

The role of school principals in creating and promoting professional learning communities: A study of three Secondary Schools in Umlazi District

By

ADELAIDE NDLANYA

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Education

School of Education

University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg

2022

Supervisor: Professor V. Chikoko

SUPERVISOR'S STATEMENT

This dissertation has been submitted with/ without my approval.

Professor V. Chikoko. _____

Date: _____

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, **Adelaide Ndlanya**, hereby declare that this dissertation is my work and does not contain any materials which have been submitted before for any degree in any institution.

Use of any published material has been dully acknowledged.

Signed: _____

Adelaide Ndlanya

Signed: _____

Professor V. Chikoko

Date: _____

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Edgewood Campus

Pinetown

DEDICATION

This piece of work is dedicated to my late father Mr M.A. Mfeka and my mother Mrs F. Mfeka. I am today because of their love and support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you God for Grace, and abundant Love. Thank you for holding my hand throughout my studying journey.

My sincere gratitude goes to the following people:

My supervisor, Professor V. Chikoko, for his strong and magnificent assistance in providing insightful counsel, editing my work, and directing me carefully throughout the research process. His commitment to helping me through the research process had a significant influence on how I approached the study.

Thanks to my husband Sandile and my children Olwethu and Ntsika for their continued support throughout the years of my studies.

Finally, I would want to express my sincere gratitude to the study participants who gave freely of their time to enlighten me. Without them, I would not be where I am today.

ABSTRACT

School principals have a very important role to play in the development of schools. Their role involves creation of an environment conducive to teaching and learning. One of many strategies that principals may adopt is to create professional learning communities. Research has shown that when PLCs in schools are well-practiced teaching and learning can improve. However, despite such a good report about PLCs what seems to be the case is that in many schools they still do not exist or they are ineffective and do not support teacher learning. Hence the focus of this study is on principals, as I believe that there is a need for research evidence about what school principals understand and experience as their role in promoting PLCs. The study adopted qualitative case study to explore the understandings and experiences of the three secondary school principals in creating and promoting PLCs.

To collect data for the study, semi-structured interviews and document analysis were used. The results of the study revealed the following: (i) As much as the evidence has shown that principals understood that they had an important role to play in PLCs, they were not fully involved. Their understanding of the role to play was limited to just being providers and not being actively involved. (ii) Their role in the promotion of PLCs involved ensuring that members of a PLC respected and trusted each other. (iii) The principal's role also included ensuring that the leadership skills of teachers participating in PLCs were developed. (iv) principals believed in shared leadership. (v) Principals have the responsibility of ensuring that necessary resources are always available for teaching and learning processes. (vi) Lastly subject meetings were also supported as another way of promoting PLCs as they are meant for teachers to share their skills and knowledge.

The recommendations are as follows: School principals must be more involved in PLCs by making sure they attend and participate in the professional development sessions held in their schools. Secondly, district officials must be seen leading the initiatives that promote PLCs. This can be done through organising workshops and seminars for principals to capacitate them on different methods that they can use to promote an effective PLC. Lastly, depending on the availability of space, principals can solicit donations from private companies and from their ex-students and build multipurpose rooms. This may address the issue of not having enough space to hold PLC meetings. The issue of space can also be resolved if principals can identify schools within the circuit that can be used as centres of professional learning communities.

ABBREVIATIONS

APIP	Academic Performance Improvement Plan
DBE	Department of Basic education
IQMS	Integrated Quality Management System
ISPFTED	Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development
LTSM	Learner Teacher support material
MHS	Msholozzi High School
PLCs	Professional Learning Communities
QHS	Qwabe High School
SASA	South African Schools Act
SIP	School Improvement Plan
SMT	School Management Team
ZHS	Zwide High School

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title	
Supervisor's statement	i
Declaration	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Abstract	v
Abbreviations	vi

CHAPTER ONE: THE INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background of the Study	1
1.3 Statement of the Problem	3
1.4 Research Questions	4
1.5 Rationale for the Study	4
1.6 Significance of the Study	5
1.7 Definition of Key Terms	5
1.7.1 Professional Learning Community	5
1.7.2 The Role	6
1.8 Structure of the Research Report	6

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction	7
2.2 Understanding the Concept of Professional Learning Community	7
2.3 The Creation and Development of Professional Learning Communities	8
2.3.1 Optimising Resources and Structures to promote the Professional Learning Community	9
2.3.2 Promoting Professional Learning	9
2.3.4 Evaluating and Sustaining the Professional Learning over time	9
2.4 Some Benefits of Professional Learning Communities	10
2.5 Some Challenges in promoting Professional Learning Communities and how they may be addressed	10
2.5.1 Unavailability of Time	10

2.5.2 Conflicts amongst the Team Members	11
2.5.3 Underdevelopment of Leadership Capacity	11
2.6 The Role of the School Principal in promoting Professional Learning Communities	12
2.7 Some studies on Professional Learning Communities and their Implications	14
2.8 Theoretical Framework	17
2.8.1 Hord's (1997) Five attributes of Professional Learning Communities	17
2.8.1.1 Supportive and Shared Leadership	18
2.8.1.2 Collective Creativity	18
2.8.1.3 Shared Vision and Values	18
2.8.1.4 Supportive Conditions	19
2.8.1.5 Shared Personal Practice	19
2.8.2 Hallinger's model of Instructional Leadership	19
2.8.2.1 The Role of the Principal in defining the Mission of the School	20
2.8.2.2 The Management of the Curriculum	20
2.8.2.3 The promotion of a Positive School Learning Climate	20
2.9 Summary	21

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction	22
3.2 Research Paradigm	22
3.3 Research Approach	22
3.4 Research Design	23
3.5 Research Sampling	24
3.6 Data Generation Instruments	24
3.7 Data Analysis Procedures	25
3.8 Trustworthiness	26
3.9 Ethical Considerations	26
3.10 Summary	27

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSION OF DATA

4.1 Introduction	28
4.2 Profiles of Schools and Participants	28
4.2.1 Schools	28
4.2.1.1 Qwabe High School (QHS)	28
4.2.1.2 Msholozhi High School (MHS)	29
4.2.1.3 Zwide High School (ZHS)	29
4.2.2 Participants	29
4.2.2.1 Mr Dee of Qwabe High School	29
4.2.2.2 Mrs Bee of Msholozhi High school	29
4.2.2.3 Mr Zee of Zwide High school	29
4.3 The discussion of Themes that emerged from the data	30
a) Principals' understanding of Professional Learning Communities	30
b) Principals' Role in the promotion of Professional Learning Communities	33
c) Resources vital for the creation of the Professional Learning Communities.	36
d) Benefits of Professional Learning Communities	37
e) Challenges encountered by principals when seeking to promote professional learning Communities	41
f) Strategies Principals use to address Challenges encountered in the process of promoting PLCs	44
4.4 Emerging issues	47

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction	49
5.2 Summary of the Study	49
5.3 Conclusions	52
5.4 Recommendations	52

REFERENCES	53
APPENDIX A	
Interview Schedule for School Principals	62
Document Review Schedule	64
APPENDIX B	65
Request Permission from Gatekeepers	
APPENDIX C	66
Permission Letter from Gatekeepers	
APPENDIX D	68
Permission to Conduct Research from District	
APPENDIX E	69
Permission to Conduct Research in the KZN DoE Institutions	
APPENDIX F	71
Ethical Clearance	
APPENDIX G	72
Turnitin Certificate	
APPENDIX H	73
Language Clearance Certificate	

CHAPTER ONE

THE INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The growth of schools depends significantly on the work of the school principals. Scholars like Hallinger, 2005; Bhengu & Mkhize, 2013; Bush, 2014 are amongst those who concur that principals are crucial to enhancing teaching and learning. The creation of favourable teaching-learning environments in schools is a requirement for effective teaching and learning. (Bush, 2014).

One of many strategies that principals may adopt to improve and support teaching and learning is to create professional learning communities (PLCs). In the school context, professional learning communities focus on the importance of deep learning in groups and not on teaching (Dufour, 2004). The sustainability of a PLC depends on the strong support that is provided by the school principal (Antnluoma, Ilomaki, Lahti-Nuuttila & Toom, 2018). This chapter sets the scene by outlining the key issues that form the basis of the entire study. The chapter provides the background and the statement of the problem. Furthermore, the research questions that guide the study are mentioned. Thereafter the rationale and the significance of the study are provided. To understand the phenomenon, the key concepts are also briefly defined.

1.2 Background to the Study

Principals of schools are expected to uphold a high degree of quality and personal dedication to education. Their commitment to teacher and learner excellence can be shown by striving towards achieving the vision of the school. Fairness, consistency, and resourcefulness are amongst the many personal qualities that school principals need to exercise (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace & Thomas, 2006). To develop ideas and initiatives that can contribute to the school's goal, principals must be imaginative and creative. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) (2015) states that school principals are required to put plans into place to support greater academic attainment as well as a structure for the continual improvement of all school systems. According to Bush, Kiggundu, and Moorosi (2011), leaders with strong leadership abilities contribute to the development of a school. Creating and sustaining professional learning communities is one method school principals can take to turn their schools into places that provide high-quality teaching and learning. Once PLCs are introduced,

school principals have an important task of ensuring that they are effective. The effectiveness of a PLC in schools is vital because through better leadership and instruction, a PLC improves students' educational expectations, achievement, and attainment (Bush, 2014). Furthermore, Bush (2014) states that strong leadership in PLCs improves the skills and knowledge of educators through professional dialogue and collaborative study. The responsibility of school leaders is to establish a capable learning environment (DBE, 2015). PLCs help the school to improve its ability to effect lasting change in the learning environment.

One of the essential undertakings of school principals is to look after the teaching and learning conditions for everybody in the school (Bredeson and Hohansson, 2000). Creating professional learning communities is not enough if schools cannot sustain them. Hence, principals must play a significant role in the development, supervision, and support of PLCs. As instructional leaders, principals are supposed to guide and make sure that the school is a community that values professional development (DBE, 2015). Principals should see to the designing of a collaboration framework to communicate good practices (DuFour, 1999). Effective professional learning communities (PLCs) must be created, developed, and promoted in each school under the direction of the principal (Brown, 2016).

Guided by the South African Schools Act 84 (SASA) principals are required to give reports each year on their students' academic progress (Itumeleng, 2014). Underperforming schools do not look forward to such a period since they are required to develop plans on how they intend to improve learner performance. Academic Performance Improvement Plan (AIPP) as a guide to improve performance and School Improvement Plan (SIP) which must be in line with Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) are amongst many plans that the school principal together with the management team have to develop (Itumeleng, 2014). The principal is therefore accountable for ensuring that the performance bar is raised (Bush, Kiggundu and Moorosi, 2011).

Numerous studies have demonstrated the beneficial impact of PLCs on learner achievement (Botha, 2012; Mestry & Singh, 2007). (Botha, 2012; Mestry & Singh, 2007). The lack of high-quality teaching and learning is a contributing factor to the low learner performance in secondary schools in South Africa. To address the challenges in improving teacher quality the South African Department of Basic Education (DBE) launched a strategy called the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development (ISPFTED). "The intention of the plan is to improve the quality of teacher education and development in order

to improve the quality of teachers and teaching” (ISPFTED, 2011, p.4). For ISPFTED to succeed each stakeholder (Department of Basic Education, provincial department of education and Department of Higher Education and Training) has to perform the assigned roles. Supporting teachers and ensuring their access to professional development opportunities is one of the initiatives run by the provincial education department. (ISPFTED, 2011). Professional learning community is one of the instruments that ISPFTED recommends to promote teacher professional development. DBE is dedicated to assisting PLCs by creating initiatives that can enhance their output (DBE,2015).

PLCs, according to DBE (2015), are communities that offer the environment and resources necessary to support groups of teachers, school administrators, and subject advisors in jointly determining their own developmental trajectories and setting up activities that will motivate their development.

I am concerned about why there has only been a slight improvement in the calibre of learner success at township secondary schools given that strategies to support processes towards learner improvement are in place and that PLCs can be leveraged to effectively drive such efforts. Therefore, the study's emphasis is on school principals and their role in creating and promoting PLCs.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Professional Learning Communities give school system administrators and teachers the chance to collaborate and learn how to enhance their practices in ways that will promote student accomplishment (Botha, 2012). Effective PLCs encourage a collaborative work environment among staff members. If they are properly supported, professional learning communities can be important in ensuring that there is quality teaching and learning in schools. Promoting efficient and long-lasting PLCs is the duty of teachers and principals. My concern is whether or not principals are aware of their responsibility in helping to promote PLCs. I am also interested in learning how they experience their role in seeking to promote PLCs. Lastly I am interested in the lesson that the study provides with regards to the role the school principal can play in promoting PLCs.

According to research, when PLCs in schools are well-run, teaching and learning can advance. When PLCs are successfully instituted by school principals and embraced by teachers, learner

achievements improve (Brodie & Borko, 2016). However, despite such a positive evaluation regarding PLCs, it appears that they still don't exist or are useless and don't assist teacher learning in many schools [(DBE, 2015). Botha (2012) argues that teachers in many South African schools work alone, which causes them to be ignorant and this can leave them unsure of how to best challenge learners with tasks of good quality. Mestry and Singh (2007) add that it is vital that teachers collaborate to address topics related to their practice. The focus of the study is on the principals, as I strongly believe that there is a need for research evidence about what school principals understand and experience as their role in promoting PLCs. Such information can be utilised with the aim of arriving at what can be regarded their ideal function in the promotion of PLCs.

1.4 Research Questions

1.4.1 What are principals' understanding of their role in promoting PLCs?

1.4.2 How do school principals experience their role in seeking to promote PLCs?

1.4.3 What lessons does the study offer for the part that a principal can play in promoting PLCs?

1.5 Rationale for the Study

I have five years of experience as a deputy principal. After holding the position of Department head for five years, I was promoted to deputy principal. Serving in senior management has exposed me to realities that, when I was a post-level one educator, were only ideas and figments of my imagination. I had the honour of working with both my late principal and the principal who succeeded him; they both supported ongoing professional development of teachers. Their goal has always been to raise the calibre of teaching and learning through collaborative teaching, always highlighting the value of cooperation and idea exchange. Therefore, my presumption was that the majority of school principals, if not all of them, support professional learning communities. Prior to talking to other school leaders, I did not realise that my presumptions were not accurate. PLCs are supposed to be created and promoted by principals (DBE, 2015), yet this is not the case in most schools. Mestry and Singh (2007) emphasise the value of teachers working together to discuss topics pertaining to their profession.

On reviewing literature on the promotion of PLCs, (Brodie & Borko, 2016; Admiraal, Schenke, De Jong, Emmelot & Sligte, 2019) I found that some school principals are aware of PLCs but

believe that they are a waste of teaching time, others are unaware of the significance of their involvement in the promotion of PLCs, and still others are unaware of the beneficial effects that PLCs have on the advancement of high-quality teaching and learning. I sense an element of being unable to develop and sustain PLCs. As a result, I discovered that little study has been done on the crucial part that school principals play in encouraging PLCs.

The aim of this study is to investigate how principals of schools perceive their role in promoting PLC. I also want to explore what their experiences are in their role of seeking to promote PLCs. Lastly, I want to determine the lessons that can be learned from the study in terms of how a school principal might support PLCs.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study aims to gain insight on the role of school principals in promoting professional learning communities. This may be valuable to policy makers when designing policies on the role of school principals in promoting professional learning communities. Furthermore, the study has the ability to clarify matters for educational institutions and advance our understanding of the significance of principals' roles in the promotion of PLCs.

1.7 Definition of a Key Terms

1.7.1 Professional Learning Community

Although there is no common definition of a professional learning community, but writers seem to agree on the activities which take place within PLCs. Collaborative teaching and learning, sharing of the common vision and continuous cross examination of practices are amongst the common activities that take place in PLCs. Hence, Jansen, Cammock and Conner (2010) state that a PLC is a group of people who learn together new approaches that will intensify the opportunities of learning. A professional learning community is a network of teachers who meet frequently, share experiences, and collaborate on improving teaching skills and learner academic success (Harris & Jones, 2010). Therefore, in this study I use the term PLC to refer to a strategy that is intentionally designed to improve the school by reducing professional isolation and by encouraging teacher learning. In a school community through PLCs teachers are able to work together towards enhancing learner outcome.

1.7.2 Role

The Oxford Dictionary defines “role” as the part played by a person in a particular scenario. The term “role” is used in this study to understand the part that school principals play in the creation and promotion of professional learning community.

1.8 Structure of the Research Report

This section outlines the structure of the entire study on the role that principals have to play in promoting the professional learning communities. The presentation of the study is arranged into five chapters. Chapter One provides a brief background to the study, the rationale and the significance of the study. Chapter Two reviews literature on the role that school principals play in promoting the professional learning communities and the theoretical framework underpinning the study. The methodology and research design that were utilised to generate the data are covered in Chapter Three. The data generated through semi- structured interviews with the participants will be presented and discussed in Chapter Four. The key findings drawn from the data that was generated will be presented in Chapter Five. Lastly based on the research findings the recommendations will be made.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature about international and local literature on the role that school principals play in creating and promoting effective professional learning communities. The chapter is made up of nine sections. First I examine the professional learning community concept. The second section looks at how PLCs are created and developed. The third section is the discussion of how PLCs can benefit teachers, learners and the schools. Fourth, challenges that schools face when promoting PLCs and how they can be addressed. Fifth, the role of the school principal in promoting professional learning community. Seventh section is about some studies on PLCs and their implications for my study. Eighth, the theoretical framework that underpinned the study is discussed. Lastly the chapter summary is presented.

2.2 Understanding the concept of Professional Learning Community

Teachers work alone in most South African schools, particularly in black communities in both urban and rural areas. Because of this, many teachers are vulnerable and unable to meet the requirements of effective teaching (Botha, 2012). These teachers lack knowledge and skills and as a result they struggle to set tasks of high level for their learners (Botha, 2012). This could be for a variety of reasons. For the purposes of my study, I want to look into the causes cited by Morrissey (2000), including the fact that leaders haven't paid enough attention to things like creating a culture of shared and supportive leadership for teaching and learning. Dufour (2004) concurring with Morrissey (2000) notes that these leaders lack expertise of how to establish supportive professional cultures and structures that will lead to improved teaching. To address the issue of isolation, some schools have been seen opting for the creation of professional learning communities (Dufour, 2004). Scholars like Shirley Hord are amongst the researchers who brought the term professional learning community into education (Stoll et al., 2006).

According to Feldman (2020), the idea of a professional learning community (PLC) is not new, but it has acquired significant traction in the international teaching community as a supportive

structure for teaching and learning. Professional learning communities may have varied meanings in different situations, but there appears to be widespread international agreement (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace & Thomas, 2006) with regards to its definition. Brodie (2013) defines a PLC as a group of educators who discuss and critically examine their work in a continuous, reflective, synergetic, inclusive, growth-promoting manner with the aim of enriching pupils' learning. Correspondingly, Sargent and Hannum (2010) state that PLCs are places where teachers may talk about teaching and learning concerns with one another and share their experiences that will help them improve their everyday practices and the learning of their learners. Mullen and Hutingner (2008) say that PLC's main focus is on the learners' interests and how they might be helped in their learning.

According to McLaughlin and Talbert (2001), a PLC is a collaborative endeavour amongst teachers in which they build new knowledge of practice and mutually support one another's professional development. In addition, Balyer, Karatas, and Alci (2015) state that PLCs are founded on the belief that learning is more effective when it occurs within the community of professionals. Furthermore, Stoll et al. (2006) state that a PLC is the work of the professionals meaning its members must adopt a professional attitude. Adopting a professional approach, according to Balyer, Karatas, and Alci (2015), means that the work in the PLC is motivated by knowledge and research. This could imply that teachers talk about how to implement educational innovations in their classrooms. Teachers can also add to the research base by studying and reflecting on their own practice. Given how different researchers define PLCs my overall understanding is that it is a group of teachers who work together and engage in cycles of inquiry learning. This group of professionals wants to improve the learning outcomes for learners by developing their teaching skills as a group. In PLCs teachers get a chance to be empowered, be able to explore teaching methods and to share classroom practices.

2.3 The creation and development of Professional Learning Communities

Professional learning communities in schools may be created for different reasons but mainly it is to support school improvement and school effectiveness. Creating a genuine professional learning community, according to DuFour (2004) requires a concentrated focus on learning rather than teaching. In addition, Dufour (2004) emphasises cooperation and accountability among the team members as the key to effective PLCs. Stoll et al. (2006) argue that the creation and development of PLC depends on four key processes namely, optimising resources and

structures to promote the professional learning community, promoting professional learning, evaluating and sustaining the professional learning over time and leading and managing to promote PLC development.

2.3.1 Optimising resources and structures to promote the professional learning community

Allocation of resources in schools can have an intense influence on PLC development. Making effective use of social and human resources is believed to be a crucial element in the development, growth, and maintenance of professional learning communities. According to Stoll et al. (2006) positive relationships and collegiality are essential for productive collaboration in schools. Trust and respect amongst the members of a PLC is a key requirement which in turn leads to teacher confidence (Harris & Jones, 2010). Being confident enables teachers to open themselves up and be willing to learn and to participate in activities like classroom observation and feedback, pedagogical discussion and curriculum innovations (Botha, 2012).

2.3.2 Promoting professional learning

Professional learning is essential for the growth of a PLC. It is always vital that schools find ways of organising and promoting learning opportunities for teachers (Coe, Carl, & Frick, 2010). School development plan and staff performance systems are some of the elements that can inform professional development opportunities (Stoll et al., 2006). In addition, Yukl (2009) states that attending workshops, induction programmes, lesson observations and giving feedback are some of the strategies that schools may use for the promotion of professional learning. A PLC environment allows the teachers to engage in continuous professional development and learning (Seo & Han, 2012). Hoaglund, Birkenfeld and Box (2014) claim that teachers must meet on a regular basis to enhance already defined goals and review their achievement in order to establish and maintain an authentic PLC.

2.3.4 Evaluating and sustaining the professional learning overtime

To ensure that the PLC operating process has a sustainable growth, schools must monitor and assess its impact. According to Stoll et al. (2006) some of the actions that a school may take to encourage and sustain PLC development include making strategic staff appointments, coaching and mentoring specific teachers, enhancing professional learning in staff meetings, and working to enhance the learning environment at the school. When the processes of creating

the PLC are properly followed, the schools can reap the benefits which are discussed in the next section.

2.4 Some benefits of Professional Learning Communities

According to research (DuFour 2004; Pella 2011), PLCs help a variety of stakeholders in schools, including teachers, learners, and the school as a whole. DuFour and Marzano (2011) argue that when teachers are committed to working in PLCs and following the concepts of PLCs, learners' performance improves. Harris and Jones (2010) concur that continual school-based teacher learning enhances learner progress. Furthermore, if the professional learning community is functioning well, a culture of self-assured learners is built (Ivy, Herrington, Kritsonis & Tanner, 2008). While trying to improve learner achievements through PLCs, the teachers also benefit as their teaching strategies improve (Hord, 2008). Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008) are of the same opinion as they also note that teaching culture improves when teachers become more learner-centred. Teachers involved in PLCs find their jobs more fulfilling, they are more motivated compared to those who work alone (Hord, 2008). In addition, Ivy et al. (2008) highlight that teachers in a PLC frequently claim that they feel more accomplished as a result of better learner achievement. According to a study by Harris and Jones (2010), the idea of distributed leadership serves as the foundation for PLC. The basis of their claim is that the distributed leadership view acknowledges that leadership involves several people and spans organisational boundaries. Through PLCs schools get to have many leaders as one of the advantages of PLCs is that they allow for distributed leadership. Success of a PLC also depends on how well the principal is executing his role of promoting them.

2.5 Some challenges in promoting Professional Learning Communities and how they may be addressed

2.5.1 Unavailability of time

Principals encounter a variety of difficulties as they work to promote PLCs, including those related to time and space (Stoll et al., 2006). Regular staff meetings must be scheduled, and teachers must always have the chance to plan, reflect, incorporate, and discuss classroom observations as well as support one another's teaching efforts (Stoll, et al., 2006). After-school group meetings would only draw a small percentage of instructors, which would limit the

amount of understanding that could be developed (Maloney & Konza, 2011). Teachers monitor, prepare for, and teach each other during collaborative learning (Sargent & Hannum, 2009). But without enough time, this won't be a success. As a result of the preceding discussion, it is evident that school principals and SMTs need to find a way to guarantee that professional learning communities in schools are given enough time to flourish. Louis (2006) argues that schools should be set up such that teachers can meet and have discussions on a frequent basis. Time for teacher development sessions can be allocated in the timetable.

2.5.2 Conflicts amongst the team members

Principals' efforts to encourage PLCs may be hampered by disputes and friction between them and the teachers. According to Jansen, Cammock, and Conner (2010), the principal's control over meetings and refusal to give teachers a chance to speak up can occasionally lead to problems. Some of the teachers still prefer to work alone because, in their opinion, collaborating with co-workers on plans takes a lot of time and adds a significant amount of work (DuFour, 2004). Botha (2012) also suggests that some teachers may also prefer to work alone because they regard the presence of conflicting tensions to be an uncomfortable component of the educational process in their communities. Harris and Jones (2010) state that some teachers resist to participate in PLCs just because they are distrustful of group work.

Teacher are sometimes hesitant to share ideas and materials with other teacher during learning sessions because they fear criticism and lack of trust towards fellow teachers (Tayag, 2020). To address the differences amongst the teachers within a PLC, Hord (2008) suggests that principal should start by developing teachers' leadership skills. The areas that must take preference when developing leadership skills of the teachers are teachers' attitudes, respect and trusting others (Hord,2008).

2.5.3 Underdevelopment of leadership capacity

According to research by Botha (2012), many South African school leaders are promoted to leadership positions based on their good behaviour and their extensive teaching experience, without having received the requisite training in the roles and responsibilities of effective leadership. As a result, principals of schools end up leading with underdeveloped leadership capacity. Lack of leadership skills may cause teachers with strong leadership traits to intimidate school principals (Botha, 2012). This could then prohibit teachers from openly exchanging ideas and cooperating to enhance their teaching methods and learner performance. To manage this challenge Harris and Jones (2010) suggest that principals of schools who are already on

the system can be capacitated by attending leadership courses and such courses must be added on as a required qualification for the school principal's positions.

2.6 The role of the school principal in promoting Professional Learning Community

The scholars like Hord (1997) and DuFour (1999) believe that the principal should lead the school through common values, beliefs, and vision. DuFour (1999) also emphasises that it is important that teachers read research on school reform and communicate their results with their colleagues so that they may make educated judgments about the type of school they want to have. The principal should take the initiative and encourage teachers to study research papers and learn about current advancements in their different fields. The principal in charge of the PLCs should prioritise instruction as the primary focus of the school and delegate responsibilities (Fullan, 2008). Gray (2015) argues that the school principal is responsible for building sound structures, such as policies, norms, and shared decision-making, in order for a PLC to develop and be sustained. Gray (2015) continues and states that in order to achieve effective results in PLCs, open and trustworthy relationships must be formed between teachers, teacher colleagues and the principal.

Principals can use professional learning communities as a method to promote professional development since they stress the value of teacher collaboration. When professional learning communities are successfully instituted by school principals and well embraced by teachers, the learner achievement is likely to improve (Brown, 2016). According to Steyn (2013) school principals should consider issues such as creating a clear understanding of PLCs, identifying suitable facilitators, and creation of a safe, supportive environment when the professional learning community is instituted. According to Steyn (2013), in order to effectively collaborate to improve classroom practice, members of a professional learning community must have a thorough awareness of the entire process. Effective professional development requires frequent chances for teachers to collaborate (Pedder & Opfer, 2011). The schedule of the school days can be set up to provide teachers with a dedicated period of time to interact and share knowledge. The school principal has to ensure that teachers do not view PLCs as an option that they can use or ignore (Pedder & Opfer, 2011). Steyn (2013) further states that school principals are tasked to identify suitable facilitators for PLCs. A suitable facilitator is able to facilitate discussions and to select the relevant activities that will match the team's needs. Furthermore, Steyn (2013) states that sessions where teachers are sharing problems, knowledge and skills must be within a safe and supportive environment. In a supportive setting, teachers

must be given the chance to talk about their classroom experiences and receive feedback on how they are doing.

One of the aspects that must be fostered during professional learning sessions is respect and trust among the teachers. When teachers trust and value one another, they create a powerful social resource for communication and reflective conversation. For the sake of this study, trust is defined as the team members' readiness to be open and vulnerable with one another based on their belief that they are all reliable, honest, and open (Gray, 2015). In addition, Gray (2015) state that trust can be collegial, meaning that teachers are able to depend on one another during difficult times. On the other hand, trust can be in the principal, meaning that teachers who have trust in their principal believe that he or she always acts in their best interest with integrity. Building collegiality based on trust and respect among teachers is one of the principal's main responsibilities in ensuring that there is collaboration among them (King, 2011). Long-term and sustainable collaboration techniques may be harmed by a lack of respect and trust among the teachers (Fallon & Barnett, 2009).

According to DuFour (2004), school principals should concentrate on raising the appropriate questions rather than imposing a solution. School leaders should pose inquiries that foster trust and enhance the capacity of the staff to collaborate as a professional learning community (Jansen, 2010). The principal must provide teachers the opportunity to recommend ways to enhance instruction and learning. While without overwhelming them, school principal must meet with teachers to tell them of what has to be done. The idea of experts picking up skills from one another is beneficial for learners' development (Jansen, 2010).

Buttram and Farlet-Ripple (2016) also highlight the need of organised time as a prerequisite for productive collaboration. Regular staff meetings must be scheduled, and teachers must always have the chance to plan, reflect, incorporate, and discuss classroom observations as well as support one another's teaching efforts (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace & Thomas, 2006). The school calendar has to include frequent chances for teachers to collaborate. This is the responsibility of the principal. It is possible to plan school days such that teachers have set aside time to get together and participate in a variety of cooperative activities (Steyn, 2013).

Protecting a common vision is a very crucial duty for principals. In addition to the principal's responsibility to create a school vision, all parties involved must actively promote teacher

collaboration learning. Each activity for professional development that is recommended must result in the realisation of a common goal (King, 2011).

2.7 Some studies on Professional Learning Communities and their implications

In a study by Buttram and Farley-Ripple (2016) on the role of the principals in professional learning communities, the authors concerns were that not much has been written on the role that principals should play in supporting and nurturing teacher collaborations through PLCs. Hence the study's main objective is to explore the role of the principals in supporting and nurturing PLCs. The study revealed that how the principals viewed the PLC determined the reaction of the teachers. The principals' understandings influence the cultivation of culture around the PLCs, thus, in my study I shall seek to investigate school principals' understanding of what PLCs are. The study also revealed that principals rarely attend the PLCs meetings as a result the credit for teacher knowledge and skills gained during the meetings is due to instructional coaches who may be allocated to the school fulltime or on part-time bases. Following this finding, my study shall explore how involved school principals are in teachers' PLC meetings. Furthermore, the researchers found that principals can have an impact on PLC collaboration by allocating and maintaining the resources needed for effective teacher collaboration and growth. Thus, it shall be useful in my study to engage school principals regarding the resources they allocate for PLCs.

A study by Balyer, Karatas and Alci (2015) sought to learn more about school principals' involvement in developing professional communities at their schools, as well as their abilities to ensure that these teams work together effectively towards achieving school goals. The researchers used semi-structured interviews to collect data and purposive sampling was an ideal method since the study required a small group of participants. This study revealed that as much as principals know and understand the benefits of the PLCs but they seem not to have enough time for their effective implementation. They claim that this is due to their daily work load. It would be useful in my study to investigate what principals think would help them keep the balance between their daily workload and their involvement in the PLCs.

In a study, Steyn (2013) investigated the importance of implementing a PLC with the aim to enhance continuing professional development. Steyn (2013) argues that while research on professional learning emphasises learning through collaborative involvement in everyday school practices, most research on professional development emphasises teachers' learning as

an individual activity. The study revealed that merging these two approaches can lead to more effective teacher development and learning. The study also revealed that as much as research has confirmed that teacher collaboration has a very important role in improving the school and learner performance, it come with challenges. Given that there are barriers that may hinder the development of the teachers' professional skills and knowledge, I saw a need for further research. In my study I would be interested in learning what barriers if any, the selected principals face and how they attempt to deal with them.

Admiraal, Schenke, DeJong, Emmelot and Sligte (2019) examined what could be done by schools to support their teachers' professional development. The study is about investigating the appropriate interventions that schools can implement to create, support and develop PLCs. The researchers argue that schools should exercise caution as interventions can either develop or hinder the teachers' professional development and collaboration. To explain the impact of such interventions the authors grouped them into five clusters. The shared school vision on learning, professional learning opportunities for all, collaborative work and learning, change of school organisation and learning leadership. It was noted that some interventions were well received by most schools and others were not. This is due to the nature of the intervention, the more deeply an intervention is embedded in a school's organisation and culture, the more long-term influence it has on shifting schools toward a culture of professional development and collaboration. Given the importance of nature of an intervention that schools decide to implement when developing PLCs, it is important to further investigate the principals' understandings of such interventions and how they can use them to develop and sustain PLCs.

Ferguson (2013) conducted a case study about the difficulties experienced by a school principal in executing a professional learning community (PLC) initiatives. Practical issues and tensions created when implementing PLCs are discussed in the study. Despite challenges it was noted that teacher professional development is critical for improving learner achievements. Furthermore, the researcher notes that effective teacher professional development must include active learning, be ongoing and maintained, and be integrated with school improvement initiatives. It is pointed out in the research that most of the challenges highlighted in the case could be dealt with through financial support from the school stakeholders (school governing body and Department of Education). Understanding the financial challenges that are faced by the schools in townships, I thought it would be interesting to learn from principals the different cost- effective strategies that can be implemented to ensure that PLCs are effective.

Botha (2013) studied how a particular way of creating a professional learning community in schools can help to close the gap that exists between better equipped schools and schools with limited resources. Botha's (2013) argument is that schools that are better equipped, have skilled leadership, and have teachers with good educational backgrounds are better able to adapt to new advances in education. Whereas schools from poor background continue to suffer with a lack of funding, school leaders with limited training and poorly educated teaching staff. The study by Botha (2013) revealed that there is not enough research on the effects of PLC in South Africa because many teachers still struggle to deliver effective teaching and learning. Furthermore, Botha (2013) states that leaders in most South African schools do not encourage sharing of educational practices amongst the teachers. To overcome the challenge of isolation and to encourage teachers to work collaboratively with one another, a community of professional learners needs to be developed (Botha,2013). Amongst the important factors to be considered when developing a PLC was planning and to consider unique environment and circumstances of each school. Through my study, I shall seek to find out from principals how the development of a PLC can incorporate the unique circumstances and environment of each school.

Harris and Jones (2010) studied how professional learning communities, across schools, can help to enhance the education system as a whole. The researchers' argument is that schools may enhance learner achievement by improving teaching and classroom practices by developing PLCs. According to Harris and Jones (2010), the idea of distributed leadership serves as the foundation of a PLC. The basis of their claim is that the distributed leadership view acknowledges that leadership involves several people and spans organisational boundaries. The study revealed that as much as the PLC is not the only tool to be utilised for the successful transformation of the education system but it can be useful. The researchers further note that if leadership is distributed and shared more, the chances for unleashing interdependent learning capacity inside schools and across the system are enhanced. Following this finding, my research will examine how much distributed leadership is used by school principals.

A study by Schaap and Bruijn (2018) focused on the factors that influence PLC growth in educational settings. The seven factors that influence the creation of a PLC were identified by the researchers as task perceptions, group composition, role conflicts, alignment beliefs, reflective dialogues, socialization, and ownership. The study revealed that alignment beliefs, ownership, and socialisation views had the greatest influence on the growth of PLCs.

Furthermore, the study revealed that some elements are interrelated. An example of the interrelations between ownership and socialisation is that when members of a PLC take ownership of their professional development it is more likely that they will also initiate socialisation activities. As much as the study has revealed the elements that had the most impact on the development of a PLC, it would be useful to explore their perceptions on the impact of the three mentioned elements namely; beliefs about alignment, ownership and socialisation as being more significant for the development of the PLC.

A study by Mullen and Huting (2008) investigated the role of principals in facilitating and maintaining study groups as an integrated professional development technique. The research also focused on the methods used by principals to encourage study group procedures, which promote teacher learning and learner achievement. According to the findings, study groups serve as both a basis for the PLC and a mechanism for supporting school transformation. Furthermore, the research also reveals that principals have seen success with study group tactics that incorporate, most crucially, their own active participation in the professional development process. In my study I shall seek to find out from the principals what they think about study groups as an approach to facilitate PLCs.

In a study, Webb, Vulliamy, Sarja, Hamalainen and Poikonen (2009) compared policy and practice of PLCs in schools in England and Finland. The researchers were interested in knowing the experiences of teachers involved in PLCs and how schools in different countries ensure that teachers' well-being is looked after. To gather information, the researchers used qualitative semi-structured interviews. According to the study, preserving teachers' zeal, dedication, and love of their jobs is an important goal in and of itself as well as a way to enhance learner learning. Hence, in my study I would like to find out from the principals how do they ensure that teachers' well-being is taken care of. It would be interesting to know how do they ensure that teachers stay motivated and committed at work and as participants in the PLC.

2.8 Theoretical Framework

Two theories form the basis of the study. These theories were chosen as they complement each other. The theory based on Hallinger's (2003) model of instructional leadership and Hord's (1997) five attributes of professional learning communities.

2.8.1 Hord's (1997) Five attributes of Professional Learning Communities

The study will be framed by Hord's (1997) five attributes of professional learning community. Hord's (1997) five attributes of professional learning community provide a structure for continuous improvement by increasing staff capacity for learning and change. The cultural shift that must occur if schools are to become learning communities is highlighted. This theory emphasises reflective discussion as a tool for collaborative learning (Hord, 1997). Professional learning communities, according to Hord (1997), include five attributes: shared and supportive leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice.

2.8.1.1 Supportive and shared leadership

The first characteristic of supportive and shared leadership is the idea that the principal should involve the teachers in decision-making processes rather than working alone. According to Hord (1997), a PLC's effectiveness rests on the leaders' readiness to delegate authority, their capacity for active participation without meddling, and their capacity to support staff members' efforts. The qualities of these principals will inspire the teachers to actively take part in any school activities. According to Hord (1997), school principal should take initiative and provide support and guidance to the teachers as and when needed. When principals share authority and influence, the teaching staff's ability for leadership increases. Reichstetter (2006) is of the view that when principals relinquish control, teachers collaborate on learning and take part in decision-making. Hord (1997) states that because teaching is a social activity, it is crucial to foster the attitudes, respect, and confidence of teachers. Collaboration between school leaders and their learning team of professionals fosters self-assurance and improves outcomes (Harris, 2009).

2.8.1.2 Collective creativity

The emphasis of the second attribute, collective creativity, is on the principal and teachers collaborating to develop innovative pedagogical ideas that will improve students' learning (Hord, 2008). All activities in the professional community should be aimed at the growth and advancement of all learners (Hord, 1997). This will be made possible by ongoing discussions and decisions about instruction, teaching, and learning that are focused on learner outcomes. Collegial partnerships that exist within PLCs result in innovative and appropriate solutions to challenges, reinforcing the connection between principals and teachers while also growing their contribution to continuous improvement efforts.

2.8.1.3 Shared vision and values

The third attribute of PLCs is the shared vision and values. School principals should work with the teachers when crafting the vision and shared values (Hord,1997). In doing so, they are empowering teachers as they are giving them an opportunity to develop and to also take part in structures that contribute to school improvement (DuFour, 1999). When decisions about educational practices need to be made, the staff's collaboratively established vision serves as a guide (Hord,1997). The discussions that are taking place within a PLC must be guided by the shared vision and values.

2.8.1.4 Supportive conditions

The supportive conditions are the fourth characteristic of PLCs. Some important issues that the principals are expected to handle are addressed by this attribute. PLCs are supported by issues including scheduling teacher meetings, choosing a meeting location, and developing effective communication channels (Hord, 1997; Reichstetter, 2006). PLC will be ineffective if teachers do not have adequate time to meet.

2.8.1.5 Shared personal practice

The final characteristic, shared personal practice, emphasises the value of co-workers lending a hand to one another. In a classroom setting, teachers can visit one another, observe lessons, and then have discussions about what they saw (Hord,1997). These methods encourage teachers to be trustworthy and sincere. Allowing teachers to share their observations encourages them to be sincere about their capabilities (Hord, 1997). This practice informs the professional development activities that are relevant for a particular team (Hord, 1997; Slabbert, de Kock & Hattington, 2009). The responsibility of the principal is to foster an atmosphere that encourages and supports shared personal practice. Fullan (2010) further argues that the participation of the school principal and other school officials is necessary for a PLC to be sustainable. Fullan (2010) adds by stating that the involvement of school leaders in PLCs allows an easy flow of ideas, commitment and leadership within the school.

This theory is pertinent to the study because it places a strong emphasis on what makes PLC effective and makes clear the principal's expected involvement in the procedure. This theory will help me understand some of the activities that school principals need to take note of when creating and developing a PLC. The theory outlines the important features of an effective PLC.

2.8.2 Hallinger's model of Instructional Leadership

Hallinger (2003) states that instructional leaders lead with a blend of knowledge and charisma. He further points out that principals who are instructional leaders tend to be hands-on, informed, and ready to collaborate with teachers to improve teaching and learning. The focus of instructional leadership is the school principal's role in organising, directing, supervising, and shaping curriculum and instruction in the classroom (Hallinger, 2003). Furthermore, Hallinger (2003) suggests that instructional leaders are goal-oriented and are concerned with improving student academic outcomes. Hallinger (2003) proposes three dimensions of instructional leadership and notes that the focus of these aspects is on the function of school principals in managing teaching and learning.

2.8.2.1 The role of the principal in defining the mission of the school

The principal's part in determining the school's mission makes up the first dimension. The school's priorities should be determined by the principal and communicated to all relevant parties, including the teachers. This aspect supports one of Hord's (1997) characteristics of the PLC, which highlights the importance of shared vision and values. The principal was given priority by both researchers. The same opinion is held by Bush (2014), who claims that the principal must develop the school's vision and mission statements and place teaching and learning at their core. It is significant to emphasise that the school's mission and vision are not developed in isolation by the principal, who is still accountable for doing so (Hallinger, 2003).

2.8.2.2 The management of the curriculum

Managing the curriculum is the second aspect of instructional leadership, according to Hallinger (2003). According to Hallinger (2003), the focus of this dimension is overseeing, assessing, and directing the curriculum as well as keeping track of the learners' progress. In the South African context, the principal collaborates with the department heads to oversee curriculum coverage. The department heads oversee the daily operations that are taking place in their respective departments (Bush, 2014). Though there is proof of cooperation and teamwork, the principal is still responsible.

2.8.2.3 The promotion of a positive school learning climate

The promotion of a positive school learning climate is the model's final dimension. This dimension includes a number of duties, including safeguarding training time, encouraging professional development, and maintaining high visibility (Hallinger, 2003). The principal's

role in PLCs is to foster a culture of learning and to make time for teacher collaboration (Sargent & Hannum, 2009).

This model, in my opinion, is appropriate for the study because it emphasises the role of the principals in the promotion of PLCs. This theory will help me understand some of the leadership qualities that school principals need to possess when creating and developing a PLC.

2.9 Summary

This chapter has given a summary of the literature from both local and international sources on the part that principals can play in the development and promotion of a productive professional learning community. I have also considered how other researchers see PLCs and how my study might be affected by those viewpoints. This chapter also covered the theoretical framework of the research.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research design and methodology for the study. At the beginning of the chapter, the research paradigm within which the study is located is described. Secondly, research approach and research design used to understand principals' role in creating and promoting professional learning communities are discussed. Thirdly, the discussion of the method of sampling and how the data is generated follows. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the methods for data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical concerns.

3.2 Research Paradigm

The study is situated in the interpretive paradigm since it seeks to understand how principals contribute to the development and promotion of PLCs. I chose the interpretative paradigm because it carefully explains how people understand their surroundings and assesses the importance of each of their individual actions (Bertram & Christiansen, 2010). Some scholars contend that understanding the subjective world of human specialists is the main goal in the context of the interpretive paradigm (Bertram & Christiansen, 2010; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Sharing the same sentiments, Burton, Brundrett and Jones (2008) agree that the interpretive paradigm entails insight, deeper knowledge, and a better understanding of human behaviour and relationships. The interpretive paradigm is deemed to be relevant for the study as it sought to understand the experiences of principals in the process of creating and promoting professional learning communities. In this study, the participants (school principals) were given an opportunity to freely voice out their experiences (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2018).

3.3 Research Approach

A qualitative approach was used in this study. According to Mouton (2011), qualitative research is a strategy used to try and explain and define the phenomenon. In other words, through this approach a phenomenon is explored by using different methods for better interpretation and understanding. By gathering information about people's lives through their work experiences or places of residence, qualitative researchers have aimed to understand how they change over time (Maree, 2011). Therefore, as the study's goal is to comprehend the function of principals in fostering PLCs, this approach seemed appropriate. The purpose of qualitative research, according to Creswell (2008), is to look at and comprehend the

methodology examined in a qualitative research sample. This study investigates how principals contribute to the development and spread of PLCs.

3.4 Research Design

The case study research design is used in this study. A case study, according to Maree (2011), is a research technique that reveals a thorough comprehension of the phenomenon. Maree (2011) continues to argue that a case study is carried out in order to thoroughly describe and analyse a single unit. Stake (2005) agrees with the viewpoint and claims that case studies are carried out when a thorough comprehension of a particular instance is necessary. The goal of the case study is to better understand the phenomenon being studied while also giving the reader the chance to go deeper into the topic and develop their understanding of organisational behaviour (Creswell, 2008). The case in this study consists of three schools, with the principals of these three schools serving as study participants and sources of information from their respective schools. It also aided my investigation into the phenomenon in the context of the participants' daily lives.

The case study design like any other research design has strengths and weaknesses. According to Cohen (2007) the benefit of the case study approach is that it can portray disputes and discrepancies between the participants' opinions, which acknowledges the complexity of the social truth. Similarly, Bell (1991) claims that a case study provides readers with a complete picture, demonstrating relationships and impact in a specific context and also exposing any micro political difficulties. The emblem of case study research, according to Cohen (2007), is the significance of the occurrences rather than their frequency. Likewise, Rule and John (2011) believe that having a big amount of data in one or a few cases allows the researcher to dig deeper and learn more about the case in question. Given these strengths, and considering that one of the aims of the study was to understand how school principals experience their role in seeking to promote PLCs, this approach was the most relevant design for the study. Zainal (2007), on the other hand, claims that one of the weaknesses of a case study is its reliance on a single example, which makes it difficult to generalise the study's conclusions at the end. Baxter and Jack (2008) also agree with Zainal (2007) by stating that case study research has flaws, such as limited generalisability, the risk of distortion and a lack of cross-checks, the effect of sources, prejudice, the researcher's positionality, and the risk of fixing reality. I looked into the situation involving three secondary schools, in the district of Umlazi. The principals of secondary schools that had PLCs in their schools were the main focus of the study. These schools were researched in order to properly comprehend the role performed by school leaders

in fostering professional learning communities. There is no way to generalise the results from these schools to other secondary schools in the Umlazi district.

3.5 Research Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants for the study. Purposive sampling is a conscious choice of participants on the basis of the qualities they possess (Bertram & Christiansen, 2010). Judging by the continuous improvement in the learner performance in these schools, I can safely state that good leadership is one of the most common qualities that these principals possess. Respect, honesty, being innovative, confidence and commitment are some of the qualities I expected and found from the participants. Furthermore, Bertram and Christiansen (2010) contend that throughout this process, the researcher decides what needs to be learned and selects people based on their experience and skill who can and are able to contribute information. I chose three school principals specifically for my research. The principals were pertinent study subjects because I was interested in learning more about how they developed and promoted PLCs. Being in a management position in one of the schools in Umlazi District and privileged to work and interact with principals of schools with different PLC statuses. I was in a position to be able to specifically selected principals who had developed PLCs in their schools and had held leadership posts for longer than five years. This is due to the fact that I think they have a lot to say about how they have created and promoted PLCs, and I will be able to record what they are doing.

3.6 Data Generation Instruments

One of the two techniques I employed to gather information was a semi-structured interview. Since McMillan and Schumacher (2006) explain that in semi-structured interviews, the researcher employs an interview guide and subjects that are established in advance, I created the interview guide in preparation. In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer utilises a set of questions to guide the conversation (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). While there are a number of leading questions, the participant's response enables the researcher to ask questions that are more in-depth than those that were initially developed (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). The greatest method for my study was a semi-structured interview because it allowed me to ask participants for more in-depth information. This is so that areas that need to be examined can be described by key questions that are included in semi-structured interview (Gill, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). A semi-structured interview is a versatile tool for data collection (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). The interviewer or interviewee can take a different route to collect data using

this strategy in order to learn more in-depth information. (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick 2008). I conducted in-depth interviews with three school principals as a researcher to acquire comprehensive data. For the researcher to grasp each participant's perspective in relation to their environment, Mhlanga (2014) advises conducting individual interviews with each participant. This would promote a relaxed conversation between the researcher and the participant that produces rich data (Myende, 2016). With the permission of the participants, I used a digital recorder to capture the interviews. This was done to make sure the interview transcript was accurate. A forty to sixty-minute interview session with each participant was scheduled. Various factors such as how well the participants understood the questions and the necessity to ask follow-up questions determined the duration of the interview. Short interviews are advised since lengthy ones may lower the calibre of the responses (Patton, 2002).

Document review served as the second mode of data generation. The process of examining or reviewing documents, whether they are printed or electronic, is known as document reviewing (Bowen, 2009). Data is analysed and evaluated while evaluating records to produce significance, gain understanding, and advance empirical knowledge (Rapley, 2007). Reviewing documents will assist the information that the participants will offer since, according to Creswell (2008), documents of various kinds may aid the researcher in learning more about, comprehending, and gaining new perspectives on the subject under study. I examined the minutes of staff meetings, departmental meetings, and school management team (SMT) meetings for the study. I was able to understand the material that was presented by the participants better, courtesy of various meeting minutes. For example, the reason behind analysing SMT meeting minutes was to see whether the plans participants shared during interviews to promote PLCs were documented.

3.7 Data analysis Procedures

I used content analysis as a tool of data analysis. According to Mouton (2011), content analysis is a method for analysing words or phrases in various texts, such as essays, interviews, and speeches. Since it has been mentioned that this type of analysis can be used to analyse data from individual interviews, I thus believed it to be essential to my study. I immediately began transcribing information from the recording device after finishing the interviews. The information was coded and categorized after transcription. Maree (2007) defined coding as the process of carefully looking through the transcribed data and breaking it down into its component parts. The data was organised into themes after coding. Finally, the analysis yield

conclusion with the goal of clearly explaining the findings in relation to the study's research questions.

3.8 Trustworthiness

The four components of the trustworthiness criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility, according to Krefting (1990), is the belief in how effectively the data addresses the desired focus. To strengthen the credibility of my study, I interviewed three principals. I then checked the data to see if the conclusions from the other principals corroborated what I had learnt from one of them. Comparing the data helps to ensure trustworthiness of answers given by the participants.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) transferability is the capacity to apply research findings in related contexts. To ensure transferability, I thoroughly outlined my study methodology so that readers and other researchers could comprehend it and be able to use my findings in any case that was comparable. My description of the process included the context of the schools and the participants as well as a full description of the selection techniques, how I acquired access to the study location, and how I conducted the data analysis. Scholars (Loh 2013; Rule & John, 2011) point out that a detailed explanation of the location, study participants, and data findings can help qualitative research be more transferable.

The confirmability notion emphasises the objectivity of the researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure confirmability in the study, participants had the opportunity to read interview transcripts and verify whether my interpretation of their narratives accurately reflects what they have said. Participants in the study were given the opportunity to remark on whether the interpretations match their personal experiences that they attempted to describe during the interviews. Member-checking, in accordance with Maree (2011), enables participants to confirm the researcher's interpretations.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the study's methods should be thoroughly described so that subsequent researchers may rely on them. In order for the reader to trust the study, I carefully stated how the data was created and how it would be analysed. Furthermore, to ensure dependability, the findings from the primary sources of data (principals) in the form of semi-structured interviews were combined with the data obtained from the documents that I reviewed.

3.9 Ethical considerations

I requested ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and requested authorisation from the KZN Department of Education to conduct research. I sent the participants a letter in which I asked them to take part in the study and explained its goals. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and, when prompted, agreed to participate in the interviews.

Qualitative research requires adherence to certain ethical norms, such as secrecy, anonymity, beneficence, non-maleficence, and integrity (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). I made it a point to avoid posing questions that would be upsetting to the participants' feelings. I also gave the participants my word that I would treat all the information they shared with me in the strictest of confidence. In order to prevent any potential harm, I also made sure that the participants' identities remained anonymous. It was made clear to the participants that the study was voluntary, and that they could opt out at any point. They were informed that the study was voluntary and that they might stop participating at any time. Finally, it was explained to the participants that there would be no financial compensation for taking part in the study.

3.10 Summary

The research methods and design that were used in this study were described in this chapter. The interpretative paradigm and the qualitative approach were discussed. The case study was mentioned as the preferred research design for the investigation. A thorough explanation of the data generation procedures and data analysis techniques was also provided. It was found that selecting participants most effectively involved using a purposive sampling method. To increase the study's rigour, I discussed trustworthiness and how it was maintained in this study, as well as the importance of adhering to ethical issues.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The findings of data gathered through semi-structured interviews and document analysis are shown and discussed in this chapter. Semi-structured interviews were the primary method of generating data, and document analysis served as a supplementary. The chapter commences with a presentation of the schools' and the participants' profiles. In order to ensure privacy for both the schools and the participants, I used pseudonyms. The chapter proceeds and presents six themes that emerged from the data analysis, I conclude the chapter with a summary of the emerging issues. The chapter continues with the presentation of six themes that came out of the data analysis, and I conclude with a summary of the emerging issues.

After analysing data, six themes emerged. These are a few of the themes that were revealed by the data: (a) principals' understanding of professional learning communities (b) the principals' role in the promotion of the professional learning communities (c) resources vital for the creation of the professional learning communities (d) benefits of being a member of the professional learning community (e) challenges encountered by principals when seeking to promote professional learning communities (f) strategies used to address challenges encountered in the process of promoting PLCs.

4.2 Profiles of Schools and Participants

4.2.1 Schools

All three selected schools are located in the same Township. They are all quantile 4 schools. I have mentioned that the names of schools are pseudonyms. These names will be abbreviated as I continue with data presentation. Firstly, Qwabe High School will be QHS, secondly Msholozhi High School will be referred to as MHS and lastly for Zwibe High School I will use ZHS.

4.2.1.1 Qwabe High School (QHS)

The school had 920 learners enrolled and 33 teachers, of them 26 were at the post-level one, 4 were at the post-level two (Departmental Heads), 2 were at the post-level three (Deputy

Principal), and 1 was at the post-level four (Principal). The school had 26 normal classrooms and 5 special rooms. Two of the 5 special rooms are science laboratories, 1 media centre, 1 computer laboratory with very few computers due to high crime rate in the area and 1 music room with less than required equipment.

4.2.1.2 Msholozhi High School (MHS)

The enrolment in MHS is 1800 learners and 52 teachers of whom 44 were post level one, 5 were departmental heads, 2 deputy principals and 1 principal. The school had 30 classrooms of which 24 were normal classrooms and 6 were special rooms. The special rooms were 2 music rooms, computer laboratory, consumer studies room, physical sciences and life sciences laboratories.

4.2.1.3 Zwide High School

The school had learner enrolment of 1282 and 38 teachers of whom 30 were post level one, 5 were departmental heads, 2 deputy principals and 1 principal. The school had 28 classrooms of which 24 were normal classrooms and 4 were special rooms. The special rooms were for engineering graphic and design, computer studies, physical sciences and consumer studies.

4.2.2 Participants

4.2.2.1 Mr Dee of Qwabe High School

Principal Dee is in his fifties. He has been in the teaching profession for twenty-eight years. He qualified as teacher by obtaining a Secondary Teachers Diploma and Bachelor of Education degree. He started in his current school as a deputy principal and has been the principal of the school for over six years.

4.2.2.2 Mrs Bee of Msholozhi High school

The principal is 63 years old. She has been the principal in the school for 22 years. Her teaching experience is 40 years in total. She qualified as a teacher by obtaining Secondary Teachers Diploma and she later furthered her studies by obtaining Bachelor of Education Honours degree.

4.2.2.3 Mr Zee of Zwide High school

The principal is 53 years old. He has been in the teaching profession for almost thirty years. He was a post level 1 educator for 5 years. He was then promoted and became a deputy principal for 7 years and has been the principal in the school for 17 years. His highest qualification is Doctor of Philosophy under the discipline of Leadership Management and Policy.

4.3 The discussion of themes that emerged from the data

a) Principals' understanding of professional learning communities

This theme is about principals sharing their understanding of the concept of PLCs. Mrs Bee's view was that PLCs are a collection of small groups inside a school that work together to improve teaching and learning. This is what she said:

Professional learning communities is a combination of different small communities within the school that contributes positively in the promotion of better teaching and learning.

Another participant Mr Zee of ZHS viewed a PLC as a supporting structure for schools and its main aim is to improve teaching and learning. He also highlighted that in a PLC teachers meet and share ideas on things that can be done to improve learner results. This is what he said:

In PLCs teachers are given an opportunity of planning together and that of sharing ideas that can help to improve teaching and learning. The goal of this professional community is to improve learner outcomes by cooperatively developing teaching ability.

He also reported that once a PLC is created it has to be sustained. I then asked him to explain what he meant by that statement. His response was as follows:

By that I mean a PLC is not only about having a meeting or two once is while, but there has to be an ongoing engagement that receives my full support as a principal.

Mr Dee reported that a professional learning community is a group of teachers who come together on a regular basis to learn from one another and exchange ideas on how to improve their teaching capabilities and learner achievements. This is what he had to say:

A professional learning community is a group of teachers who on regular basis meet and learn from one another, and also share different methods of teaching that can help to improve learner achievement. I believe that engaging our teachers in professional learning communities is important for our education system since it is where they are afforded with the opportunity to learn and improve their teaching skills.

According to Seagent and Hannum, (2010); and Muller and Huting, (2008) during the PLC meeting, teachers may discuss teaching and learning difficulties with one another and share their experiences, which will help them improve their daily practices and their learners' learning. Mullen and Huting (2008), concur and state that the primary focus of PLC is on the learners' interests and how they might be assisted in their learning.

This study is underpinned by Hord's (1997) Five attributes of professional learning communities. Professional learning communities, according to Hord (1997), have five characteristics: shared and supportive leadership, group innovation, shared ideals and vision, conducive conditions, and shared personal practice. When analysing the responses by the participants regarding their understanding of the concept of professional learning community, my take is that not all attributes were covered. Supportive and shared leadership, collective creativity, and shared values and vision are the three attributes that I felt were not covered by the participants. These attributes highlight the important role that principals play in PLCs. Supportive and shared leadership is about the importance of ensuring that principals do not work in isolation but involve teachers in decision-making processes. Shared vision and values is about the importance of principals ensuring that teachers are empowered by giving them an opportunity to develop and also take part in structures that contribute to school improvement. The third attribute of the PLCs that I also felt was not covered by the participants in their responses was supportive conditions. This attribute deals with a few crucial difficulties that principals are expected to handle in order to assist a PLC. These concerns can include deciding on a time for educators to gather and the venue for those meetings.

On the other hand, the other two attributes, namely, collective creativity and shared personal practice were covered by the participants when responding to the question. The shared personal practice attribute emphasises the value of co-workers lending a hand to one another. This attribute is in line with the concept of PLC where teachers who teach the same subject or who are teaching the grade/phase are expected to work together and share ideas that would result in

the improvement of learners' results. Participants of a PLC are empowered, have the opportunity to experiment with teaching methods, and share classroom practices. Although the study participants did not mention that principals have an important role to play when discussing their understanding of the concept of PLC, it is worth mentioning that they were somehow in line with collective creativity attribute which asserts that collegial partnerships that exist within PLCs result in innovative and appropriate solutions to challenges and that the main purpose is to improve learner results.

The minutes from the Science department meeting of ZHS had dates scheduled for subject meetings. These meetings were in support of what the principal said was his understanding of the PLC, as he mentioned that in a PLC teachers of a particular subject meet and develop each other by sharing different strategies that can be used to improve the results of the learners. It was stipulated in the minutes that subject heads are expected to have a detailed report on the issues that will be discussed in their meetings. The extract from Science department meeting minutes:

<i>Scheduled date</i>	<i>Subject</i>
<i>2/03/2021</i>	<i>Life Sciences</i>
<i>5/03/2021</i>	<i>Physical Sciences</i>
<i>8/03/2021</i>	<i>Technology</i>
<i>8/03/2021</i>	<i>Natural Sciences</i>

- *The subject heads are expected to submit a detailed report on the issues that will be discussed to the Departmental Head three days after the meeting.*

I also managed to go through the minutes of the meeting for Life Sciences teachers. The records show that teachers were sharing ideas on how to ensure that teaching and learning Life Sciences is interesting to both teachers and learners. Extract from minutes:

- *One of the teachers suggested that the school needs to provide the necessary resources for them to successfully conduct experiments.*
- *Another teacher suggested that informal tests must be administered at the end of each chapter. These tests must be common for each grade.*
- *It was also suggested that each teacher presents a topic to the group so as to share different methods of teaching life sciences.*
- *The Subject head requested that the dates scheduled for formal tasks be reviewed to address clashes.*

The year plan of MHS had dates scheduled for Departmental Heads meetings of sharing good practices. This is showing that the departments within the school are not working in isolation. The extract from year plan of MHS:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Department</i>
20/02/2021(15h00- 16h00)	<i>Humanities and commerce</i>
21/02/2021(15h00-16h00)	<i>Sciences and Mathematics</i>

b) Principals' role in the promotion of professional learning communities

This section discusses the role that principals play in the promotion of professional learning communities. I wanted to determine the extent of the principals' involvement in the promotion of PLCs. In response to the question, this is what Mr Dee of QHS said:

I need to ensure that a PLC is established and once it is established it must be functional also to provide necessary support and resources. I have a responsibility of ensuring that members of the PLC trust and respect each other. It always depends on the teachers' needs for the day, However, I always ensure that they have the venue to hold their meetings and the necessary materials.

Mr Dee mentioned the importance of trust and respect amongst the members of the PLC. I then asked him to explain his role in ensuring that such values are upheld. He responded as follows:

I always tell everyone (staff and learners) in the school that respect is earned by showing it to the next person and that it goes hand in hand with trust. I lead by example as I always treat everyone with respect and expect the same treatment from them and for one another. A good example is that of having subject heads within the departments. This concept is about departmental heads trusting and respecting post level one educators. Also understanding that as departmental heads are not experts in all subjects that they are managing but they need to depend and trust other team members for their subject knowledge.

Mr Zee of ZHS just like Mr Dee reported that he provided materials that would be needed by the teachers during their PLC meetings. This is what he said:

I ensure that teachers have everything that they need during PLC meetings. I do this to avoid complaints and lack of participation which could be as a result of insufficient resources.

I asked him to give examples of the resources that would be required during PLC meetings. He responded as follows:

The resources could be to allocate sufficient time for the meeting, the venue to hold the meeting and equipment and material that may have been requested.

Mrs Bee of MHS emphasised the importance of giving support to the teachers by ensuring that teaching and learning resources are available. She mentioned that depending on the needs of teachers she sometimes organised people from outside the school for assistance. This is what she said:

The principal is the overseer of everything that is happening in the school. I ensure that resources are available for PLC to be effective and for better teaching and learning to take place. I also have a responsibility to provide the necessary human resources.

Mrs Bee also mentioned that through PLCs leadership skills of the participants are developed. Explaining her statement, she highlighted that she has the responsibility of ensuring that members of the PLC are given an opportunity to take up leadership positions. This is what she had to say:

Through PLC leadership skills are developed as every member has to take up leadership position such as coordinating team activities and setting the agenda and of ensuring the availability of the necessary resources.

According to A guideline for South African Schools on Professional Learning Communities (2015) effective PLCs require distributed leadership where every member is afforded with opportunities to lead.

The principals seemed to share the same view regarding the role that they play in the promotion of the professional learning communities. For instance, participants mentioned that they have the responsibility of giving support and providing resources to the teachers. According to Steyn (2013) school principals should consider issues such as creating a clear understanding of PLCs, identifying suitable facilitator, creation of a safe, supportive environment when the professional learning community is instituted. In support of the same view, Schechter and Ganon (2012)

state that promoting PLCs includes ensuring that principals create a meeting schedule for teachers by allocating adequate time, space, and resources. Furthermore, Sargent and Hannum (2009) state that the position of the principal in PLCs is to provide a positive learning environment and to provide time for teacher collaboration. As much as the daily activities that take place in different departments in schools are supervised by the departmental heads, the principal remains accountable even though there is evidence of collaboration and teamwork (Bush, 2014). One of the major conditions for effective PLC is supportive leadership (A guideline for South African Schools on Professional Learning Communities, 2015). Supportive leadership can be when principals are seen providing instructional leadership by motivating and encouraging teachers to participate in PLCs.

It emerged from the data generated during the interviews that the principals' role in the promotion of PLCs includes ensuring that there is collaboration amongst teachers by fostering collegiality based on trust and respect. The principal is also responsible for motivating and encouraging teachers to participate in PLCs by providing them with the necessary resources.

The analysis of the minutes revealed that in QHS there was a special committee that was responsible for ensuring that there is sufficient and relevant learner teacher support material (LTSM). This committee was led by the principal. The extract from the minutes of the meeting that was held on the 30/03/2021:

After the opening remarks the chairperson (principal) outlined that his dream is to see each learner in his school having a textbook for every subject and to see teachers using different and innovative teaching aids. He then noted that he was grateful to committee members for raising funds that will assist in improving LTSM.

What was different in ZHS where the principal was struggling to get a list of required teaching and learning materials from the departmental heads. The minutes of a staff meeting that was held on 4/05/2021 revealed that the principal was concerned about the teachers who took time to submit their LTSM requirements as this would negatively affect teaching and learning. The extract from the minutes:

The principal expressed his disappointment to the departments that have not submitted their LTSM requirements. He then requested the Departmental Heads that have not submitted to explain their reasons in writing and submit the report before the end of the day.

All three participants seem to have a limited understanding of their role in promoting PLCs. The reason for my observation is that participants did not mention the importance of them being actively involved as team members in the PLCs. My impression was that they think that their role is more of being the provider and not so much of being actively involved. Personnel Administrative Measures (Annexure A.7) stipulates that job description of principals includes that they should teach and assess learners. This implies that their role in PLCs is not only to provide resources but they are also participants.

c) Resources vital for the creation of the professional learning communities.

In this section I planned to find out from the participants what they thought were important resources for the creation of a PLC. Mr Zee stated time as one of the important resource when creating a PLC. This what he had to say:

Let me start by saying, I believe that the success of a PLC depends on the amount of time dedicated for meetings. My wish is that PLC meetings take place after school. However, I have to be realistic and take note of the fact that there are teachers who are willing to participate in PLCs but who are not prepared to sacrifice their time. To meet them halfway we therefore hold some meetings during the working hours. We normally take ten minutes from each of the six teaching periods which are one hour long and from the first break which is also one hour long to make time for meetings.

I was a bit concerned about them taking ten minutes from each teaching and learning period and asked him how then do they make up for the lost time. He then responded as follows:

Mind you, not that all meetings disturb teaching and learning, some takes place during breaks. It all depends how much time is required for a particular meeting. Proper planning is a pre-requisite for every meeting to minimise challenges. So to answer your question to make up for lost time teachers use morning and afternoon study period.

Mr Dee also mentioned that effective allocation of time is important for the creation of a PLC. However, he noted that his approach was different from that of Mr Zee. He stated that experience has taught him not to dictate and allocate time for PLC meetings, instead he asks the teachers to submit their schedule of meetings with dates and times. This is what he said:

Experience has taught me not to allocate time for PLC meetings. Instead I allow the teachers to submit the schedule of their meetings with dates and duration. This helps

us to minimise excuses for non-attendance as the schedule is based on what they had discussed and agreed upon as a team.

I then asked him if he suggested that he always gets hundred percent attendance. His response was: *Yes, for most meetings and when there is member that is reported absent its always with a valid reason.*

Mrs Bee mentioned that availability of time and acknowledging the importance of professional development are important for the creation of a PLC. This is what she said:

My view is that willingness to learn and acknowledging that you need to improve as a teacher is important for the creation of a PLC. Secondly, it is time because belonging to a PLC means you have to put in extra time and ensuring that enough time is allocated for PLC meetings and for feedback sessions.

I probed her to explain what she meant by feedback sessions. Her response was as follows:

Remember in PLCs a group of professionals get together and learn from each other and in our case as educators. We are then expected to implement what we have learnt. The process involves a stage where we come together again and share our experiences while we were implementing and that is what I am referring to as feedback sessions.

Participants also reported that good communication skills are important for the creation of a PLC. This is what Mr Dee had to say:

A lot of interaction takes place in a PLC as a result good communication skills are vital for the creation of a PLC. Good communication amongst the team members will avoid unnecessary conflicts and misunderstandings.

Mrs Bee had the following to say:

The creation of a sustainable PLC depends on healthy communication amongst the members. It is also very important that objectives and goals of the PLC are clearly communicated to the members.

Participants mentioned time and good communication skills as some of the resources that would be important for the creation of the professional learning communities. Stoll et al. (2006) state that time must be set aside to hold regular staff meetings and that teachers must have continuous opportunities to prepare, reflect, incorporate and discuss classroom insights and help each other enhance teaching. Time to meet is one of the supportive circumstances

suggested by Hord's (2008) model of PLCs. In this model it is suggested that principals are expected arrange time for PLC meetings. Sargent and Hannum (2009) state that one of the prerequisites for a PLC to be successful is that teachers should meet regular basis.

d) Benefits of professional learning communities

Under this theme I sought to find out from the participants how their schools were benefiting from having professional learning communities. Mr Dee from QHS stated that PLCs do not only help teachers but the school as whole. In his explanation he mentioned that the commitment of the teachers in the PLC, result in the improvement of the learner's performance. This is what he had to say: *I am proud to say that our results are improving especially for grade twelve and this is because teachers continuously engage in developing themselves through PLCs.*

Mr Dee continued and mentioned that teachers who are members of PLCs have a potential of growing professionally and are afforded an opportunity of being empowered. This is what he said:

Being part of the team means one would grow professionally. Teachers get to share different methods of teaching that would help them improve their subject knowledge. Through discussions teachers with difficulty in understanding certain aspects or sections get help and as such results they are empowered.

He also highlighted that communication skills of the teachers who participate in PLCs improve. This is what he said:

In PLCs communication skills of teachers are developed and improved through sharing ideas, debating different issues and brainstorming innovative ways to improve teaching and learning.

Mrs Bee from MHS shared that she has seen a development of a strong relationship amongst the PLC members in her school. This is what she had to say:

I have seen the growth and development amongst the members in terms of trust and always striving to enhance the strengths of one another.

She also noted that teachers who participate in PLCs improve their subject knowledge and they are able to share different teaching methods. She had this to say:

I have noticed an improvement in the subject knowledge, self-esteem and confidence of the teachers participating in the PLC. Educators are able to work in teams and are able to acknowledge their contributions in the improvement of learner results. They are becoming more confident and are eager to try out different methods of teaching that they learn during their meetings.

Mrs Bee also reported that teachers who are involved in PLCs are at an advantage of improving their technological skills. This is what she said:

Through PLCs teachers are able to share and be up to date with the new and improved technological changes that are vital for both teachers and learners. Such updates are normally led by novice teachers as they are more enlightened with technology.

Mr Zee also mentioned that teachers' benefits for being members of PLCs include improvement in the subject knowledge and teachers refrain from pointing fingers at each other. He also was of the view that by participating in PLCs, teachers are able to address problem areas that are difficult to address in isolation. This is what he said in this regard:

Teachers are able to reflect on their teaching methods. Their content knowledge also improves. If teachers work as a team the practice of pointing fingers at each other is eliminated.

I asked him to clarify when and why teachers would point fingers at each other. He then said:

There is this tendency of teachers who teach in higher grades (especially Grade 12) of complaining that justice is not done in lower grades - some aspects are partially covered and some are not done at all. This then creates gaps which are difficult to close as each grade has its own content to cover. Therefore, when they work together such problems would be addressed. Working as a team also help teachers to be able to solve problems that are difficult to solve as individuals. A good example is that of teachers working together in unpacking subject policies.

Another benefit of participating in a professional learning community is job satisfaction and relief from job related stress. Mr Dee from QHS mentioned that teachers who participate in PLCs are relieved from stress. He also said that the stress could be as a result of poor learner performance in their subjects. This is what he said:

Having to account for poor learner performance is very stressful for teachers as they have to submit intervention plans and be closely monitored. So for being a member of a PLC teachers are able to help one another and come up with strategies that can help improve learner results and that would relieve their stress.

The view that being in a PLC helps in relieving stress for teachers and that they get job satisfaction was also shared by Mrs Bee by stating the following:

During PLC meetings, teachers also discuss issues such learner discipline, absenteeism and any other challenges that they normally face in classrooms. Being able to discuss such challenges and be able to come up with solutions as a team relieve them from stress. They are afforded with an opportunity to enjoy the time they spend at work and to be more efficient and effective.

Hord (2008) is of the view that one of the benefits for teachers who participate in PLC is the improvement of their teaching methods or strategies. Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008) are of the same opinion as they also note that teaching culture improves when teachers become more learner-centred. Furthermore, Hord (2008) states that teachers involved in PLCs find their jobs more fulfilling, and they are more motivated compared to those who work alone.

The staff meeting minutes of QHS held on 06/ 06/2021 revealed that the principal was happy with learner performance and discipline in the school. In response to the principal, one of the teachers highlighted that, it was as a result of being given a chance of sharing different methods of disciplining and motivating the learners. Another teacher added by acknowledging the support that they get from the school management team with regard to learner discipline. Extract from the minutes;

- *The principal appreciated the efforts of the teachers towards learner discipline and shared that this was as a result of team work and for the fact that the staff members are willing to learn from each other.*
- *One of the teachers noted that such praises were as a result of everyone's effort and a will to learn from one another.*
- *Another teacher acknowledged the support that they always receive from the management team. Why do you have documentary evidence from just one school?*

The views of the participants on benefits of the professional learning community can be summarised as follows: Through PLCs the challenges that lead to poor learner performance

are identified and necessary steps are taken to solve them. Effective PLCs do not only focus on improving learner achievements but also on teachers engaging in continuous professional development. Lastly, the positive energy found in PLCs contributes towards a positive school culture. Having summarised what participants viewed as benefits of the PLC, it is important to mention that the mere existence of a group called a PLC does not guarantee that all these benefits will be achieved. Scholars like Hord (2008); Slabbert, de Kock, and Hattingh (2009) believe that emotional intelligence is one of the crucial qualities teachers need to have in order to function in PLCs. Emotional intelligence can be demonstrated through empathy, staff empowerment, group decision-making, and distributed leadership (Heck & Hallinger 2010).

e) Challenges encountered by principals when seeking to promote professional learning communities

Under this theme, I sought to find out from the participants the challenges they encountered when seeking to promote a professional learning community. Mr Dee of QHS claimed that some teachers resisted participating in PLCs because they lack self-esteem, peer pressure, and fear of being criticised.

My biggest challenge is to try and convince teachers that belonging to a PLC does not speak less of you as a teacher. So I have to inspire, motivate and remind them that belonging to a PLC simply means people are learning from you and you are also learning from them.

Mr Dee continued and reported that some teachers lacked commitment as there would always be one or two who will come up with excuses when they have to attend PLC meetings. What complicates things, even more, is that their meetings are scheduled to be held after school. This is what he said:

It is a struggle to get a hundred percent attendance from the teachers. There would always be one or two members who do not attend. The fact that PLC meetings are held after school complicates things even further.

Mrs Bee of MHS shared the same view of being challenged by teachers who were not willing to participate in the professional learning communities. She revealed that some teachers felt being a member of a PLC meant extra workload for them which is unnecessary.

I have educators who are simply not willing to participate in PLCs. They argue that they are already overloaded with work so being part of a PLC means more work for them and is a waste of time.

She also pointed out that sometimes PLC meetings were cancelled because of circuit or district meetings or workshops that teachers had to attend. She had this to say:

We are also challenged by unforeseen circumstances like things that will take you out of your way and that will disturb what was scheduled to be done in the PLC meeting. Sometimes meetings have to be rescheduled just because some team members cannot attend due to unforeseen circumstances, e.g. having to attend subject workshops planned by the district or CASS moderation meetings that take place quarterly.

Furthermore, Mrs Bee stated that conflicts and tension amongst the teachers also posed a challenge for her when trying to promote a PLC.

Conflict and tension amongst the teachers also create problems as they are unable to work together and not willing to listen to each other.

As observed in the literature review in chapter two, scholars like Jansen (2010) argue that sometimes tensions are created by principals' domination in meetings and not allowing teachers to voice their opinions. Some of the teachers still tend to work in isolation as they state that working with colleagues to plan together is time-consuming and adds a lot of work burden (DuFour, 2009). Botha (2013) also suggests that some teachers may also prefer to work alone as they find the presence of competing tensions an unsettling aspect of the learning experience in their communities. Harris and Jones (2010) state that some teachers resist participating in PLCs just because they are distrustful of group work. This study is framed by Hord's (1997) five attributes of professional learning communities. One of the attributes of this theory is shared personal practice and its emphasis is on the importance of people who work together to help one another. Such practices promote trust and honesty among teachers.

Mr Zee identified the unavailability of time and space as major challenges in his school. This is what he had to say:

Having to teach, assess and give feedback to learners makes it difficult to do justice in terms of what is expected in our PLC meetings. We sometimes fail to meet as per schedule. It sometimes gets to a point where some teachers feel like they are overloaded

with work. Another challenge is the issue of limited space. Some meetings are not as effective as a result of limited space.

According to Maloney and Konza (2011) some teachers do not consider participation in professional learning communities to be a significant element and are unwilling to go an extra mile, which includes giving up their own time. Similarly, Harris and Jones (2010) argue that some teachers resist participating in PLCs just because they do not believe in group work. It was clear from our discussions that teachers cannot be forced to participate in the professional learning communities. However, they need to be motivated and have a clear understanding of the benefits of their involvement in the PLC.

In my discussion with Mr Zee, unavailability of time came up as one of the challenges. Sargent and Hannum (2009) argue that unavailability of time limits the activities that are to take place during PLC meetings. In addition, Sargent and Hannum (2009) note that during collaborative learning, teachers observe each other, prepare, and teach each other. It is therefore important to acknowledge that all this will not be possible without adequate time.

Minutes of meetings that were held in two schools that participated in the study revealed that sometimes meetings are to be postponed because of poor attendance and/or because of district meetings that teachers have to attend. In MHS the minutes from the FET maths teachers' meeting revealed that the meeting had to be postponed as some members had to attend the Quality management systems (QMS) meeting that was organised by the district. The following is an extract from the minutes:

09/03/2021 after roll call the chairperson suggested that the meeting be rescheduled as some members could not be part of the meeting as they had to attend the QMS workshop.

In agreement with what the principals said about being challenged by lack of commitment from some teachers, the minutes of the meeting that was held for accounting teachers of QHS on 16/04/2021 revealed that they had to reschedule as there was no quorum. An extract from the minutes read:

The facilitator of the meeting suggested that the meeting be postponed as most members could not attend for different reasons.

The SMT meeting minutes of ZHS held on 05/05/2021 revealed that some departmental heads were complaining about the limited space in the school which makes it difficult for them to hold effective subject meetings. The extract from the minutes:

- *One of the departmental heads was concerned about the fact that their PLC meetings are scheduled to be held during the afternoon study period. Therefore, it becomes difficult for them to have effective PLC meetings as sometimes they need to use the equipment (e.g. the projector) that is in classrooms occupied by the learners.*
- *Another departmental head seconded the issue of limited space and added by pointing out that they are usually disturbed by noise from learners who are supposed to be studying during their meeting times.*

The data presented suggest that most of the issues that principals face occur within the school. For instance, Mr Dee said some teachers were not willing to participate in the PLCs as they feared criticism and because of low self-esteem. Mrs Bee also mentioned that some teachers felt that participating in PLCs overloaded them with work. Mr Zee also submitted that some teachers do not want to participate in PLCs because they feel that they do not have enough time to do all that is expected as they feel they are already overloaded with work.

f) Strategies principals use to address challenges encountered in the process of promoting PLCs

In the previous theme, the discussion was about the challenges principals encounter when seeking to promote PLCs. The challenges cited included teachers resisting to participate as they lacked self-esteem and some did not want to be criticised. Some teachers, according to Mr Dee and Mrs Bee considered PLCs as a time waster and an addition to their already excessive workload. In this theme, I present the strategies that principals use to address the challenges encountered in the process of promoting PLCs. Mrs Bee reported that involving teachers in decision-making processes and motivating them to always go an extra mile in everything that they do were some of the strategies that work in her school. This is what she said:

I try to involve teachers as much as possible in decision-making processes this makes them realise that they play a very important part in the school. I constantly praise them and they get to be recognised for their extra efforts.

Mr Zee shared the same view and reported that he ensured that teachers were involved when decisions are to be made and they are always praised for their achievements. This is what he had to say:

We introduced the concept of subject heads in our school and that allows the post-level one teachers to lead and be part of the decision-making team. We also make sure that teachers are recognised for their good performance, be it just by being called out in the morning assembly or through our newsletter.

One of the theories used in this study is Hord's (1997) five attributes of professional learning communities. One of the attributes of this theory is that leadership should be supportive and shared. This implies that principals must not work in isolation but they need to involve teachers. This would empower teachers and it allows them to participate in structures that contribute to school improvement. According to DuFour and Eaker (1998), a shared mission, vision, and goals are recommended to address the issue of isolation amongst teachers.

Mr Zee continued and reported that proper planning was vital and the importance of ensuring that PLC members are clear of what is expected from them all the time. He also added that his observation was that when teachers participate in PLCs they learn to depend on each other resulting in strengthened trust in one another. This is what he said in that regard:

My take is that proper planning controls poor attendance, unwillingness to participate, and elements of confusion. Instructions and expectations must always be clear to avoid conflicts and misunderstandings amongst the PLC members. Teachers must be able to depend on each other to enforce the element of trust.

Hord (2008) states that areas that must take preference when developing leadership skills of the teachers are teachers' attitudes, respect, and trust in others.

Mrs Bee also emphasised the importance of always encouraging teamwork amongst the teachers and being able to win the support of the teachers with a positive attitude whenever there is an idea that needs to be shared. This is what she said:

Do not work alone to get people to buy into your ideas. Teachers must understand that the idea of a positive learning environment needs everyone's effort. Teamwork is

important. Identify people who are willing to go the extra mile. Involve as many people as possible and always sell your idea to people with a positive attitude.

Mr Dee claimed that capitalising on the strengths of the teachers when promoting PLCs was paramount. He stated that in his school teachers serve as their main source of strength. Hence his emphasis was on the importance of always giving extra support to the teachers. This is what he had to say:

The success of the PLC depends on my ensuring that teachers get all the required resources. I may not be able to attend all the PLC meetings that are taking place in the school, but where possible I make an effort and attend and show my support. I lead by example and am always committed to finishing the task at hand.

Steyn (2013) suggests that school principals should consider issues such as creating a clear understanding of PLCs, identifying suitable facilitators, and creation of a safe, supportive environment when professional learning community is instituted. Hallinger's (2003) instructional leadership theory was also used as a focus of the study. One of the three dimensions of this theory is the promotion of a positive school learning climate. Several roles, such as protecting training time, promoting professional growth, and the preservation of high visibility, are included in this dimension (Hallinger, 2003). Such roles are to be seen performed by the principal who is promoting an effective PLC.

The data presented suggest that principals have to make an effort and develop suitable strategies to address the challenges encountered when promoting PLCs. The minutes of the SMT meeting that was held in QHS on 15/10/2020 revealed that they had plans of ensuring that teachers remain motivated.

On 30/10/2020 the school management team will be sharing ideas on staff recognition procedures as a way of motivating teachers to improve their performance.

This extract is showing that the principal understands that teacher's good efforts must be recognised. The extract is also suggesting that the principal does not work in isolation, he involves others when decisions are to be made. In our conversations with Mrs. Bee, she revealed that her school holds an awards ceremony every year at the conclusion of the third term. This function aims to award both teachers and learners for their best performance and as a way of recognising those teachers who always go the extra mile when doing their work. Bass

(1985) claims that transformational leaders function as change agents by awakening and stimulating followers' attitudes through motivating activities.

The documents that were reviewed in the other two schools revealed that planning takes priority. The documents reviewed included minutes of the meeting that was held by the school management team of ZHS and the minutes of the commerce department meeting of MHS.

An extract from the minutes of the school management team meeting of ZHS:

Quarterly results analysis meeting is to be held at the beginning of the new term, individual teachers will be accounting for the results obtained in the previous term and submitting improvement plans.

An extract from minutes of the commerce department meeting of MHS read:

- *Teachers who are sharing a subject in a grade are expected to plan together and submit their plan to the subject head. The subject is then supposed to report to the departmental head.*
- *The recommendation is that these planning meetings are to take place in the afternoons so that teaching and learning are not disturbed.*
- *One of the teachers suggested that they use Friday afternoons since learners leave early and therefore classrooms will be free for them to use.*

4.4 Emerging issues

The participating principals were of the same opinion that the main focus of a PLC is on the interests of the learners and how they can be assisted in their learning. They were also of the view that PLCs were the best tool for teacher development and training. In PLCs, teachers are able to share ideas on how to improve teaching and learning. Through PLCs, teachers are able to share methods of dealing with challenges that they may encounter in their school life. PLCs promote teamwork, respect, mutual understanding and trust amongst the members. In my view the principals understand the concept of a PLC. As much as principals are also members of PLCs they also have an important role to play of ensuring that all these small groups of professionals are functional.

Functionality can be ensured by providing teachers with the necessary resources. My view is that the participants had a limited understanding of their role as principals in promoting PLCs.

I am saying this because all three participants were emphasising the point of ensuring that they provide resources and not so much on being active in the PLCs.

Time, communication and willingness to learn were the only issues mentioned as being vital for the creation of a PLC. In my view this is an indication of a limited understanding of what a PLC entails.

The data presented suggested that the schools had a problem of teachers who were not willing to participate in PLCs. Some teachers were not willing to participate in the PLCs as they feared criticism and because of low self-esteem. Other teachers felt that participating in PLCs overloaded them with work. Some teachers did not want to participate in PLCs because they felt they did not have enough time to do all that is expected as they felt they were already overloaded with work.

The data presented suggested the following as the strategies that can be used to address the challenges encountered when promoting a PLC: Involving teachers in decision-making processes, motivating teachers to always go an extra mile when executing tasks, praising and recognising teachers for their extra efforts, always ensuring that proper planning takes place, and that the team members have a mutual understanding of task to be executed.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, data were presented and discussed. In this chapter I summarise and draw conclusions and make recommendations about the study.

5.2 Summary of the study

This study investigated the role of a school principal in creating and promoting professional learning communities in selected schools in a district of KwaZulu-Natal. After considering how writers define a professional learning community, in this study I refer to it as strategies that are intentionally designed to improve the school by reducing professional isolation and by encouraging teacher learning. In a school community through PLCs, teachers can work together toward enhancing learner outcomes. The study was motivated by the need for knowledge about the role that school principals have to play in the creation and promotion of a PLC.

In Chapter One I outlined the key issues that form the basis of the entire study. Considering that one of many strategies that principals may adopt to improve and support teaching and learning is to create professional learning communities, I was concerned about why then there was little improvement in the quality of learner achievement in township secondary schools. Hence, the focus of the study was on the school principals and their role in creating and promoting PLCs.

Chapter Two reviewed literature on the topic. In this regard, literature shows that PLCs are created through teacher collaboration which focuses on professional learning rather than teaching. They can be developed by promoting, evaluating and sustaining professional learning. Regarding the role, the school principal can play in promoting PLCs, literature reveals that the principal is responsible for building sound structures, such as policies, norms, and shared decision-making, in order for a PLC to develop and be sustained. Literature also shows that school principals are likely to face challenges in seeking to promote PLCs. Underdevelopment of leadership capacity and unavailability of time and space are some of the

mentioned challenges. Furthermore, literature shows that some key ways to address such challenges include capacitating principals by attending leadership workshops on continuous basis and also by scheduling in the school calendar regular opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively and to allocate time for teacher development sessions. I positioned Hord's (1997) five attributes of professional learning communities and Halinger's (2003) instructional leadership theory as the study's theoretical framework. Hord's theory was relevant for the study as its emphasis is on what makes a PLC effective and the role that the principal is expected to play in the process is clearly explained. Halinger's theory assisted in developing an understanding of some of the leadership qualities that school principals need to acquire in order to create and develop a PLC.

In chapter Three I discussed and clarified the study's methodology and research design. The study adopted the interpretive paradigm and a qualitative case study research design. This was because according to Burton, Brundrett and Jones (2008) the interpretive paradigm entails insight, deeper knowledge, and a better understanding of human behaviour and relationships. The adoption of the case study design was based on what Maree (2011) argues, that a case study is conducted so that an intensive description and analysis of a single unit is done. This case study design consisted of three secondary school principals and the aim of the study was to understand their role in the creation and promotion of an effective PLC in their schools. Purposive sampling was used to choose the participants and data was generated using semi-structured interviews and document review. The three principals interviewed were a useful source of data in that they had been in leadership positions for more than five years and had established PLCs in their schools. Documents reviewed included school management team (SMT) meeting minutes, departmental meetings minutes, and staff meeting minutes. Document review was an appropriate source of data in that I was able to assess the genuineness and accuracy of data that was generated during the interviews.

Chapter Four presented and discussed data. The chapter developed through themes that emerged from data analysis in conjunction with the research questions. The following key themes were adopted: principals' understanding of professional learning communities, the principals' role in the promotion of the professional learning communities, resources vital for the creation of the professional learning communities, benefits of being a member of the professional learning community, challenges encountered by principals when seeking to promote professional learning communities, and strategies used to address challenges encountered in the process of promoting PLCs.

The results from this study reveal the following:

The school principals understood that they had a very important role to play in the promotion of PLCs. Their role in the promotion of PLCs involved ensuring that members of a PLC respected and trusted each other. The principal's role also included ensuring that the leadership skills of teachers participating in PLCs were developed. This resonates with what is stated in A Guideline for South African Schools on Professional Learning Communities (2015), that effective PLCs require distributed leadership where every member is afforded opportunities to lead. The findings reveal that while developing leadership skills, the development of other skills such as communication and technology also take place. I say this because principals noted that when new and improved technological changes take place, the novice teachers tend to take the leading role as they are more enlightened. In the process, their leadership skills are also developed.

Findings revealed that principals believed in shared leadership. They reported that when leadership is shared teachers are empowered and they are also able to participate in structures that contribute to the school's improvement. This confirms Hord's (1997) view that leadership should be supportive and shared. This implies that principals must not work in isolation but they need to involve teachers.

Principals have the responsibility of ensuring that necessary resources are always available for teaching and learning processes. Time, communication and willingness to learn emerged as some of the resources that are vital for the creation and promotion of a PLC. Principals can ensure that teachers are willing to learn by helping them in the journey of realising that their strengths can be a useful tool when dealing with their weaknesses.

Principals had different experiences when seeking to promote PLCs. They had to realise that they have a very important role to play in the creation and promotion of PLCs. Their experiences included the challenges they have encountered and the strategies that had to be used to address the challenges. Some of these challenges were that some teachers did not want to participate in PLCs as they were afraid of criticism and for some, it was because of low self-esteem.

Involving teachers in decision-making and motivating them to do better by always giving positive appraisals for any good work that they have done seemed to be the winning strategies for two of the three participating principals. The third participant saw proper planning and

always ensuring that members of a PLC know exactly what is expected from them constitute good strategies for dealing with challenges.

It was also noted that the participants believed in subject meetings as they are meant for teachers to share their skills and knowledge. This is one way of promoting professional learning communities.

5.3 Conclusions

The principals who participated in the study agreed that promoting an effective PLC cannot be a one-person show. With that being said, principals as they are leaders remain accountable. As much as the evidence revealed that principals understood that they had an important role to play in PLCs, the study indicates they were not fully involved. Their understanding of the role to play was limited to just being providers and not being actively involved. Their perception was that they needed to support PLCs by ensuring that all the necessary resources are provided. Where the school principal is not actively involved in PLCs, the likelihood is that teachers may also view their participation as being optional.

The trust and respect that principals expected to witness amongst the teachers were to some extent seen being practised by them. I say this because the finding revealed that they had adopted the concept of subject heads. Such positions are mostly given to post-level one teachers who are experts in their subjects. This symbolises the trust and respect that principals together with the management team have for other teachers. Where trust and respect thrive, a powerful social resource for communication and reflective conversation is created.

5.4 Recommendations

School principals must be more involved in PLCs by making sure they attend and participate in the professional development sessions held in their schools.

Secondly, district officials must be seen leading the initiatives that promote PLCs. This can be done through organising workshop and seminars for principals to capacitate them on different methods that they can use to promote an effective PLC. Workshops should also be organised for teachers so that they understand the importance of professional development.

Lastly, depending on the availability of space, principals can solicit donations from private companies and from their ex-students and build multipurpose rooms. This may address the issue of not having enough space to hold PLC meetings. The issue of space can also be resolved if principals can identify schools within the circuit that can be used as centres of professional learning communities. In these centres, schools with well-developed professional learning infrastructure will be sharing with those that are from disadvantaged backgrounds. These centres will also promote good working relations amongst the teachers from different schools.

References

- Adhabi, E., & Anozì, C. B. (2017). Literature review for the type of interview in qualitative research. *International Journal of Education*, 9(3), 1948-1952.
<https://doi.org/10.5296/ije.v9i3.11483>
- Admiraal, W., Schenke, W., De Jong, L., Emmelot, Y., & Sligte, H. (2019). Schools as professional learning communities: what can schools do to support professional development of their teachers? *Professional Development in Education*. Retrieve [10.1080/19415257.2019.1665573](https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2019.1665573)
- Antnluoma, M., Ilomaki, L., Lahti-Nuuttila, P., & Toom, A. (2018). Schools as professional learning communities, *Journal of Education and Learning*, 7(5), ISSN1927-5250E-ISSN1927-5269.
- Balyer, A., Karatas, H. & Alci, B. (2015). School principals' roles in establishing collaborative professional learning communities at schools. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 197, 1340-1347.
- Bass, B. M. (1985). *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*. New York: The Free Press.
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The qualitative report*, 13(4), 544-559.
- Bell, M. G. (1991). The estimation of origin-destination matrices by constrained generalised least squares. *Transportation Research Part B: Methodological*, 25(1), 13-22.
- Bertram, C., & Christiansen, I. (2010). *Comprehending research: An introduction to reading research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Bhengu, T.T., & Mkhize, B.N. (2013). Principals' instructional leadership practices in improving learner achievement: case studies of five secondary schools in the Umbumbulu area. *Education as Change*, 17(1), 33-47.
- Botha, E. M. (2012). Turning the tide: creating Professional Learning Communities (PLC) to improve teaching practice and learning in South African public schools. *Africa Education Review*, 9(2), 395-411.

- Bowen, G. (2009). Document analysis as qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27- 40. doi: 10.3316/QRJ0902027
- Bredeson, P.V. & Hohansson, O. (2000). The school Principal's role in teacher professional development. *Journal of In-Service Education*, 26(2), 385-401.
- Brodie, K. (2013). The power of Professional Learning Communities. *Education as Change*, 17(1), 5-18.
- Brodie, K. & Borko, H. (2016). *Professional learning communities. In South African schools and teacher education programmes*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Brown, G. (2016). Leadership's influence: A case study of an elementary principal's indirect impact on student achievement. *Education*, 137(1), 101-115.
- Bush, T. (2014). Instructional leadership and leadership for learning: global and South African perspectives. *Education as change*, 17(1), 5-20.
- Burton, N., Brundrett, M. & Jones, M. (2008). *Doing your education research project*. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Bush, T., Kiggundu, E., & Moorosi, P. (2011). Preparing new principals in South Africa: The ACE: School Leadership Programme. *South African Journal of Education*, 31, 31-43.
- Buttram, J. L., & Farley-Ripple, E. N. (2016). The role of principal in professional learning communities. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 15(2), 192-220.
- Coe, K., Carl, A., & Frick, L. (2010). Lesson study in continuing professional teacher development: A South African case study. *Acta Academica*, 42(4), 206-230.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education (8th Ed.)* London: Routledge.
- Creswell, J. (2008). *Education research: Planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research (3rd Ed.)* London: Pearson.
- Department of basic Education (2015). Policy on the South African standard for principalship. *Enhancing the Professional Image and Competencies of school Principals*.

- Department of Basic Education (2015). *Professional Learning Communities-A guideline for South African schools*.
- DuFour, R. (1999). Help wanted: Principals who can lead professional learning communities. *National Association of Secondary School Principals*, 83(12), 12-15.
- DuFour, R. (2004). What is a “professional learning community”? *Educational Leadership*, 61(8), 6-11.
- DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (1998). Professional learning communities. *Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service*, 230.
- DuFour, R., & Marzano, R. J. (2011). *Leaders of learning: How district, school, and classroom leaders improve student achievement*. Solution Tree Press.
- Fallón, G., & Barnett, J. (2009). When Is a Learning Community Just a Pseudo Community? Towards the Development of a Notion of an Authentic Learning Community. *International Studies in Educational Administration (Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management (CCEAM))*, 37(2).
- Feldman, J. (2020). The role of professional learning communities to support teacher development: A social practice theory perspective. *SA Journal of Education* 40(1).
- Ferguson, K. (2013). Organizing for professional learning communities: Embedding professional learning during the school day. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, (142).
- Fullan, M. (2010). *What’s worth fighting for in the principalship*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E., & Chadwick, B. (2008). Methods of data collection in qualitative research: Interviews and focus groups. *British Dental Journal*, 204(6), 291-295.
- Gray, J. A. (2015) International professional learning communities: The role of enabling school structures, trust and collective efficacy. *The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 14(3), 61-75.

- Hallinger, P. (2003). Leading Educational Change: Reflection on the Practice of Instructional and Transformational Leadership. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 33(3), 329-352.
- Hallinger, P. (2005). Instructional leadership and the school principal: a passing fancy that refuses to fade away. *Leadership and policy in schools*, 4(3), 221-239.
- Harris, A. & Jones, M. (2010). Professional learning communities and system improvement. *Improving Schools*, 13(2), 172-181.
- Heck, R. H., & Hallinger, P. (2010). Testing a longitudinal model of distributed leadership effects on school improvement. *The leadership quarterly*, 21(5), 867-885.
- Henning, E., Van Rensburg, W., & Smit, B. (2004). *Finding your way in qualitative research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Hesse-Biber, S. N., & Leavy, P. (2011). *The practice of qualitative research*. London: SAGE.
- Hoaglund, A.E., Birkenfeld, K.J., & Box, J.A. (2014). Professional Learning Communities: creating a foundation for collaboration skills in pre-service teachers. *Education*, 3-13
- Hord, S. M. (1997). Professional learning communities: What are they? why are they important? *Issues About Change*, 6(1), 1-71.
- Hord, S. (2008). Evolution of the professional learning communities: Revolutionary concept is based on the collegial learning. *Summer*, 29 (3), 10-13.
- Ivy, A., Herrington, D.E., Kritsonis, W.A., & Tanner, T. (2008). *The Challenge of Building Professional Learning Communities: Getting Started*.
- Itumeleng, S. (2014). The role of school management teams in underperforming school matter of value. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(3), doi: 10, 592014.v5n3p475
- Jansen, C., Cammock, P., & Conner, L. (2010). Leaders building learning communities: Appreciative inquiry in action. *Journal of Educational Leadership, Policy and Practice*, 25(1), 42-54.
- Joyce, B. (2004). How are professional learning communities created? History has a few messages. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 86(1), 76-83.

- King, K.P. (2011). The professional learning in the unlikely space: Social media and virtual communities as professional development. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning*, 6 (4), 40-46.
- Krefting, L. (1990). Rigor of Qualitative Research: The assessment of Trustworthiness. *American Journal of occupational Therapy*, 45(3), 214-222
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic enquiry*. Thousand Oaks CA: SAGE
- Loh, J. (2013). Inquiry into issues of trustworthiness and quality in narrative studies: A perspective. *Qualitative Report*, 18(33).
- Louis, K. S. (2006). Changing the culture of schools: Professional community, organizational learning, and trust. *Journal of school leadership*, 16(5), 477-489.
- Maloney, C. & Konza, D. (2011). A case study of teachers` professional learning: Becoming a community of professional learning or not? *Issues in Educational Research*, 21(1), 75-87.
- Maree, K. (2011). *First steps in research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- McLaughlin, M., & Talbert, J. (2006). *Building school-based teacher learning communities*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2006). *Research in education: Evidence-based inquiry* (6th Ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Mestry, R., & Singh, P. (2007). Continuing professional development for principals: A South African perspective. *South African Journal of Education*, 27(3), 477-490.
- Mhlanga, N. (2014). *Perceptions of principals in promoting professional learning communities: A case study of three principals*. Unpublished MEd dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban.
- Mitchell, C. & Sackney, L. (2000). *Profound improvement: Building capacity for a learning community*. Lisse, The Netherlands: Swets & Zeitlinger.
- Morrissey, M. (2000). Professional Learning Communities: An Ongoing Exploration. *Southwest Educational Development*, 512(1), 476-686.
- Mouton, E. B. J. (2011). *The practice of social research*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

- Mullen, C. A., & Huting, J. L. (2008). The principal 's role in fostering collaborative learning communities through faculty study group development. *Theory into Practice*, 47(4), 276–285.
- Myende, S. S. S. (2016). *An exploration of clusters as teacher learning communities for grade 12 geography teachers in the inland circuit*: Unpublished MEd dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg.
- Nieuwenhuis, J. (2007). *Introducing Qualitative research. First Steps in Research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Patton, M. (1989). *How to use qualitative methods in education*. California: Sage Publications.
- Patton, M. Q. (Ed.). (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluative methods*. London: Sage Publications.
- Pedder, D., & Opfer, V. D. (2013). Professional learning orientations: Patterns of dissonance and alignment between teachers' values and practices. *Research Papers in Education*, 28(5), 539-570.
- Pella, S. (2011). A situative perspective on developing writing pedagogy in a teacher learning community. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, Winter, 108-125.
- Rapley, T. (2007) *Doing conversation, discourse and document analysis*. London: Sage.
- Reichstetter, R. (2006). Defining a professional learning community. *Creative Education*, 4(5).
- Rule, P., & John, V. (2011). *Your guide to case study research*. (1st ed.). Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Sargent, T.C. & Hannum, E. (2010). Doing more with less: Teacher Professional Learning Communities in resource-constrained primary schools in rural china. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 60(3), 258-276.

- Schaap, H. & de Bruijn, E. (2018). Elements affecting the development of professional learning communities in schools. *Learning Environment Research, 21*(1), 109-134.
- Schechter, C., & Ganon, S. (2012). Learning from success: exploring the sustainability of a collaborative learning initiative, *Journal of Educational Administration, 50*(6), 732-752.
- Seo, K., & Han, Y. (2012). The vision and the reality of professional learning communities in Korean schools. *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy, 9*(2), 281-298.
- Sing, P. (2010). *Innovative strategies to develop better schools*. Port Elizabeth: Common grounds Publishing (Pty) Ltd.
- Slabbert, J.A., de Kock, D. M., & Hattingh, A. (2009). *The brave new world of education: Creating a unique professionalism*. Cape Town: Juta and company.
- Stake, R. E. (2005). *Qualitative case studies*. The Sage handbook of qualitative research.
- Steyn, G. (2013). Building Professional Learning Communities to Enhance Continuing Professional Development in South Africa. *Anthropologist, 15*(3), 277-289.
- Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M. & Thomas, S. (2006) Professional learning communities: A review of the literature. *Journal of Educational Change, 7*, 221-258.
- Tayag, J. (2020). Professional learning communities in schools: Challenges and opportunities. *Universal Journal of Educational Research, 8*(4), 1529-1534.
- Toole, J.C., & Louis, K.S. (2002). *The role of professional learning communities in international education*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Vescio, V., Ross, D., & Adams, A. (2008). A review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 24*, 80-81.

- Webb, R., Vulliamy, G., Sarja, A., Hämäläinen, S. and Poikonen, P.L. (2009). Professional Learning Communities and Teacher Well-Being? A Comparative Analysis of Primary Schools in England and Finland. *Oxford Review of Education*, 35,405-422. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03054980902935008>
- Yukl, G. (2009). Leading organizational learning: Reflections on theory and research. *Leading Quarterly*, 20, 49-53
- Zainal, Z. (2007). Case study as a research method. *Journal Kamanusian bul*, 9, 1-6.

Appendix A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Background information

1. Information sharing by the interviewer. Explain research project.
2. Information sharing by the participants. Please introduce yourself and briefly talk about:
 - How long have you been the principal in this school?
 - How many years of experience do you have as a principal?
 - How many years of experience do you have as a teacher?
 - What is your highest qualification?The school
 - What is the enrolment of your school?
 - How many classrooms does the school have?
 - How many teachers and members of the SMT does the school have?

Conception of a Professional learning community

3. What is your understanding of a PLC?
4. What do you see as your role in the creation and promotion of a PLC?
5. What are some of the activities that can take place in a PLC?

Current Status of PLC in the school

6. Is there a PLC in your school? If yes, when and how was it started?
7. If not, why has it not been possible to run PLCs?
8. If yes, please describe how the PLC(s) is/are running.

Resources

9. What are some of the resources vital for the creation and the promotion of a PLC?
10. Is there any time allocated for PLC members to meet? If yes, how frequent and how long?
11. What do you do to ensure that PLC is functional and effective in your school?

Benefits

12. What benefits does being a member of professional learning team have for the teachers?

Culture

13. How do you ensure that there is balance between your daily workload and your involvement in PLCs?
14. How do you, if at all, ensure that PLCs are part and parcel of what you do in your school?

Barriers

15. Kindly share some of the challenges that you encounter when promoting PLC in your school.
16. How do you try and overcome those challenges?

Leadership

17. Share the leadership strategies you find ideal for development of PLC in your school.
18. What are some of the examples of leadership roles that can be distributed to teachers who are participating in PLCs?
19. How do you ensure that teachers remain motivated and committed at work and as participants in the PLC?
20. How are personal and interpersonal relationships and dynamics amongst the members managed?

DOCUMENT REVIEW SCHEDULE

<u>Document Name</u>	<u>Where to obtain it</u>	<u>Information sought</u>
1. Minutes of departmental meetings	Principals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional development needs of the teachers Discussions of how these needs can be addressed through PLCs.
2. Minutes of PLCs meeting	Principals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plans on how the professional development needs of the teachers can be met. Brief explanation of activities that takes place within the PLCs.
3. Staff meeting minutes	Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers professional development requirements. Discussions of how these requirements can be addressed.
4. Staff development Policy	Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Criteria for determining the teachers' professional needs. Steps to be taken to meet the professional needs of the teachers.
5. Department Circulars	Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional development programs planned by the Department.
6. Vision and Mission statements	Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the school's vision and mission attempting to identify and meet the professional requirements of the teachers? Is it part of the school's vision or mission to continually improve learner performance?

Appendix B: Request permission from gatekeepers

47 Seventh Avenue
Ashley
Pinetown
3610

The Principal

REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH

I am Adelaide Ndlanya. I am conducting research as a requirement at the University of KwaZulu-Natal towards a Degree of Master of Education in Educational Leadership Management and Policy. The title of the research is **“The role of school principals in creating and promoting professional learning communities: A study of three Secondary Schools in Umlazi District”**

The objectives of the study are:

1. To explore the principals' understandings of their role in promoting PLCs.
2. To explore how do school principals experience their role in seeking to promote PLCs.
3. To determine the lessons that the study provide regarding the role a school principal can play in promoting PLCs.

I write to invite you to participate in this study. This will involve you participating in an interview session.

Please note that:

- Confidentiality is guaranteed. Your name, school or any of your identity will not be disclosed. The interview may last for about 1 hour and may be split into two parts depending on your preference.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- Data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after 5 years.
- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- Your involvement is voluntary and purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.
- If you are willing to be interviewed, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
Audio equipment		

I can be contacted at:

Email:nndlanya18@gmail.com



My supervisor is Professor V. Chikoko who is located at the School of Education, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He can be contacted at:

Email: Chikokov@ukzn.ac.za

Phone: 031 260 2639

You can also contact the University Ethics Office on: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za

I hope this letter will find your positive consideration, thanking you in advance.

Yours sincerely

Adelaide Ndlanya

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SECTION FOR CONSENT OF PARTICIPATION:

I _____ (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the nature and purpose of the study titled: **“The role of school principals in creating and promoting professional learning communities: A study of three Secondary Schools in Umlazi District”**. I agree to participate in the study. I am also fully aware that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any point should I wish to do so, without any negative or undesirable consequence. I am also aware that there are neither any foreseeable direct benefits nor direct risks associated with my participation in this study. I therefore understand the contents of this letter fully and I do **GIVE CONSENT / DO NOT GIVE CONSENT** for the interviews to be digitally recorded.

Signature

Date

Appendix C: Permission letter from the gatekeepers

School letterhead

Date

Dear Adelaide Ndlanya

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT

Your letter titled “Request to conduct research...” has reference. Please be informed that you are granted a permission to conduct your research at the above mentioned school.

Yours sincerely

Name of Principal

School stamp

Appendix D: Permission from district official to conduct research



KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE EDUCATION REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

U – 1664 UMLAZI

CNR OF MAURICE GUMEDE & SCHOEMAN LANE

ENQUIRIES: BG IMZOLO

FAX:

Email:

PHUMELELA CMC

TEL. NO.: 031-909 9400

REF NO.:

DATE: 26/10/2021

Dear Adelaide Ndlanya

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT

Your letter titled "Request to conduct research...." has reference. Please be informed that you are granted a permission to conduct your research at the above mentioned schools.

Yours sincerely



Name of circuit manager

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

KZN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
PHUMELELA CIRCUIT
MANAGEMENT
DUKUMBANE CIRCUIT
TEL: 031 909 9400

UMLAZI DISTRICT

Appendix E: Permission to conduct research in the KZN DoE schools



KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE

EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200
Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201
Tel: 033 392 1051

Email: buyi.ntuli@kzndoe.gov.za

Enquiries: Buyi Ntuli

Ref.:2/4/8/7154

Mrs Adelaide Ndlanya
47 7th Avenue
Ashley
PINETOWN
3610

Dear Mrs Ndlanya

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **“THE ROLE OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN CREATING AND PROMOTING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES: A STUDY OF THREE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN UMLAZI DISTRICT:”**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

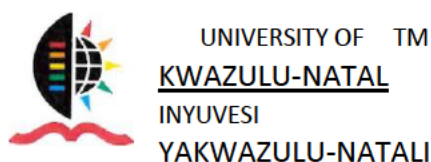
1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research. 5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 02 September 2021 to 31 August 2023.

7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.



Dr. EV Nzama
Head of Department: Education
Date: 02 September 2021

Appendix F: Ethical clearance



UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

07 January 2022

Adelaide Nozipho Ndlanya (200309761)
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear AN Ndlanya,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00003722/2021

Project title: The role of school principals in creating and promoting professional learning communities: A study of three Secondary Schools in Umlazi District Degree: Masters

Approval Notification — Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 07 December 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted FULL APPROVAL.

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

This approval is valid until 07 January 2023.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines,

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair) /ms

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

rounding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix G: Turnitin

Feedback Studio - Personal - Microsoft Edge
https://ev.turnitin.com/app/carta/en_us/?o=1934881058&u=1061536825&student_user=1&s=&lang=en_us

feedback studio Adelaide Ndlanya The role of school principals in creating and promoting professional learning comm...

CHAPTER ONE
THE INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The growth of schools depends significantly on the work of the school principals. Scholars like Hallinger, 2005; Bhengu & Mkhize, 2013; Bush, 2014 are amongst those who concur that principals are crucial to enhancing teaching and learning. The creation of favourable teaching-learning environments in schools is a requirement for effective teaching and learning. (Bush,2014).

One of many strategies that principals may adopt to improve and support teaching and learning is to create professional learning communities (PLCs). In the school context, professional learning communities focus on the importance of deep learning in groups and not on teaching (Dufour, 2004). The sustainability of a PLC depends on the strong support that is provided by the school principal (Antluhama, Ilomaki, Lahti-Nuutila & Toom, 2018). This chapter sets the

Page: 1 of 52 Word Count: 19311

Text-Only Report High Resolution On

81% 21°C Mostly cloudy 18:46 2022/10/30

Match Overview

10%

Match Number	Source	Similarity Score
5	Stoll, Louise, Seashore ... Publication	<1%
6	Submitted to University... Student Paper	<1%
7	acumen.lib.ua.edu Internet Source	<1%
8	open.uct.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
9	researchspace.ukzn.ac... Internet Source	<1%
10	digitalcommons.unl.edu Internet Source	<1%

25 Maple Crescent
Circle Park
KLOOF
3610

Phone 031 – 7075912
0823757722
Fax 031 - 7110458
E-mail:
dr1govender@telkomsa.net
sathsgovender4@gmail.com

Dr Saths Govender

2 NOVEMBER 2022

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

LANGUAGE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

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

The role of school principals in creating and promoting professional learning communities: A study of three Secondary Schools in Umlazi District, by ADELAIDE NDLANYA, student no. 200309761.

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

Yours faithfully



DR S. GOVENDER

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