in your school after the principal completed ACE (School Leadership) programme? Please elaborate your answer

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

4. Since completing the ACE (School Leadership) programme, would you say that the way the principal leads and manages the school has changed? If YES/NO, please elaborate on your answer
   Probes:
   - Encouraging staff to meet
   - Supporting teaching and learning
   - Establishing various grouping/clusters
     - ✓ In each case they will be asked to elaborate.

UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL

INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

14 November 2014

Ms Sibongile Aurelia Shange 210551029
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Protocol reference number: HSS/1491/014M
Project title: Professional learning communities and learning culture in three secondary schools in the Pinetown District

Dear Ms Shange

Expedited Approval

In response to your application dated 13 November 2014, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted FULL APPROVAL.

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

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

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

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

Yours faithfully

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/px

cc Supervisor: Dr TT Bhengu
cc Academic Leader Research: Professor P Morojele
cc School Administrator: Ms Tyzer Khumalo