Exploring the experiences of three secondary school principals in developing a collaborative learning culture among teachers

By

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment for the Degree of Master of Education in the School of Education in the discipline, Educational Leadership, Management and Policy

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

December 2013

Durban, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The need for collective working among teachers in schools is emerging. Traditionally, teachers have been working in isolated environments, and this practice has limited their opportunities of receiving and giving support to other colleagues. Therefore, introduction of collaborative learning among teachers has been advocated by different researchers as a culture that allows for reciprocal growth among teachers. School principals as leaders can play a significant role in promoting good cultures in schools. As a result, a qualitative case study was undertaken to explore the experiences of three secondary school principals in developing a collaborative learning culture among teachers in schools. The focus of the study was based on the assumption that these principals would have established this culture after completing an Advanced Certificate in Education - School Leadership (ACESL) which promoted collaboration in schools.

The study has made use of semi-structured interviews and documents analysis to generate data. Interview sessions were recorded and transcribed before they were analysed. On one hand, the data from transcriptions was coded and the themes were developed from the coded data. On the other hand, documents were analysed through critical analysis; which was done to ensure reliability and conformability of documents. The results of the study revealed that, (i) principals are still trying to implement ideas learnt from ACESL programme, and when they see grade 12 results getting better, they associate that to initiatives such as collaborative learning, which is one of their good experiences. (ii) Principals are faced with a challenge of instilling commitment on teachers and this challenge results from the lack of relevant leadership qualities from the principals. (iii) Principals are using motivation of learners and teachers, as well as the alternation of teachers between different grades as strategies to respond to their challenges. (iv) Principals are promoting the collaborative learning culture through team working in departments; however, they also promote other platforms for collaboration among teachers, either within or outside the schools. (v) Principals played a passive role in this process; they did not play any direct role in sustaining the culture of collaboration among teachers, as they were found not to be participating in departmental sessions.

DECLARATION

I, Sibonelo Brilliant Blose, declare that

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

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

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

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Statement by Supervisor:

This dissertation is submitted with/without my approval.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to young members of my family; brothers and sisters let us invest in education so we can live a reasonable life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4 verses 12 and 13).

- ❖ My first acknowledgement goes to 'him who gave me strength', without God, all this would be impossible.

- ❖ Second, I would like to convey my gratefulness to my supervisor, Dr. TT Bhengu for immense support and guidance he has offered.

- ❖ Third, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to school principals who participated in this study.

- ❖ Fourth, I would like to acknowledge my family; my grandmother MaBhengu Blose, my mother MaShangase Blose, my aunties Lindiwe and Thandazile Blose, my sisters, my brothers and the whole family.

- ❖ Fifth, I would like to acknowledge my colleagues at Amaoti No.3 Combined School; thank you very much good people, you have played different significant roles in my life, and among yourselves I have got mentors, mothers, brothers, sisters and friends.

ABBREVIATIONS	
ACESL	Advanced certificate in Education (School Leadership)
DoE	Department of Education
HOD	Head of department
K-12	Kindergarten to twelfth grade
PLCs	Professional learning communities
SMT	School Management team
USA	United State of America

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Professional development plays an important role in improving schools (Ono & Ferreira, 2010). Apart from courses offered by educational institutions, workshops and seminars, teachers can still develop themselves professionally through working in collaboration with other colleagues. According to Lieberman and Pointer-Mace (2010), professional growth of the teachers should be the prime means for them to advance their practice. Therefore, educators need to be continuously developed professionally in order to enhance their productivity, which ultimately results in school improvement. To that end, collaborative learning among teachers can be implemented through learning communities of teachers, and school heads can play an important part in promoting the realisation for such a goal. This view is supported by Mohabir (2009) when he posits that principals who develop professional learning communities in their schools are likely to improve them. Moreover, Seo and Han (2012, p. 282) encourages school principals "to build a collegial relationship with teachers in order to share leadership, power, and decision making as well as to create an environment in which teachers can engage in continuous learning and development".

The study that is reported in this dissertation sought to understand how three secondary school principals developed a collaborative learning cultures in their schools. This chapter serves to introduce the study by amongst other things, providing a background to the problem. Furthermore, the chapter will outline the rationale for the research, the three key research questions, a brief discussion of the type of literature to be reviewed and the research design and methodology. The chapter concludes by providing the outline of all the chapters comprising the dissertation.

1.2   Background to the study

Countries such as South Korea, United States of America and Wales have introduced the concept of teacher learning communities as a way of developing teachers professionally in the schools (DuFour, 2004; Fullan, 2007; Carrigan, 2008; Rismark & Solvberg, 2011; Seo &

Han, 2012). From the South African perspective, the culture of collaborative learning amongst the teachers is not popular and formalised. DuFour (2004) indicates that in teacher learning communities, educators work in collaboration and engage in an on-going series of questions that encourage deep learning among teachers. This is supported by Bausmith and Barry (2011) when they argue that teachers require deep knowledge of both; the content of the subject they offer and the best ways in which students can be taught that content. This therefore suggests that professional learning communities grant teachers an opportunity to assist one another in addressing content and practice related challenges.

The National Department of Education has piloted an Advance Certificate in Education – School Leadership (ACESL) programme from year 2007. The aim of the programme, according to (DoE, 2008, p. 2) is to "empower school leaders to lead and manage schools effectively in a time of great change, challenge and opportunity". In addition, one of the objectives of the programme was to enable head teachers to administer their schools as learning organisations. Senge (2012) looks at learning organisations as entailing the development of a comprehensible and frank understanding of present certainty that is accessible to the whole organisation; this is utilised to create fresh, equally accessible knowledge and that assists people take valuable action in the direction of their desired prospect. The ACESL programme was therefore expected to capacitate school managers to convert schools in South Africa into learning organisations. Viewed from the perspective illustrated above, it is evident that when the teachers work in collaboration they can equally access information and learn from one another. School principals who have attended the programme were encouraged to develop a collaborative working culture among teachers in schools.

1.3 Rationale for the study

I have been employed as a teacher for a period of seven years and have been working in one school. I have observed on one hand, that some of the teachers from my school and others that I know, still work in isolation and are not keen to participate in professional development activities. On the other hand, some principals I know are not making any tangible effort towards changing the solitary working culture. A culture of collaborative work among the teachers within a school has a potential to bring about personal development. Seo and Han (2012) indicate that a community of learners in a school exists when a group of educators

share experiences and collaboratively improve their practice. Therefore, collaborative working among the teachers provides them a platform to share knowledge, experiences and skills; subsequently they develop professionally. From my observation, there are teachers who are working in isolation and who are not developing themselves professionally by enrolling in tertiary institutions. Therefore, the quality of education they deliver to the learners, some may argue, is questionable. School principals as leaders can play a significant role in developing cultures that promote collaborative learning among the teachers in schools. One way of doing this is through the development of teacher learning communities.

The Department of Education's intention by introducing ACESL was to empower school managers to guide and manage schools successfully in the time of great change, challenge and opportunities. One of the goals of the core module (lead and manage people) in this programme was to enable leaders to develop personal and specialised skills and to create an atmosphere favourable to collective bargaining, collaboration and negotiation (DoE, 2008). As a result, school principals who have completed the ACESL programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal were expected to promote a culture of working collaboratively among the teachers through the development of teacher learning communities in schools.

The first cohort of the ACESL programme completed in the year 2009; it is therefore expected that they have had sufficient to develop teacher learning communities in their institutions. Additionally, these managers must have had different experiences in promoting this culture in their respective schools; their experiences could include the strategies they have used in introducing collaborative work ethos among the teachers, the challenges they have faced, the impact of teacher collaborative work on both the teachers and the learners, as well as the strategies they could have devised in order to respond to the challenges. Considering all the issues highlighted above, this research aims to discover the experiences of principals in developing a collaborative working culture among the teachers in their respective schools. It is considered that a number of studies have been done on ACESL programme. For instance, Bush, Kiggundu and Moorosi (2011) conducted a study which evaluated the ACESL programme in South Africa. This research investigated the impact of each module of the programme and the findings revealed that the programme has impacted positively on school managers. In support of this, Bush, Kiggundu and Moorosi (2011, p. 38) mention that "...most candidates claim to have improved their management practice and this

was sometimes confirmed by their role sets, notably the district officials, and by shadowing and scrutiny of school policy documents. Areas of improvement include policy implementation, improved relationships with educators, more delegation to other SMT members, enhanced financial management, and conflict management". Secondly, Msila and Lebeloane (2013) studied the efforts of higher education institutions in empowering school managers in South Africa. These researchers examined the role that higher institutions play in enabling school managers to transform schools. Msila and Lebeloane (2013) believe that higher education institutions are sometimes challenged when it comes to changing some of the 'traditional' practices that are contradictory to some innovative programmes. In addition, Msila (2012) also looks at mentoring and school leadership; this researcher wanted to establish the benefits and challenges from the principals that were involved in school leadership and mentoring programmes. Thirdly, Kiggundu and Moorosi (2012) have studied networking of school leaders. Their study focused on the perceptions and experiences of networking during the ACE programme. Another study was conducted by Chikoko, Naicker and Mthiyane in which the focus was on leadership development. In that research, the researchers reviewed 18 out of 88 portfolios that principals, who had participated in the ACSSL programme, had developed as evidence for learning that had occurred in them.

The studies that have been conducted around the ACESL programme have evaluated the programme and also investigated different aspects of the programme. The areas that have been investigated include mentoring and networking of school leaders. This study has taken a different route as it has tried to understand the experiences of school leaders in implementing the knowledge and skills acquired from the programme.

1.4 Objectives of the study

Given the background that has been provided in the previous section, the study sought to achieve the following objective.

- To understand the experiences of principals in developing a collaborative leaning culture among teachers in their schools.
- To obtain a deeper knowledge with regards to the ways and strategies that school principals use to develop a collaborative learning culture within their schools.

- To ascertain the reasons for principals to develop a culture of collaborative learning among teachers in schools.

1.5 Research questions

- What are the experiences of school principals in developing a collaborative leaning culture among teachers?
- How do school principals develop a collaborative learning culture within their schools?
- Why do principals develop a culture of collaborative learning among teachers in schools?

1.6 Literature Review

The next chapter (Chapter Two) reviews international and national literature related to the study focus. The review of related literature focuses on collaborative learning concept, the impact of teacher collaboration and the roles that principals play in developing professional learning communities. In addition, the literature review chapter also discusses adult learning, collaborative learning, instructional leadership and transformational leadership as concepts that are framing the study.

1.7 Research design and methodology

Since the study intended to understand the principals' experiences in developing a culture of collaborative learning among teachers, the study is therefore located in the interpretive research paradigm. Burton, Brundrett and Jones (2008) characterise the interpretive paradigm as involving insight, deeper knowledge and understanding of human behaviour and relationship. The interpretivists believe that people behave differently; therefore, different meanings can be developed from peoples' behaviours. In support of this notion, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000) claim that interpretivists consider a person as an individual and begin with individuals and depart to comprehend their interpretations of the world around them.

The study used a qualitative research approach. This research approach is defined by Creswell (2008) as educational research where the researcher depends on the participants

ideas. This study intended to explore the principals' experiences; therefore the study relied on the principals' views.

1.8 Outline of the study

The section below provides an outline of the entire study.

Chapter One

This is an introductory chapter and presents the background to the problem. Furthermore, the chapter outlines the rationale for the study, the research questions, the related literature and issues of research design and methodology.

Chapter Two

This chapter provides a somewhat comprehensive review of literature that relates to collaborative learning among the teachers. In reviewing the literature, the chapter is divided into themes which are informed by the research questions. In addition, this chapter also provides a detailed account of the theoretical framework that guided the data.

Chapter Three

This chapter presents the research design as well as research methodology of the study. Chapter three also explores the research orientation, research methodology, data generation methods as we as the data analysis.

Chapter Four

Chapter Four presents and discusses the data that was generated through semi-structured interviews and documents analysis.

Chapter Five

Chapter five presents the findings of the study. It begins by presenting a summary of the entire study and concludes by making recommendations based on the findings.

1.9 Chapter summary

The chapter has discussed the background and the rationale of the study. This chapter has indicated that the focus of the study is on the experiences of secondary school principals in developing a collaborative learning culture among teachers in schools. Therefore, this chapter has introduced the study and has also given the direction on how the report would unfold. The next chapter provides a full account of literature review and conceptual framework.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1   Introduction

Chapter two intends to explore the literature on collaborative learning and professional learning communities of teachers. The purpose of the chapter is to gain an insight around the development of collaborative learning culture and the role played by principals in developing and sustaining collaborative learning among teachers in schools. The review of related literature considers both the national and international perspectives. In addition, this chapter also incorporates the conceptual framework which underpins the study.

The chapter is therefore divided into seven sub-topics; first, it looks at the collaborative learning culture among teachers. Second, it looks at collaborative learning in professional learning communities. Third, the chapter looks at the importance of developing a collaborative learning culture among teachers in schools. Fourth, it reviews literature on teacher professional development from the international perspectives. Fifth, it discusses teacher professional growth in the South African context. Sixth, the chapter addresses issues relating to the principals' roles and experiences in developing a collaborative learning culture. The chapter concludes with a discussion of a set of four concepts that frame the study.

2.2   Collaborative learning culture among teachers

Collaborative learning occurs in a situation where people are learning from the collaboration (Dillenbourg, 1999). This author argues that learning does not always occur in any collaborative interactions. As a result, collaborative learning is viewed as "a situation in which particular forms of interaction among people are expected to occur, which would trigger learning mechanisms, but there is no guarantee that the expected interactions will actually occur" (Dillenbourg, 1999, p. 5). While Dillenbourg (1999) presents the conditions under which learning happens, other scholars discuss other elements that describe the nature of collaborative learning. For instance, Lassonde and Israel (2010), describe collaborative learning as an on-site learning which provides effective professional development. These

authors believe that collaborative learning communities can allow teachers to seek out and prioritise professional growth and can assist teacher in finding and reinforcing their voices as educators whose knowledge and experiences are cherished. In addition, they claim that collaboration with prepared teacher can also assist in overcoming challenges. This view is in line with Dillenbourg (1999) as he also claims that learning does not always occur in any collaborative interactions.

Collaborative learning has been viewed as a professional development instrument and also as a tool to improving learner performance. This view is supported by scholars such as Goodnough (2005) and Lassonde and Israel (2010) who argue that collaborative learning among the teachers can bring about improvement of student learning and professional development. Therefore, a collaborative learning culture among the teachers can have a positive impact on the schools. These views should not at all suggest that there is unanimity among scholars about what constitutes collaborative learning. Different authors have written differently about collaborative learning concept. Firstly, there are scholars such as Lassonde and Israel (2010); Dillenbourg (1999); Goodnough (2005); Bruffee (1984) who have written about collaborative learning as a separate concept. Secondly, there are scholars such as DuFour (2004); Rismark and Solvberg (2011); Carrigan (2008); Bausmith and Barry (2011); Seo and Han (2012); Horn and Little (2009); Morrissey (2000); Thompson, Gregg and Niska (2004) who have displayed a belief that collaborative learning materialises effectively in professional learning communities. Thirdly, there is Fullan (2007) who has written about teacher learning and proposes that teacher learning must be in a collaborative format. Despite that, Goodnough (2005) indicates that the reason of establishing and maintaining collaborative partnerships is known; the problem lies with how to establish and maintain collaborative partnerships. Therefore, there is still a challenge with regards to how to develop a culture of collaboration among teachers.

2.3 Collaborative learning in Professional learning communities (PLCs)

A culture of collaborative learning amongst teachers in schools has been implemented through professional learning communities (PLCs). Seo and Han (2012, p.282) outline "shared mission, vision and values; collective inquiry; collaborative teams; action orientation and experimentation; continuous improvement and results orientation" as attributes of professional learning communities. This indicates that teachers partaking in teacher learning

communities work collaboratively also support one another in their teaching practices. In support of this, DuFour (2004) claims that educators who are developing a teacher learning community recognise that they must work jointly to achieve their collective purpose of learning for all. "Therefore, they create structures to promote a collaborative culture" DuFour (2004, p. 9) argues. Similarly, Morrissey (2000), claims that professional learning communities enable the teachers to support one another towards improving their professional practice.

Teachers in schools are faced with professional challenges emanating from changes in the curriculum, educational policies, and learners' behaviours. In support of this, Forde, McMahon and Reeves (2009) claim that professionals usually work on the basis of being responsive to particular cases rather than routinely working under a set stable circumstance. This therefore, suggests that teachers need support from people within the profession as they will understand some of the professional related challenges. Bausmith and Barry (2011) make it clear that teachers must have a deep understanding of both the content of subjects they are teaching and the ways in which the learners learn the content. In addition, DuFour (2004) indicates that teachers in learning communities work together in teams, they also engage on a continual cycle of enquiries that encourage deep collective learning. Therefore, communities of learners grant teachers an opportunity to assist one another with content and practice related challenges.

Collaborative learning among the teachers could not be easily infused on them since they would be used to and comfortable with their own culture of working in isolation. Seo and Han (2012) argue that collaboration is more difficult in schools than in other organisations because of the structure and culture of schools. They claim that traditionally teachers have taught alone in the insulated and isol

ated environment of their own classrooms. Therefore, introducing a culture that will move them away from their traditional approach would be difficult.

2.4 Importance of developing a collaborative learning culture among teachers in schools

Professional learning communities are developed in schools for different reasons but which are aimed at contributing to school effectiveness and school improvement. Creemers (1997,

p. 2) looks at school effectiveness as a holistic theory about education which takes into account the outcomes of education, the input, the process and the context in which education takes place. However, Jansen (1995, p.194) claims that school effectiveness involves "the effects of set inputs on specific output". School effectiveness has been severely critiqued by various researchers. Harber and Muthukrishna (2010, p. 422) for instance, have critiqued school effectiveness by asking questions such as: "effective what? and effective for what?". These authors believe that desired outcomes of schooling differ from situation to situation, from school to school and even from classroom to classroom. On the other hand, Creemers (1997, p. 2) claims that "school effectiveness research was criticised because it just takes into account superficial criteria for example basic skills and knowledge".

School improvement concept focuses on the context or conditions that support learning; therefore, it is part of school effectiveness. In support of this, Thrupp and Willmott (2003, p. 94) indicate that "there is a need for taking contextual factors into consideration in selecting and applying school improvement strategies". Similarly, Harber and Muthukrishna (2010, p. 423) argue that "in considering the improvement of South African schools, the contextual realities for some South African school children need to be borne in mind". In addition, Thrupp and Willmott (2003) argue that school improvement does not have structural limits. They further maintain that in order to achieve improvement, schools have to exceed what could be termed 'normal effort'.

The development of a collaborative learning culture between teachers has been differently justified by different scholars. There are researchers who claim that learning communities are established with the aim of advancing learner performance and teacher practices. Among them are scholars like Seo and Han (2012) who maintain that teacher learning communities can bring about changes in teachers' practices that result to the improved student performance. DuFour (2004) indicates that a professional learning community leads to higher levels of student achievement. Similarly, Childs-Bowen, Moller and Scrivner (2000) believe that when teachers participate in professional learning communities they will influence their students' learning and eventually make a contribution towards school development. The mutual idea identified from these researchers is that a culture of collaborative learning among the teachers is imperative for teachers' practice, student performance and for improving schools. These researchers link the teachers' practices with learner performance. Carrigan

(2008, p.7) claims that "until every school becomes a strong learning community, students' academic performance will continue to suffer..." This is in line with the argument by Fullan (2007) when he claims that "student learning depends on every teacher learning all the time". Similarly, Thompson, Gregg and Niska (2004) found that lots of teachers believed that learning of students can improve when their teachers are also participating in learning communities. Therefore, it can be concluded that learner performance is informed by teacher practices.

There is another bunch of researchers who claim that school improvement results from professionally developed teachers. They further claim that professional learning communities are necessary for professional development (Morrissey, 2000; Fullan, 2007; Bausmith & Barry, 2011; Seo & Han, 2012). Seo and Han (2012) claim that professional learning communities create an environment in which teachers can engage in continuous professional learning and development. Similarly, Morrissey (2000) attests that teachers in professional learning communities support each other in advancing professional practice. In addition, Bausmith and Barry (2011, p.175) concur with other researchers as they claim that professional learning communities "have been touted by practitioners as an effective structure for providing professional development to teachers by building upon the knowledge and skills of experienced teachers". Carrigan (2008) looks at professional development from the other perspective; he claims that the development of professional learning communities could be a catalyst that enables schools to provide a requisite support for meaningful official welcome into the profession for novice teachers.

Most researchers seem to take a common position which indicates that professional learning communities bring about improvement in teacher practices. According to DuFour (2004, p.8), teachers in professional learning communities must answer these three questions: First, "what do we want each student to learn?" Second, "how will we know when each student has learned it?" Third, "how will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?" Therefore, the practices of teachers in professional learning communities are informed by these questions which appear to be centred on learning. Moreover, DuFour (2004) claims that the response to the third question distinguishes between learning communities and traditional schools. The other perspective by Lieberman and Pointer Mace (2009) considers teacher with a long service in the profession; these authors call teachers with three to thirteen years of

experience accomplished teachers. Accomplished teachers can therefore share their experiences and practices with their colleagues, this process enables teachers to learn from one another. Subsequently, the practices of teachers participating in professional learning communities will be reinforced by knowledge gained from peers and oneself (Lieberman & Pointer-Mace, 2009).

Some researchers expect teachers participating in professional learning communities to be reflective practitioners. According to Rismark and Solvberg (2011), teachers must be reflective practitioners and need to be thinkers, inquires and conceptualisers These authors further claim that teachers who are involved in learning communities realise that they are not only pedagogic knowledge users, but they are creators and disseminators of pedagogic knowledge. The study conducted by Morrissey (2000) reveals that teachers made casual visits to colleagues' classrooms and engaged in team discussions. In these discussions teachers sought opinion and advice about effective approaches to work with students and about sharing instructional material.

2.5 International perspectives of teacher professional development (teacher learning)

Traditionally, teachers have been concerned about teaching and curriculum completion more than ensuring that learners have learnt. According to Forde, McMahon and Reeves (2009), professionals are people who work under circumstances where they are assisting a range of people in a variety of different contexts. Therefore, in order to achieve certain goals they need to be able to continually adjust what they do. This argument looks at a wide range of professionals; however, views expressed are also relevant to the teachers as professionals. DuFour (2004), claims that the centre mission of proper education is not simple to make sure that students are taught, but also to make sure that they learn. The shift from focusing on teaching to learning has been commonly discussed by different researchers. In support of this, Seo and Han (2012) maintain that in order to ensure that all learners learn; educators are to work together, in professional learning communities to examine and develop their classroom practices.

Teachers in professional learning communities "create an environment that fosters mutual cooperation, emotional support, personal growth as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone" (Thompson, Gregg & Niska, 2004, p.2). Another perspective

reveals that teachers who participate in professional learning communities learn from one another, plan their lessons jointly and solve the problems they face in the profession (Bausmith & Barry, 2011). On one hand, Rismark and Solvberg (2011), propose sharing of knowledge as a solution to the initiation of teacher learning communities. On the other hand, Seo and Han (2012) view professional learning communities as means for improving schools.

The professional learning community concept has been formally adopted by Korean schools. In this regard, Seo and Han (2012) highlight that the Minister of Education, Science and Technology in South Korea made an announcement in 2011 in terms of which schools were to be transformed into leaning communities. They further claim that the current education reform in Korea initiates a belief that a school is an institution where learners, teachers and principals must learn and develop. The Koreans believe that transforming schools into learning communities is critical for school improvement. In facilitating the transition the Minister of Education, Science and Technology in Korea encouraged school administrators (principals) to build an atmosphere where educators can share leadership, power, and decision making as well as to create an environment in which educators engage in continuous professional leaning and development (Seo & Han, 2012).

The United States of America (USA) has also introduced the concept of professional learning communities in schools. Carrigan (2008) indicates that the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future outline a plan for raising both excellence and capacity of candidates for the teaching field. In addition, Carrigan (2008), Childs-Bowen, Moller and Scrivner (2000), commonly held view that the goal of that plan was to ensure that by year 2006, America must be providing all her students with access to competent, caring, and qualified teachers. The National Commission outlined three recommendations, and one of them was about organising every school for teaching and learning success (Carrigan, 2008). This author claims that at the heart of this recommendation is the notion that schools organised for success are learning communities. Therefore, that recommendation was implemented through the establishment of professional learning communities in American schools.

From another perspective, DuFour (2004) argues that there have been a number of initiatives that were intentioned at school reform in America and that these movements have come and gone. He therefore claims that the movement to develop professional learning communities can only be sustained if teachers reflect crucially on the concept's value. Subsequently, he

asserts the concept of professional learning communities as implanted in three massive thoughts; namely, making sure that students learn, a culture of cooperation exists and result are in the centre of attention (DuFour, 2004). Professional learning communities have been implemented in number of schools in the USA and different studies have been conducted around this concept. For instance, Lieberman and Pointer-Mace (2010) have studied the technological impact on the enhancement of teacher learning communities. These scholars claim that many K – 12 (kindergarten to twelfth grade) teachers in the USA can now access computers, interactive whiteboard, cameras, and video editing software daily. Therefore, they are likely to use these resources to connect with their learners, as well as other teachers using innovative ways.

Moreover, different researchers have studied the concept of professional learning communities from different perspectives. DuFour (2002) for instance, has published a paper titled 'the learning-centred principal' in which he interrogates the concept 'professional learning communities' from the leadership perspective. In a paper entitled 'What is a professional learning community?' (DuFour, 2004), provides a detailed description about what this concept entails. Lieberman and Pinter-Mace (2010) have, through their publication titled, 'making practice public: teacher learning in the 21st century', challenged the entrenched professional development practices. In another publication entitled 'the role of accomplished teachers' in professional learning communities: uncovering practice and enabling leadership' Lieberman and Pointer-Mace (2008) examine how people learn by examining their own practice and how they learn to contribute to teacher reform initiatives and participate in local and national positions of teacher leadership.

Other studies that have been conducted in the American context include Childs-Bowen, Moller and Scrivner (2000). Through this study, these scholars examined the role of principals as leaders within the backdrop of the schools' reform in the USA. These authors argue that teachers are leaders and principals are leaders of leaders (Childs-Bowen, Moller & Scrivner, 2000). Similarly, Mohabir (2009) published a paper entitled 'principal's role in implementing professional learning communities within a school: a case study'. The findings of that case study revealed that professional learning communities were operational in that school and that the school principal was nurturing the learning communities through

clarifying the school's vision, goals and sharing of leadership and decision making (Mohabir, 2009).

From the Canadian perspective, Michael Fullan has published a number of papers on this topic which he regards as teacher learning. One of his work entitled 'change the terms for teacher learning' Fullan (2007), argues that learning of students is informed by learning of teacher. His argument is based on the notion that improvement is more a function of learning to do the right things in the setting where you work than it is of what you know when you start to do the work. Therefore, he claims that professional development may involve courses, workshops, programmes and related activities that intend most probably to offer teachers with recent skills, ideas, and necessary competencies for upgrading classroom practice. Finally, he claims that professional development must be abandoned and make professional learning communities a daily experience for every teacher (Fullan, 2007).

From the European perspective, 'professional learning communities' concept has been introduced in Norway. According to Rismark and Solvberg (2011) there is a National overriding school reform in Norway which challenges schools to develop into teacher learning communities. In addition, these authors claim that the Norwegian school reform emphasises the view that the lack of a culture that allows for sharing of individual and cooperative ideas may impede schools in their endeavour to grow into learning communities. As a result, their study suggests knowledge sharing as the main tool to set up learning communities of teachers (Rismark & Solvberg, 2011).

2.6 Teacher professional development in the South African context

The issue of professional development is still a challenge in the South African context. According to Ono and Ferreira (2010), the lack of adequate teacher professional development in South Africa probably had more serious effect than others. These researchers do not commend professional development as the latter programmes are delivered through workshops, seminars, conferences or courses. However, these efforts have been criticised as being fragmented, brief, incoherent encounters that are decontextualised and isolated from real classroom situations (Ono & Ferreira, 2010).

South Africa has been conducting professional development programmes through cascade training. Ono and Ferreira (2010. p.61) refer to cascade training as "training – the – trainer". These researchers argue that when massage is transmitted through cascade training, chances are high that the crucial information may be watered down or misinterpreted. They further claim that cascade training saves money because those who have received training can subsequently train others. This is the approach that the South African Department of Education adopted and relied on when Outcome Based Education and Curriculum 2005 were introduced. As a result, these researchers propose that there must be a balance between child and adult learning; they further consider the international perspective and claim that professional development programmes should be cantered on learners, knowledge, assessment, and community in order to enhance the learning of teachers (Ono & Ferreira, 2010).

2.7 Principals' roles and experiences in developing a collaborative learning culture among teachers

There has been a broad agreement among different scholars about what characterises the concept professional learning communities. For instance, Seo and Han (2012), Childs-Bowen, Moller and Scrivner (2000), Thompson, Gregg and Niska (2004), Carrigan (2008), Mohabir (2009),and Bausmith and Barry (2011, p.175), characterise professional leaning communities by a set of attributes such as "shared beliefs, values and vision, shared and supportive leadership, supportive structural conditions, supportive relational conditions, collective learning and peer sharing". These attributes must be displayed by principals who develop professional learning communities in their schools. Seo and Han (2012) encourage principals to build collegial relationship with teachers in order to share leadership, power and decision making.

Thomson, Gregg and Niska (2004) also emphasise that school principals must have a skill to share authority with educators, facilitate educators' work, and the aptitude to participate in learning communities without dictating. Similarly, Mohabir (2009) claims that principals have got a responsibility of constructing schools where teachers continually grow their capabilities to clarify vision, know complexity, and expand shared mental models. This is in line with Childs-Bowen, Moller and Scrivner (2000) as they claim that principals who want to see a positive learner performance dedicate their time in growing leadership competence

around key issues regarding student achievement instead of the operational activities and managerial tasks of running the school.

Traditionally, school principals used to practice traditional ways of leadership and they were dominating in every school activity (Hallinger, 2009). On the contrary, professional learning communities require practices characterised by shared leadership and authority. This therefore, calls for change on the principals' leadership practices. Adding to this debate, Childs-Bowen, Moller and Scrivner (2000) suggest that principals must move from 'I' and use the collaborative 'we' in leading schools; they maintain that in that way principals can also learn together with other members of staff, or they can allow other members of staff to lead. Echoing similar sentiments, Thomson, Gregg, and Niska (2004, p. 4) state that "Never before in the history of education has there been such a clarion call for leaders who can create a culture that fosters both adults and student learning and expands the definition of leadership to include all stakeholders in the school".

Different authors suggest different leadership styles that have to be displayed by principals who develop professional learning communities. Childs-Bowen, Moller and Scrivner (2000) for instance, refer to principals in professional learning communities as leaders of leaders. These researchers argue that it is time to shift from the traditional model that dictates to teachers what they must do in order to advance, to a leadership design that involves both the principals and educators in making significant decisions about school improvement. Supporting the above view, these authors view school principals as transformational leaders since they change followers (teachers) into leaders, and change leaders into change agents in teacher learning communities (Childs-Bowen, Moller & Scrivner, 2000).

According to Thompson, Gregg and Niska (2004, p. 5), a principal in a teacher learning community is viewed as a "lead teacher and lead learner". They argue that school principals must move beyond conventional styles of leadership to create teacher learning communities where the main target is to grow teachers, including the principal. They go to an extent of regarding school principals as constructivist leaders; these researchers claim that constructivist leader posses a set of skills, beliefs, and knowledge about leadership that emphasise a give-and-take process among teachers in a school. They therefore link constructive leadership with professional learning communities since professional learning

communities have shared vision, goals, values, beliefs and experiences (Thompson, Gregg & Niska, 2004).

There is another perspective advanced DuFour (2002, p.15) when he argues that principals in professional learning communities must move from instructional leadership to "lead leaner". This view links closely with that of Thompson, Gregg and Niska (2004, p.5) when they view a school principal as "lead teacher lead learner". DuFour (2002) claims that principals should put student and teacher leaning at the centre of their leadership while they serve as lead learners. This author further argues that instructional leaders of the past emphasised the inputs of the learning process whereas today's school leaders concentrate on learning. DuFour (2002, p.13) claims that the focus of principals in the past was on "How can [they] help [teachers] more effectively?" instead of "What steps can [they] take to give both students and teachers the additional time and support they need to improve?" Therefore, the main focus has been on teaching more than on learning.

The study that was conducted by Morrissey (2000) revealed insights about the experiences of principals who have developed a collaborative learning culture among teachers. Morrissey (2000) found that principals were sharing the decision making authority with the teachers and encouraged communication. This researcher also found that one principal repeated the vision statement every morning in order to ensure that every one internalised it and thereby owned the school's vision. Moreover, the principal was found encouraging teachers to assume leadership roles and collaboration among the professional staff.

2.8 Challenges of developing a collaborative learning culture in schools

Collaborative learning of teachers is a relatively new concept; traditionally, teachers were working individually and were less interested in learning from one another (Hord, 1997; Liebeman and Pointer-Mace, 2010 & Seo and Han, 2012). According to Seo and Han (2012) traditionally, teachers have taught alone in the insulated and isolated environment of their own classrooms. Therefore, it becomes a challenge to introduce a new culture when teachers have been embracing isolated working as their culture. In support of this view, Seo and Han (2012) argue that collaboration is more difficult in schools than in other organisations because of the structure and culture of schools. They further argue that establishing professional learning communities in secondary schools is more complex. Seo and Han

(2012) claim that building teacher learning communities in a secondary school needs more time and effort because the process involves number of adjustments away from specialisations and departments, towards a school-wide learning communities of teacher. Similarly, Hord (1997) argues that nurturing the teachers' willingness to change so that improvement is constant has always been a challenge to the prospective leaders of change in school.

It is therefore evident that setting up professional learning communities of teachers is not easy as it involves changes in teachers' normal practices. Notwithstanding, school principals are imagined to play a leading role in advocating collaborative learning among the teachers. Mohabir (2009) indicates that organisational learning requires commitment and high level of participation. He goes on to say that, there is a need for school principals to continue the development of schools as communities where continuous learning and professional development focused on student achievement occurs. Similarly, Morrissey (2000) indicates that the principal's role is a crucial one; coordinating a subtle balance between pressure and support, encouraging educators to undertake new roles whilst they themselves release the old paradigms regarding their role as school principals.

There is another difficulty that emanate from within the principals. For instance, Hord (1997, p.18) maintains that "omnicompitance has been internalised by principals and reinforced by others in schools, making it difficult for principals to admit to any need for professional development themselves or to recognise the dynamic potential of staff contributions to decision making". The development of professional learning communities challenges school principals because they too need to adjust themselves first before promoting collaborative learning among the teachers; their adjustment involves changing their old styles of leadership to a leadership style that will enhance collaborative learning in schools, admitting that they can still learn from teachers, and sharing authority and decision making. As, Hord (1997) indicates, it becomes difficult for teachers to propose different ideas relating to school effectiveness if the principal is occupying a dominant position. This author further argues that traditional model that educators teach, learners learn, and principals manage is entirely transformed. There is no longer a ladder of who knows better than others, but to a certain extent the need for everybody to contribute (Hord, 1997).

2.9 Conceptual Framework

The study is framed by four concepts; adult learning, collaborative learning, instructional leadership and transformational leadership.

2.9.1 Adult learning

The adult learning theory claims that adulthood takes place when people conduct themselves in adult ways and believe to be adults (Dunn, 2002). This study focuses on the development of collaborative learning amongst teachers in schools; therefore the study views teachers as adult learners. Burns (1995, p.3) indicates that adulthood is "student-centred, experience-based, problem-orientated and collaborative". Further, Dunn (2002) indicates that adult learners are different from children learners. To this end, Dunn (2002) outlines six points that define adult leaning. First, adult learners bring a great amount of experiences to the learning setting. Secondly, adult learners expect to have an influence on what they will be taught and how they will be taught. Third, adult learning encourages learners to participate actively in drawing up and executing educational programmes. Fourth, adults are expected to be able to recognise the application of new knowledge. Fifth, adult learners need to have a great control on how their learning will be examined. Finally, when feedback is asked from adult learners, they expect their responses to be taken into consideration (Dunn, 2002).

It has been highlighted that adult learners bring in their experiences and expectation to the learning programmes. Therefore, teachers in the schools can be regarded as adult learners. Given that the study is looking at collaborative learning among the teachers, this theory provides a framework of teacher learning in collaborative settings as adults. Burns (1995, p.3) claims that "by adulthood, people are self-directing"; self-directing is the concept he claims to be in the heart of andragogy. Similarly, Merriam (2001) assumes that as adults mature, they become more independent and self-directing. It is therefore evident that adult learners do not learn like children, and that has implications for how school principals facilitate this learning process.

According to Burns (1995) it becomes a problem along the way when people are not learning. He therefore gives a metaphor of a petrol tank view of school education. The story goes as follows: "fill in the tank at the only garage before the freeway, then away we go on life's

journey..." he continues and indicate that "the problem can emerge when people have not had their tank filled completely at school", he extends the metaphor to suggest that there should be service stations along the length of the highway of life (Burns, 1995, p. 227).

2.9.2 Collaborative learning

The study is also underpinned by the collaborative learning as it investigates the development of collaborative learning cultures among teachers in schools. Roberts (2004, p.33) claims that "the term collaborative generally refers to those leaning techniques that emphasise student – to – student interaction in the learning process...". This author believes that collaborative learning involves building of self-esteem, promoting understanding of diversity, reducing anxiety, and stimulating critical thinking. However, he also makes it clear that collaborative learning could bring about problems which he refers to as 'free riders', 'sucker effect' and 'ganging up on the task phenomenon' (Robert, 2004, p. 31).

From the other perspective, Dillenbourg (1999) looks at collaborative learning as a broad concept which is complex to define. He therefore claims that collaborative learning occurs in an environment where at least two people learn or make an effort to learn together something. Drawing from this view, the author pulls out the term 'learn' and looks at it from individual leaning and learning from collaboration dimensions. Individual leaning on one hand, takes place when individuals execute some activities such as reading, predicting, building, and so on, which prompt some learning means. Learning from collaboration on the other hand, involves peers who carry out some activities which activate specific learning means. However, Dillenbourg (1999, p.5) argues that "there is no guarantee that those mechanisms occur in any collaborative interactions"; while he further claims that they do not occur only during collaboration.

Dillenbourg (1999) classifies collaborative learning into four categories. The first focuses on setting up initial condition in order to boost the likelihood that some types of interaction take place in a watchfully designed condition. The second is about over-specifying the partnership bond with a scenario based on roles. This points out that there must be a clear specification of roles. The third deals with scaffolding the connections by encompassing interface rules in the medium. This refers to the specification of interaction rules, especially for in-person cooperation in order to ensure that everybody in the group gives his or her opinion. Finally, to

supervise and control the communications, Dillenbourg (1999, p.6) claims that "this role is often named facilitator instead of tutor, because the point is not to provide the right answer or to say which member is right, but to perform a minimal pedagogical intervention in order to redirect the group work in a productive direction or to monitor which members are left out of the interaction". These categories are helpful in understanding how teachers can learn or be assisted in learning from one another as professionals.

2.9.3 Instructional leadership

Instructional leaders are viewed as culture builders; these leaders are perceived as people who develop and maintain the culture of an organisation (Hallinger, 2009). In describing this leadership approach, Hallinger (2009) indicates that instructional leaders are goal orientated; they play a lead role in directing their schools and personally coordinate efforts towards increasing student achievement. Approaching this concept from a slightly different angle, Pansiri (2008), looks at this theory by examining the two terms 'instruction' and 'leadership'. Pansiri (2008) views instruction as meaning the instruction between educators and curriculum materials towards improving learner achievements in a school. Leadership is regarded as involving the capacity to converse the school's vision as well as focusing the effort of the group towards attaining the collaboratively established vision (Pansiri, 2008). When viewed as a combined term, instructional leadership can be regarded as that skill which works to expand teachers' capabilities and construct their self-confidence for effective teaching (Pansiri, 2008).

We can therefore conclude that instructional leadership focuses on building a culture of an organisation. Viewed from that perspective, instructional leaders are thus meant to build confidence on the teachers so they can teach effectively because the focus of this leadership is on learner achievement. In line with this view, Pansiri (2008) posits that the role of the principal (instructional leader) would be to make sure that teachers' involvement in a continuous learning leads to improved learner achievement. This therefore indicates that instructional leaders are expected to ensure that teachers are involved in curriculum related discussion in a collaborative format. It should be noted that such collaboration is solemnly aimed at enhancing learner achievement. The figure below illustrates how a learner is a central focus in the instructional leadership process.

School leadership

Learner

Curriculum material   teaching staff and parents
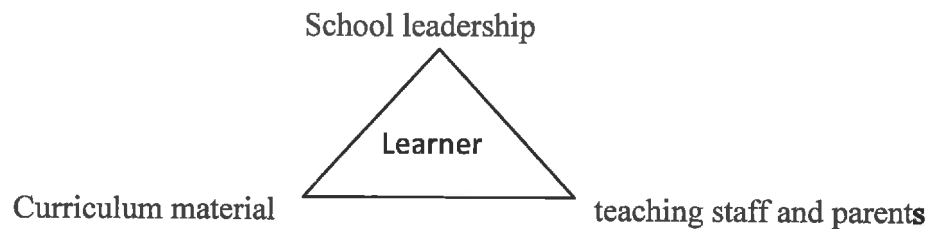
Fig. 1 Relationship between leadership, teaching and learners. (Pansiri,2008, p. 476).

Instructional leaders focus on both leading and managing their organisations. (Hallinger, 2009). According to Hallinger (2009, p. 5) instructional leaders "are hands on leaders, working hip-deep in curriculum and instruction and unafraid of working directly with teachers on the improvement of teaching and learning". Similarly, Moswela (2010) believes that involving teachers in activities that will improve their teaching can empower them. In addition, Moswela (2010) indicates that instructional supervisors should guide, coach, and facilitate rather than dictating to teachers what must be done and not be done.

The school principal's role as an instructional leader involves defining the mission of the school, management of instructional programme, and encouraging a positive climate of learning in a school (Hallinger, 2009). From another perspective, Pansiri (2008) claims that instructional leaders endeavour to change teachers into effective instructional leaders in order to attain instructional improvement. Glickman, Gordon and Gordon (2001) defined instructional improvement as:

> ...helping teachers acquire teaching strategies consistent with their general teaching styles that increase the capabilities of students to make wise decisions in varying contexts.

This study intended to understand the experiences of school principals in developing a culture of collaboration among teachers in schools. Therefore, the study considers principals as instructional leaders. Hallinger (2009) confirms that instructional leaders are culture builders. The central focus of instructional leaders is a learner; this relates directly to the study because the intention of any collaboration among the teachers must be centred on learner

improvement. It is therefore believed that instructional leaders can play an important role in developing and maintaining collaboration among teachers.

2.9.4 Transformational leadership

Bass (1996) and Dvir, Eden, Avolio and Shamir (2002), seem to agree that transformational leadership is an extension of transactional leadership. Bass (1996) on one hand maintains that transactional leadership highlights the transition that takes place among leaders, colleagues and followers. Dvir, Eden, Avolio and Shamir (2002) on the other hand, indicate that transactional leaders apply pressure by setting goals, clarifying required result, providing feedback, and offer rewards when tasks are accomplished. Similarly, Tracey and Hinkin (1998), concur with other scholars when they highlight that transactional leaders emphasise work principles, assignments, and task-oriented objectives. Scholars such as Bass (1996), Tracey and Hinkin (1998), Dvir, Eden, Avolio and Shamir (2002) emphasise the notion of sanctions whereby transactional leaders either reward or discipline the followers depending on the sufficiency of the follower's achievement.

Transformation leadership moves beyond the notion of transaction, and in fact contrast this leadership approach. Transformational leadership looks at the leaders' effect on the followers and the behaviour used to achieve this effect (Yukl, 1999). The main focus of the study is on principals' experiences in developing collaborative learning culture among the teachers in schools. Therefore, some key elements of transformational leadership can have a direct relations to the manner in which teachers are influenced by the leader. Bass (1996, p.4) accentuates that "transformational leaders motivate others to do more than they originally intend and often even more than they thought possible... they set more challenging expectations and typically achieve higher performance". Similarly, Dvir, Eden, Avolio and Shamir (2002, p.735) claim that "transformational leaders exert additional influence by broadening and elevating followers' goals and providing them with confidence to perform beyond the expectations specified..." Therefore, the transformational leadership emerges when principals transform schools from solitary culture of learning into a collaborative culture of learning among teachers.

Bass and Avolio (1994) indicate that transformational leadership comprises four dimensions. First, *idealised influence*; this is described as behaviour that results in the follower

admiration, respect, and trust. Second, *inspirational motivation*; this includes behaviours that articulate clear expectations and demonstrate commitment to overall organisational goals. Third, *intellectual stimulation*; this occurs when transformational leadership solicits new ideas and creative problem solutions from their followers, and encourages novel and new approaches for performing work. Fourth, *individualised consideration*; this is reflected by leaders who listen attentively and pay special attention to follower achievements and growth needs.

From the other perspective, Bass (1996) outlines his set of four transformational leadership components. Firstly, *charismatic leadership* or *idealised influence*; this suggests that transformational leaders become an examples to their followers through the manner in which they behave. Therefore, transformational leaders are well-liked, valued and trustworthy. Secondly, *inspirational motivation*; this means that transformational leaders conduct themselves in ways that stimulate and enthuse those around them by providing their follower with knowledge and challenges. It is believed that team strength is stimulated and passion and confidence are displayed. Thirdly, *intellectual stimulation*; transformational leaders encourage creativity; they avoid criticism of individual member's mistake in public and they encourage members to try new approaches. This is done through questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways in order to stimulate the followers' efforts to be creative and innovative. Finally, *individualised consideration*; this leadership pays a special attention to an individual's needs for achievement and growth; instructional leaders do this by acting as trainer or adviser. Transformational leaders therefore acknowledge the individual differences in terms of needs and desires (Bass, 1996). In line with this thinking, school principals who are developing a culture of collaborative learning in their school are expected to display some of the transformational leadership qualities, whereby they motivate, and inspire teachers in the process.

2.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the literature that has been reviewed on the topic. The intention of reviewing literature was to gain an understanding around the development of collaborative learning among teachers. Therefore, the chapter has referred to both national and international literature. In addition, this chapter has also incorporated the conceptual framework that underpinned the study. The next chapter provides details about the design and methodology that was used in the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has reviewed literature on collaborative learning culture among teachers in schools; it has also discussed the key concepts framing the study. This chapter presents a discussion of the research design and methodology informing the study. Inspired by Gray, Williamson, Karp and Dalphin's (2007) conceptualisation of methodology as principles, procedures and strategies of research, this chapter addresses items such as the research paradigm, research approach, research design, sampling, methods of generating data, data analysis, trustworthiness measures, as well as ethical issues.

3.2 Research paradigm

This study sought to understand the principals' experiences in developing a culture of collaborative learning among teachers in schools. The study is located in the interpretive paradigm. Burton, Brundrett and Jones (2008) characterise the interpretive paradigm as involving insight, deeper knowledge and the understanding of human behaviour and relationship. Similarly, Cohen and Manion and Morrison (2007) attest that the vital attempt in the context of the interpretive paradigm is to comprehend the biased world of a human being. These authors share the similar sentiments in defining the interpretive paradigm. Drawing from the above scholars, I look at interpretive paradigm as a worldview that involves deeper understanding of human behaviour and human experiences. This study paid particular focus on understanding the experiences of the principals of the sampled school; it attempted to understand how they promoted a collaborative learning culture among teachers in their schools. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) interpretivists make effort to get into a person and to understand from within, and this is done in order to appreciate the person's world view. In addition, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000) maintain that interpretivists begin with individuals and set out to understand their interpretations of the world around them. It is therefore apparent that interpretivists believe that people behave differently; as a result, different meanings can be developed from peoples' behaviours. Since

the study intended to get an understanding of school principals' experiences in developing a collaborative learning culture in schools; the interpritivist paradigm was relevant.

3.3   Research approach

This study adopted a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is viewed by Creswell (2008) as a type of educational research in which the researcher relies on the views of participants. Moreover, Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) indicate that qualitative researchers believe that an understanding is derived from the social setting and that comprehending social knowledge is a genuine scientific process. Therefore, this study relied on principals' views, as it intended to explore their experiences in developing a collaborative learning culture among the teachers. When describing what qualitative research is all about, different scholars emphasise different aspects of it. For instance, Creswell (2008) posits that qualitative research poses open general questions; generate text data from the participants; describe and analyses the generated data for themes; and carry out the study in a manner that is subjective and biased. Other scholars such as Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010), emphasise that qualitative studies are conducted in a naturalistic environment; researchers ask open questions which are designed to discover, or to understand the participants' context; participants are normally selected through non-random method; the use data generation techniques such as observation and interviews; the researcher is likely to take an interactive role through which she or he gets to know the participants and social context in which they live; finally data is reported using words rather than numbers.

3.4   Research design

This study adopted a case study design. According to Creswell (2012) research design refers to the distinguishing features that are used by a researcher in generating, analysing and interpreting data in a qualitative or quantitative research. Merriam (1998) indicates that a qualitative case study is a rigorous, holistic account and analysis of a sole instance, phenomenon, or public unit. Punch (2009) corroborates Merriam's (1998) view when he indicates that the case study aims to understand the case in-depth, and in its natural setting, recognising its complexity and its context.

This study adopted a case study design for its relevance since the researcher is intended to obtain an in-depth understanding of school principals' experiences. Creswell (2012) defines a case study as an in-depth examination of a surrounded system, such as event, process, or individual based on wide data generation. He further indicates that bounded means that the case is detached for research in terms of place, time, or some physical limits. Similarly, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) claim that a case study is the study of an instance in action; they indicate that the single instance is of a bounded system, for an example a clique, a child, a school, class, a community. According to Dooley (2002, p.335), the "case study research is one method that excels at bringing us to an understanding of a complex issue and can add strength to what is already known through previous research".

Bell (1993, p. 8) describes a case study as "an umbrella term for a family of research methods having the decision to focus on inquiry around an instance". He further indicates that the case study design is a most appropriate design for individual researchers since it provides an opportunity for one can be mostly appropriate for individual researchers because it provides an opportunity for one feature to be explored deeply. In the context of this study, there is just one case, namely, that of principals developing collaborative learning and they had completed the Advanced Certificate in Education: School Leadership programme (ACESL). This notion of a case study is supported by Creswell (2012), Merriam (1998), Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) and Punch (2009) who maintain that the case may be a programme, a single person, several people separately or in a group, an event, a clique, an organisation, a class, activities or a community. This study focused on three secondary school principals from one district in order to get their in-depth understanding of their experiences in their contexts.

3.5   Sampling

In order to understand the principals' experiences in developing a collaborative learning culture, the study used school principals as participants. For the purpose of this study I have selected three secondary schools in one education district. The researcher selected secondary school principals because he wanted to get an understanding of principals from a specific work context. The sample of the study is composed of school principals who have who have attended ACESL and who have developed a collaborative learning culture among teachers in their schools. This study made use of purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling belongs to a bigger family generally known as non-probability sampling as the researcher has

purposely selected school principals based on his judgement (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). I chose purposive sampling because this method allows the researcher to hand pick the cases to be involved in the study based on the relevant characteristics. Moreover, I had no intentions of generalising the findings. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000) indicate that non-probability sampling does not represent the wider population, it is frequently used in small scale research where no attempt to generalise is desired. Similarly, Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) indicate that the goal of purposeful sampling is to select places, persons, or things that can provide rich and in-depth information to assist in answering our research questions. In this study the researcher purposely selected the principals of secondary schools; who have obtained an ACESL and who have developed a collaborative learning culture among teachers in their schools; who are within a specific district; and whom their schools are easily accessible.

3.6   Data generation methods

The study has relied on two methods of generating data; interview and documents review. The participants were interviewed separately in order to gather an understanding of their experiences in their contexts. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) look at interviews as enabling interviewers and interviewees to converse their understanding of the world around them, and articulate how they view situations from their own perspectives. There are different types of interviews and this study made use of semi-structured interviews. According to Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) semi-structured interview involves questions or topics to be addressed during the interview sessions with the participants. These authors claim that since this kind of interview is semi-structured, it means that the researcher can modify, exclude, or may use a different wording of the questions depending on how the interview unfolds.

I also utilised documents review. Creswell (2008) and Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) mention that documents consist of public and private records that qualitative researchers obtain about the site or participants in a study. Such documents can include newspapers, minutes of meetings, personal journals, and letters. Therefore, in this study I reviewed results analysis, minutes of meetings, and reports of departmental meetings. Firstly, the results analysis documents were selected with an intention of establishing the impact of teacher

collaboration on learner performance. Secondly, minutes of departmental meetings were selected in order to understand the issues that teachers discuss in PLCs.

3.7 Data analyses

In analysing data, I started by recording interview sessions through a voice recorder. Information that was captured through the use of the voice records was then transcribed into a textual format. This process is supported by Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) when they state that the first task in data analysis is to prepare and organise data; this is done to make sure that data is in a format that can be easily analysed. However, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000) argue that interview is a social encounter, not merely a data generation exercise. Therefore, the problem with transcription is that it becomes exclusively an evidence of data rather than evidence of social encounter. To minimise any loss of information that may not be captured through the use a voice recorder, I also took notes that were kept in my journal. Gestures that participants made during the discussion were recorded in the journal.

The transcriptions of data were categorised using a coding system; the interview questions and responses were grouped according to the interview questions. Coding is defined by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000) as the process of translating responses to interview questions to specific groupings for the intention of analyses. According to Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) coding is viewed as an inductive process of analysing data; coding includes the examination of many small pieces of information and conceptualising a connection between them. These authors claim that coding system involves identification of different sections of the data that illustrate related phenomena and labelling these parts using broad grouping names. As a result, in analysing data the researcher grouped the responses to each question together and analysed them separately. In addition, the researcher coded the related responses using key terms that were common in the responses.

From the coded data I then developed themes in order to scale down the coded data. Themes are described by Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010, p.185) as "big idea that combine several codes in a way that allows the researcher to examine the sub-questions guiding the research". As a result, the themes were developed in contemplation of the key research questions. This is supported by, Anderson (1993) as he indicates that when analysing data you should try to organise the big ideas into a framework.

The study also made use of documents review in generating data; documents were therefore analysed separately. In analysing documents, all documents collected were critically examined. The examination was done in other to confirm the reliability and credibility of the documents. According to Punch (2009) analysing documents involves the questions such as, how are documents written? How are they read? Who writes them? Who reads them? For what purpose? On what occasion? With what outcomes? This is in line with Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) as they also indicate that there are preliminary issues around ascertaining the authenticity of the document; that is, verifying the author, place and date of its production. These authors argue that in some cases the documents may have been forged or the authorship in doubt. This study has made use of documents which are produced within the schools.

To enhance credibility, the dates in the minutes of the meetings were checked against the notices of the meetings that were issued. The dates of the turnaround strategy documents and principal reports were also checked against dates in the minutes of meetings. In addition, authenticity of the results analysis was checked against the dates of the terms as well as the author and letterhead of the school. This is in line with Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), who indicate that the researcher also needs to take into account the reliability of the document, for example the credibility of the account of an event.

3.8   Trustworthiness

In ensuring the trustworthiness of the study, the study relied on four elements of trustworthiness; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.8.1   Credibility

This study has adopted a qualitative research design; therefore, in ensuring that the generated data is credible, the researcher made use of a manageable sample of participants. These participants were visited and interviewed in their contexts. The interview sessions with participants were recorded in order to keep a firsthand data. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) ensuring credibility is one of the imperative elements in establishing trustworthiness where the researcher ensures that what has been reported is truthful and correct. During the visits I encouraged the participants to participate freely in the interview sessions as promises of confidentiality had been made.

3.8.2 Transferability

According to Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) transferability refers to the degree of similarities between the research context and other contexts as judged by the audience. Similarly, Lincoln and Guba (1985), view transferability as the extent to which the results of the research can be applied in similar contexts. However, Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) argue that the judgement of transferability may be made by a reader based on the similarities of the schools, policies, participants, resources, culture and other characteristics of the site of the researcher against that of the readers. Shenton (2004) shares the same sentiments as Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) when he argues that the findings of a qualitative project are specific to a small number of particular environments and individuals. To enhance transferability, I provided thick description of all the processes that I followed during the research process. Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) claim that giving detailed information on context and background is important for transferability.

3.8.3 Dependability

This chapter discusses the research design and methodology employed in carrying out the study. The chapter therefore indicates how the data was generated, analysed and interpreted; this increases the dependably of the study. According to Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) dependability refers to whether one can track the procedures and processes used to collect and interpret the data. Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) further claim that good qualitative studies provide detailed explanations of how the data are generated and analysed. In increasing dependability of this study, it has been indicated that interview sessions with participants were recorded through voice recorder. This is supported by Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) as they indicate that recording devices such as audiotapes and videotapes are used extensively in all types of qualitative research to support dependability.

3.8.4 Confirmability

The confirmability concept focuses on the researchers' objectivity; as Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicate that the concept of confirmability is the qualitative investigator's equivalent concern to neutrality. In ensuring confirmability in this study, I ensured my interpretations were checked with the participants and the participants confirmed them. In addition, I also ensure that after the interviews had been transcribed, participants were given copies so that they could check for accuracy of what they had shared with me during the interviews. In this regard, Shenton (2004) attests that researcher must take steps to ensure, as far as possible,

that the findings are not descriptions and preferences of the researcher but are the results of the experiences and ideas of participants.

3.9 Ethical issues

With regards to ethical issues, I first wrote letters to school principals as gatekeepers, seeking permission to conduct the study in schools under their management. I also wrote letters to the participants requesting them to participate in the study and also to give consent in writing should they agree to participate. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) indicate that the consent letter allows a prospective participant to decide whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions. The purpose of the research project was also explained to the participants. In addition, they were made aware of that the data to be produced would remain confidential. All participants were informed about their right to withdraw their involvement at any point if they did not wish to continue anymore. Participants were also given assurances that their names would not be disclosed to anyone and that pseudonyms would instead be used as a way of protecting their identities.

The participation in the study was voluntary; participants were informed that there was no compensation for their participation. In confirming their participation, each principal wrote a letter to the researcher as gatekeepers, indicating that they allowed the study to be conducted in their schools. In addition, each participant signed an informed consent to indicate that he or she agreed to take part in the study. These letters together with the ethical clearance form were submitted to the University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethics Committee and consequently, the ethical clearance was granted.

The study has embraced the principles of non-maleficence and non-beneficence. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 85) refer to the principle of non-maleficence as "do no harm", and highlight that the researcher should not damage the participants at all, physically, psychologically, emotionally, professionally, personally.

3.10   Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed the research design and methodology that was adopted in the study. This chapter can be regarded as the heart of the study as it has given detailed description of the procedures that were followed in conducting the study. The next chapter provides a detailed discussion of the data as it emerged from the research sites.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented a discussion on the research design and methodology that was utilised in generating data that was used to answer the research questions. This chapter thematically presents and discusses the data that emerged. The study made use of two data generation methods, namely, semi-structured interviews and documents review. Therefore, this chapter presents and discusses the data generated through the use of these two methods. In addition, the discussion infuses the literature that was reviewed, as well as, the conceptual frames that informed the study.

This chapter is divided into eight subtopics, and these are as follows: (a) how collaboration occurs in secondary schools (b) the contribution of ACESL towards enabling principals to develop collaboration among teachers (c) the role of school principals in promoting a culture of collaboration among teachers (d) the benefits of team working among teachers in secondary schools (e) the benefits of teacher collaboration on learner performance (f) principals' perceptions of collaborative working among teachers (g) challenges of developing and maintain team working among teachers (h) strategies applied by school principals to address the challenges. Before the themes are discussed, the profiles of the participants are presented and the chapter summary concludes it.

4.2 Profiling of participants and schools

This study was conducted in three secondary schools in the Pinetown District of KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa. The study made use of school principals and documents as the data sources. Participants in the study are profiled below; two schools are located in the township and the other one is located in the rural area. However, it appears that all these schools are well resourced.

4.2.1 Mrs Shinga

The first participant is named Mrs Shinga for anonymity reasons. She is a secondary school principal and is fifty two years of age. The school is named February Secondary School (FSS) also for anonymity reasons. FSS is ranked Quintile 3 and is located in a rural area within the Pinetown District. Mrs Shinga has twenty five years of experience as a school principal, having assumed duties in 1988. Currently, the school has an enrolment of 358 learners who are accommodated in ten classrooms. In managing the school, Mrs Shinga works closely with two other managers who are heads of departments (HODs). One of the HODs supervises commercial subjects, while the other one supervises humanities subjects. The school has a total number of twelve teachers. The school is reasonably resourced with a number of equipment such as computer laboratory, science laboratory and some of the classrooms are equipped with data projectors. This is uncommon in schools that are located in rural areas.

4.2.2 Mrs Chobile

The second participant is named Mrs Chobile for anonymity reasons. She is a secondary school principal of forty eight years of age. The school is named March Secondary School (MSS) also for anonymity reasons. MSS is ranked Quintile 4 and is located in one of the townships in the Pinetown District. This principal has six years of experience as a school principal, having assumed duties in 2007. Currently, the school has an enrolment of 1079 learners who are accommodated in nineteen classrooms. In managing the school, Mrs Chobile works with five other managers, comprising a Deputy Principal and four HODs. The school has thirty two teachers and four departments, namely, languages, commerce, science, and humanities. The school is reasonably resourced with a number of facilities such as computer laboratory, science laboratory, and school library. The school has got clean and well maintained buildings, which is not usual for township schools.

4.2.3 Mr Ndelu

The third participant is named Mr Ndelu for anonymity reasons, and is a male secondary school principal of forty two years of age. The school is named April Secondary School (ASS) also for anonymity reasons. ASS is ranked Quintile 4 and is located in a township

in the Pinetown District. This principal has nine years of experience as a school principal, having assumed duties in 2004. Currently, the school has an enrolment of 1160 learners who are accommodated in twenty four classrooms. In managing the school, Mr Ndelu works with seven other managers comprising two Deputies and five HODs. The school has five departments, namely, languages, commerce, science, humanities and services. The school is reasonably resourced with a number of facilities such as computer laboratory, music class, science laboratory and a library. The school has got clean grounds, however, the buildings are very old and not well maintained, which is common with township schools.

4.3   How collaboration occurs in secondary schools

The manner in which collaborative learning occurs in schools is important in this study. In fact, whether collaboration did or did not occur in the schools was deemed important. However, due to the nature of this study, collaboration was assumed to be occurring, and that is why my attention focused on the manner in which it occurred. This is due to the fact that principals that participated in the study had done and completed ACESL which, among other things, advocated collaborative learning. Principals who had completed the course were expected to implement this practice in their own schools. This theme played itself out differently in different schools. In some schools, collaboration of teachers occurred among teachers who were sharing subjects, while in others it took place in various departments.

From the generated data, it is evident that although collaboration among the teachers was happening, at the time of the study it did not seem to be embraced by all the teachers. The data also shows that teachers in all three schools were expected to collaborate within different departments; however, it was also common that not all departments and teachers in these schools are working in collaboration. This is what one participant had to say:

> *I've seen teamwork in humanities department; there is also teamwork in communication department. But in technology department, teachers are not working in teams. Although we are trying to encourage them, but working as team is not taking place. Another department is commerce; again teachers have got lots of problems. Even in science department I haven't seen any teamwork among the*

teachers. Yah out of five departments, I can account for only two departments which I have seen working as a team **(Mr Ndelu)**.

The other participant talked about her observation of teacher collaboration in her school, and this is what she had to say:

> *They always have departmental meetings and even after assessment sessions they sit down and check problem areas and make decisions as to how they as a department are going to do remedial work; maybe identify areas where they are weak and also identify challenges* **(Mrs Shinga)**.

From the discussions above, it appears that collaboration in these schools was taking place and it was structured in such a way that teachers from the same department were expected to work together. However, not all departments in these schools did their work collaboratively. Mr Ndelu has mentioned that in his school, only two out of five departments were working in teams. One of the participants indicated that apart from collaboration that is based on departments, teachers who were sharing certain subjects did work collaboratively though that was not practiced by all the teachers. This is what she had to say:

> *... of course I would say so, because there would be an interaction of some sort in some other grades, although not all of them; for some of them you will find that they worked as individuals, but others even do team teaching whereby another teacher from Grade 12 will go to Grade 10 and teach, for instance, Life Science and Mathematics* **(Mrs Chobile)**.

According to Mrs Chobile, it appears that collaboration in her school was not only confined to departments, but teachers who were teaching the same subject also collaborated on their own. It was found to be a common practice among the participants that teachers only collaborated on an *ad hoc* basis; if other teachers see no need of collaborating and prefer to work in isolation participants believed that they could not do anything about that.

Apart from departmental and individuals' arrangements for collaboration, one of the participants mentioned a different way of teacher collaboration. This participant had this to say:

Again our science department is working with K College; so the teachers and the learners go there and learners and teachers from K College also come here. So the science department uses this twining very much rather than collaborating within the school **(Mr Ndelu).**

This type of collaboration suggests that there is a potential for collaborative learning among teachers in these schools. Dillenbourge (1999) posits that collaborative learning occurs in a situation where people are learning from one another. However, it cannot be assumed that teachers are learning from such collaborations. Dillenbourge (1999) further cautions us not to assume that learning always occurs in any collaborative interactions. In addition, it emerged from my conversations with all the participants that not all teachers in their schools worked collaboratively. This is despite the benefits thereof. For instance, Lassonde and Israel (2010) argue that collaboration with interested colleagues can help in overcoming the challenges. This is indicative of what can be achieved through collaborative work. It also suggests that collaboration should not be imposed on the teachers. Rather, for them to gain from the process, they have to be interested and be willing to collaborate with others.

As part of documents analysis, I have looked into the minutes and other documents where teachers recorded schedules of meetings for the term or the year. This would shed some light about the dates of such collaborative work and the type of issues that they discussed. Document analysis suggested that there were no fixed schedules for collaborative work among the teachers. Nonetheless, they were able to produce minutes of various departmental meetings within each school. That indicated that teachers formally met only during department meetings. However, it has also emerged from the interviews that they did not invest enough time to do collaborative work.

The minutes of meetings corroborated the data generated through interviews. Department reports of April Secondary School showed that teachers made plans for collaboration within departments. One of the reports is quoted verbatim below:

6. The eight point plan to turnaround the performance of learners.

6.5. Group teaching

6.6. Development of educators in the subjects **(Science Department report, April Secondary school)**

The above entry indicates that the department in ASS made some plans to focus on issues such as group teaching and the development of the teachers as some of the attempts to enhance learner achievement. One of the concepts framing the study is adult learning theory. This study therefore regards teachers as adult learners. What was found to be common among all the participants was that not all the teachers in schools were collaborating with others; only those teachers who were willing did collaborate. This finding is corroborated by Merriam's (2001) assertion that as adults mature they become independent and self-directing. Merriam (2001) further claims that in ensuring that adults learn, the purpose of learning must be made clear so that they can willingly participate in the learning process.

From the discussions above it appears that collaborative working among the teachers was taking place in all three sample schools. The department based arrangement for collaboration among teachers was found common in all participating schools. In addition, two participants raised other ways in which their teachers collaborated apart from the department based collaboration. Collaboration in MSS also occurred among teachers who were sharing subjects. In ASS collaboration extended even externally as some of the teachers collaborated with other teachers from a partner school.

4.4 The contribution of Advanced Certificate in Education: School Leadership (ACESL) in enabling principals to develop collaboration among teachers

The participants in the study have all attended and completed ACESL and one of the goals of this programme was to enable them to develop a culture of collaboration among teachers in schools. In support of this, DoE (2008) outlines the creation of an environment conducive to collective bargaining, collaboration and negotiation as some of the objectives of 'Managing and Leading People' module. The data generated suggest that the ACESL programme did assist the principals in collaborating among themselves during their studies. Their learning

sessions were structured in a form of workshops where students were actively involved. So they were exposed to collaborative learning practices and they gave positive comments about the contribution of ACESL in their leadership practices.

> *...of course one gained a lot from those workshops; all those role plays they taught us something... involvement of management (SMT involvement)... I now believe in collaboration with a team, involvement of all of us, starting with the management going to educators for their contributions. I don't take decisions on my own anymore* **(Mrs Chobile).**

The other participants raised other views which are an indication that they were developed by the ACESL programme.

> *UKZN is more practical because you cannot just theorise; they want evidence of what you are talking about. And it has to be the evidence from schools and you also have to provide your portfolio each time you have a workshop, you bring all the minutes of meetings* **(Mrs Shinga).**

Similarly, the other participant indicated that ACESL was beneficial to them as they have attended with one of the deputy principals in his school.

> *...I think so, I think so...information was enough; it was a comprehensive course yah. I was fortunate that we attended with the school's deputy principal. We hope that as the time progresses teachers will grasp this teamwork approach... For instance, when a Physics teacher produces 80% and a Maths teacher produces 20%, at the end the Science department will be regarded as a failing department* **(Mr Ndelu).**

This discussion suggests that the ACESL programme had a contribution towards enabling the principals to promote collaboration among teachers in their schools. This programme also monitored their progress as it has been discussed that they were expected to bring in evidence during sessions. Moreover, the programme promoted teacher involvement and this created a platform for collaboration among the teachers. This corroborates what Bush, Kiggundu and Moorosi (2011) highlight from their ACESL evaluation study. In that report, these scholars

found that most candidates were claiming to have improved their management practices and this was sometimes confirmed by their role sets, notably the district officials, and by shadowing and scrutiny of school policy documents.

The discussions with the participants revealed that the ACESL programme was able to achieve its objectives as indicated in the ACESL implementation guidelines documents. According to this document, one of the modules of the programme is 'Managing teaching and learning.' The document indicates that module begins by exploring the school as a learning organisation and promoting a culture of learning and teaching, which is dedicated to renewal and improvement (DoE, 2008).

In concluding this section, I need to highlight that ACESL appears to have made a reasonable contribution on principals' ability to develop a collaborative learning culture in their schools. This programme did not only support principals in developing a collaborative learning culture among the teacher, but it has also inspired principals with regards to collaboration. The discussions of principals revealed that they believed in collective decision making, teacher involvement and teacher collaboration.

4.5 The role of school principals in promoting a collaborative learning culture in their schools

This study intended to understand the experiences of principals in developing a collaborative learning culture among the teachers. Therefore, the roles that principals play in developing and maintaining a collaborative learning culture among teacher are important in the study. Seo and Han (2012) encourage principals to build collegial relationship with the teachers in order to share leadership, power and decision making. Similarly, the study that was conducted by Morrissey (2000) found encouragement of teachers by principals to assume the leadership roles to be one of the roles that principals can play in maintaining a collaborative learning culture. It appears from these researchers that principals who are developing a collaborative learning culture must motivate teachers, share their leadership power and encourage teachers to assume leadership roles. From the discussions with the participants, it has transpired that different principals played different roles in developing a culture of collaboration among teachers. In this regard, this is what this principal had to say:

Normally what we do at the beginning of each year, we always have surveys of some kind where we ask people to tell us areas where they need to be developed and to be supported; then we take it from there. This process enables us as a team to identify different areas where we are weak; then after we come up with programmes where we develop one another on those identified areas **(Mrs Shinga).**

The other participant come up with a different idea as she indicated that she suggests team work to teachers who were producing poor results:

Actually what I normally do is to target teachers whose performance is weak and call them to my office so that we can talk. We therefore identify the problem together; we check as to what it is that is lacking and what could be the solution. At the end of our discussion, I suggest working as a team with other teachers who teach the same subject in the same grade or in other grades. I have just done this with a Life Sciences teacher and she has done it, she is even seeking outside help and advises **(Mrs Chobile).**

The third participant believed that motivating members of the school management team was important in developing a collaborative learning culture among teachers.

I only motivate members of the SMT, believing that they will also motivate other teachers to work in collaboration and learn from one another **(Mr Ndelu).**

From the discussions above it appears that all participants were using different strategies to infuse the collaborative learning culture among teachers in their schools. Firstly, Mrs Chobile targeted teachers whose performance was regarded to be weak and then suggested that they should work collaboratively with other teachers. Secondly, Mrs Shinga claimed that they conducted surveys at the beginning of each year with an intention of identifying the teachers' weaknesses. The findings from the survey were therefore used to develop programmes to address identified weaknesses of teachers. Thirdly, Mr Ndelu indicated that his role was to motivate SMT members only, because he believed that they worked closely with the teachers.

There are commonalities in the manner in which different researchers characterise a culture of collaborative learning. This culture has been characterised by a set of attributes such as shared beliefs, values and vision, shared and supportive leadership, supportive structural

conditions, supportive relational conditions, collective learning and peer sharing (Childs-Bowen, Moller & Scrivner, 2000; Mohabir, 2000; Thompson, Gregg & Niska, 2004; Carrigan, 2008; Bausmith & Barry, 2011; Seo & Han, 2012). These researchers claim that principals who are developing professional learning communities must promote these attributes. It appears from the discussions with participants that the participants embraced some of these attributes. For instance, Mrs Shinga indicated that "what we normally do… then we take it from there", from this phrase, it was observed that this participant from time to time was using "we", and that displays shared and supportive leadership. In support of this, Childs – Bowen, Moller and Scrivner (2000) suggest that principals must move from "I" in leadership and embrace the collaborative "we", in that in that way they can learn with teachers or they can even step aside and let others lead.

Mrs Chobile indicated that "I call teachers whose performance is weak" this act could result to shared and supportive leadership, supportive structural conditions, supportive relational conditions, collective learning, and peer sharing. This participant indicated that 'we identify problems together and then suggest teamwork'. This act is supported by Childs – Bowen, Moller and Scrivner (2000) as they argue that it is time to move away from the deficit model that tells teachers what they need to do in order to improve to a leadership design that engages both the principals and the teachers in making important decisions about improving schools.

The study was not only interested at the role that these participants played in developing the collaborative leaning culture among teachers, but also on the role they currently play in enhancement and maintenance of the culture in their schools. In this case, the use of SMT members to monitor the progress of teacher collaboration was evident. The extract below indicates this.

> *Actually, what I normally do in our weekly management meetings is that I just ask for reports on what has been done and check whether what we agreed on doing is happening or not. I also check how we are implementing our programmes, checking even our work plan; how far we are yah!* **(Mrs Shinga).**

A similar comment was also made by the second participant who said that:

The role that I play; I involve the HODs; they must see to it that the good culture is continuing **(Mrs Chobile).**

What is found from these discussions is that principals are not hands – on leaders of collaboration among the teachers in their schools, but the role of leading teacher collaboration appears to be entrusted upon other members of the school management team. Moreover, the participants appeared not to be participating in professional learning communities, as they receive reports from the heads of departments. This act is condemned by Thompson, Gregg and Niska (2004) as they claim that principals must move beyond traditional leadership styles to create professional learning communities where the goal is to develop people, including oneself. Similarly, Childs – Bowen, Moller and Scrivner (2000), also claim that principal must embrace the collaborative "we" in leadership and that in that way they can learn with the teachers. These researchers believe that the principal in professional learning communities must appear as a leader of leaders.

From the leadership point of view, principals must display qualities of instructional and transformational leadership in order to develop a culture of collaboration among the teachers. Firstly, participants were found not to play a leading role in developing a collaborative learning culture among the teachers as instructional leaders. Hallinger (2009) indicates that instructional leaders are culture builders; they must take a lead in defining a clear direction for their schools and must personally coordinate the efforts towards increasing learner achievement.

Secondly, in order to develop the culture of collaboration among the teachers, principals must also display qualities of transformational leadership. Eden, Avolio and Shamir (2002) claim that transformational leaders exhibit charismatic behaviour, arouse inspirational motivation, provide intellectual stimulation and treat followers with individualised consideration. However, it has transpired from the discussions with participants that they were not participating in departmental meetings where collaboration was mainly expected to take place; they only motivated members of school management team. Therefore, their influence on teachers was limited. Bass (1994) indicates that transformational leaders motivate others to do more than they originally intended and often even more than they thought possible. In

addition, Dvir, Eden, Avolio and Shamir (2002) also indicate that transformational leader exert additional influence by broadening and elevating followers' goals and improving them with confidence to perform beyond the expectations specified.

Different principals played different roles in developing and maintaining collaboration among teachers in their schools. For instance, Mrs Shinga collectively identified areas where teachers needed to be developed, and then they developed programmes to develop one another. Mrs Chobile's role was to identify teachers whose performance was weak and met with them individually. In such meetings she normally suggested that they should work like a team. Mr Ndelu's role was to motivate members of the SMT in order for them to motivate the teachers. These principals were not participating in departmental meetings; therefore their level of motivation and encouragement to teachers was limited. Moreover, they did not get a chance to learn from the teachers during collaboration sessions.

4.6   The benefits of team work among teachers in secondary schools

The generated data indicates that teacher collaboration impacted positively on the teachers. Teachers who were working in teams became better in terms of teaching and learner results compared to those working in isolation. This is supported by all participants as they have indicated that team work was helping teachers in becoming better practitioners. It was also found to be common among all the participants that collaborative working among the teachers was helping them. This is how one of the participants responded:

> *It helps the teachers, because they don't have to struggle with the content that they are not comfortable with. In that way learners also benefit as the comfortable teacher will come in and teach them that particular content better. At the same time the teacher who is not comfortable also learns from his or her colleague so that he or she could gain confidence on that particular topic. Therefore I could safely say that collaboration among teachers makes them better* teachers **(Mr Ndelu).**

Similarly, the other participant indicated the following.

> *They change positively, like the one that I was setting an example with, Life Sciences and Languages teachers; they even team-teach and their results are very good. Therefore, their collaboration motivates them because they do see positive results from their practice, which indicates that they have positively changed* **(Mrs Chobile).**

It emerged from these discussions with participants that collaboration among teachers promoted information sharing and mutual support. Mr Ndelu indicated that collaboration was beneficial to the teachers because they can learn from one another and they could also exchange content with an intention of benefiting learners. In addition, Mrs Chobile revealed that team-teaching was the outcome of collaboration.

Literature confirms that teachers who work in collaboration become better practitioners. For instance, DuFour (2004) claims that educators who are building a professional learning community recognise that they must work together to achieve their collective purpose of learning for all. He further claims that "therefore, they create structures to promote a collaborative culture" (DuFour, 2004, p. 9). From the discussions with participants it emerged that teachers who are working in collaboration do support each other and also positive change results. According to Seo and Han (2012), collaborative learning communities can facilitate changes in teachers' practices that can lead to improved student achievement. Similarly, Childs-Bowen, Moller and Scrivner (2000) also believe that, when teachers function in professional learning communities, they will affect student learning and contribute to school improvement. These authors share mutual sentiment as it appears from their discussion that a culture of collaborative learning among teachers leads to school improvement, improved teacher practice, and improved student performance.

From the conceptual framework's perspective, Roberts (2004, p.33) claims that "the term collaborative generally refers to those learning techniques that emphasise student – to – student interaction in the learning process..." Roberts (2004) further claims that collaborative learning involves building of self-esteem, reducing anxiety, encouraging understanding of diversity, fostering relationships, and stimulating critical thinking. This researcher confirms that teachers who are working in collaboration are likely to improve and become better teachers through "student – to – student interaction", which can be regarded as colleague–to–

colleague interaction in this study. The participants indicated that collaborative working among the teachers allowed them to support each other and become better teachers. This is in line with the collaborative learning theory as collaborative learning builds self-esteem, reduces anxiety, promotes understanding of diversity, foresters relationships, and stimulates critical thinking collaborating teachers (Roberts, 2004).

The impact of collaborative working among the teachers was found to be common among all the participants. The participants indicated that teachers who were working in teams became better in teaching and in producing better learner results compared to those who worked in isolation. The data presented above indicates that collaborating teachers can even exchange their learners and while they themselves learn from the process.

4.7   The benefits of teacher collaboration on learner performance

A culture of collaborative work among the teachers was found to be beneficial to the learners. It was found to be common among the participants that learners' achievement in different subjects improved as a result of working collaboratively among the teachers. This improvement, participants believed, was derived from the performance of learners in their examinations. The following extract supports this.

> *I was happy about March examinations, what an improvement! We have been obtaining very low marks and poor quality results, but in March the quality wasn't bad. Normally when I analyse the results I look at the quality more than the quantity because one is looking at the number of bachelor passes because we want to have less learners who will not be able to go to universities. Okay, but for the languages department, they are under pressure because they have been producing 100% all the time, so I am still happy about the fact that there is no drop as yet* **(Mrs Chobile).**

The participants have all observed improvement in learner performance, which they claim was the result of working as teams. Here is what Mr Ndelu says is his observation:

> *Yah we had first term assessment awards; we were awarding children who were able to obtain 70% and above. Most of the certificates were from the languages department; almost all certificates were for this department. It was clear that this teamwork is*

effective. When we started awarding best performers after assessment, we were awarding from 60% and above, but it was difficult for a learner to obtain 60%. But this year we have observed that the majority of learners could obtain 70%, and then we raised the threshold in June and the number decreased a bit. But still in Mathematics there were about ten learners who were able to obtain 80% and above and we know that they are supported by our collaboration with the K College **(Mr Ndelu).**

The discussions with participants indicated that teacher collaboration has a potential of improving learners' achievements. Participants have commonly indicated that there has been improvement in the performance of learners which they believed was a result of working as teams. It has been established that teachers in the sample schools worked in teams; team work in these schools occurred in the following structures: departmentally; initiated by individuals who are sharing a subject and through networking with partner schools. The participants have indicated that teachers in their school shared their experiences with other colleagues. They have also indicated that teachers also did team-teaching or exchange to topics. This, they believed, sustained the collaboration in the schools which ultimately resulted to improved learner achievement. The responses of participants were corroborated by the documents reviewed. For instance, as the results schedules for the sample schools were analysed, improvement in Grade 12 performance was evident. The tables below illustrate performance of Grade 12 learners in subjects where teachers were working collaboratively. Table 1 was extracted from the results analysis document of February Secondary School, Table 2 was extracted from the results analysis document of March Secondary School and Table 3 was extracted from the results analysis document of April Secondary School.

Subject	2012 Final performance (Pass %)	2013 June performance (Pass %)
IsiZulu Home Language	100%	100%
English First Additional language	100%	100%
Accounting	57.14%	100%
Business Studies	88.24%	100%
Computer Applied Technology	100%	100%
Economics	75%	100%

Table 1: FSS Grade 12 December 2012 and June 2013 results.

The improvement in learner performance is common with these schools. Table 2 below displays the performance of learners in March Secondary School.

Subject	2012 Final performance (Pass %)	2013 June performance (Pass %)
IsiZulu Home Language	100%	100%
English First Additional language	100%	100%
Accounting	68%	92%
Life Sciences	74%	95%
Mathematical Literacy	62%	84%
Business Economics	92%	100%

Table 2: MSS Grade 12 December 2012 and June 2013 Results

Similarly the learner performance indicates a great improvement in ASS. Table 3 below displays the matric performance for December 2012 and June 2013 in selected subjects.

Subject	2012 Final performance (Pass %)	2013 June performance (Pass %)
IsiZulu Home Language	100%	100%
English First Additional language	100%	100%
Physical Science	88%	91%
Life Sciences	100%	100%
Mathematics	82%	100%
Accounting	83%	100%
Business Economics	100%	100%

Table 3: ASS Grade 12 December 2012 and June 2013 results

This performance depicted above confirms that the achievement of learners is improving is certain subjects. It provides some evidence that the data generated from both interviews and documents is congruent as it appears that learner achievement is improving in these sample schools. DuFour (2004) indicates that professional learning communities lead to higher levels of student achievement. In addition, DuFour (2004) asserts that the professional learning community is implanted in three big ideas; first, ensuring that students learn; second, a culture of collaboration; and lastly, a focus on results. The improvement of results in the sampled schools can confirm a positive impact of collaborative work among the teachers. In support of this view, Fullan (2007) claims that student learning depends on every teacher learning. Similarly, Carrigan (2008, p.6) also claims that "until every school becomes a strong learning community, student academic performance will continue to suffer".

From the conceptual framework's perspective, Pansiri (2008) claims that instructional leaders endeavour to make teachers effective instructional leaders for instructional improvement. This author believes that teachers must be instructional leaders in order to improve learner

achievements. It appears from the discussions with the participants that the focus of the sampled principals and their teachers is on learner achievement. Improvement in learner achievement in the sampled schools for certain subjects is evident. This suggests that there may have been some positive influences of instructional leadership made by school management and the teachers. In addition, Pansiri (2008) views instruction as meaning the instruction between the teachers and the curriculum materials towards developing a quality learner in a learning environment. This author believes that the role of the principal (instructional leader) would be to ensure teacher involvement in a continuous cycle of discussing, implementing, planning and review curricular and instruction leading to improved learner-achievement.

The impact of teacher collaboration on learner achievement has come out as positive. Participants observed that learner achievement had improved in their schools. Moreover, the reviewed documents corroborated the data from the interviews.

4.8   Principal's perceptions of collaborative working among teachers

School principals perceived the value of collaborative working among teachers differently. Some viewed collaborative work of the teachers as an important tool for success in a school. It was interesting to listen to their experiences of teacher collaboration in their schools.

> ... *it provides us with time for integration and it also links the teachers. In most cases you will find that teachers are not linked and if they are not linked it becomes a problem. If one teacher is teaching one subject in Grade 9 and the other one is teaching the same subject in Grade 10, there must be a continuation; because the Grade 10 teachers will expect to develop learners from what they were taught in Grade 9. So I believe that there should be really a team working so that teachers can work collaboratively* (**Mrs Chobile**).

Again the second participant believes that teacher collaboration is very important.

> *It is very important; we decided to spend a lot of money so that when we return and talk about team work. You find that teachers understand even obstacles because there are obstacles you cannot beat alone, so you need support. Therefore, we must work in*

teams. Again learners are doing seven subjects, so if a learner passes three because three teachers are working hard and fail the other four subjects, and that is problematic. All that which would have been done would be a fruitless exercise. So if we have expertise and skills, other colleagues must also have them, so that is what we are preaching in this school. From 2005, if I am not mistaken, long before I enrolled for ACE, the Department of Education introduced the categorisation of schools based on matric performance; therefore a school which has achieved below 60% was regarded as an underperforming school. So we also underperformed in year 2006, but from there we never underperformed again, because we have been promoting team working among teachers. So we make it clear that one teacher cannot celebrate for a learner who has obtained 90% and failed other subjects **(Mr Ndelu).**

These discussions indicate that collaborative working among teachers was valued by the participants. For instance, Mrs Shinga claimed that it allowed for integration among the teachers, and it also linked the teachers who were doing similar subjects in different grades. This is in line with the ideas of Morrissey (2000) when he attests that teachers in professional learning communities support one another in providing professional practice. Mr Ndelu claimed that collaborative working among the teachers allowed for knowledge sharing, it enabled the teachers to develop new skills from others, and it has resulted to improvement of learner results in his school. This idea is in line with that of Bausmith and Barry (2011) who argue that, professional learning communities have been touted by practitioners as an effective structure for providing professional development to teachers by building upon the knowledge and skills of experienced teachers.

One of the concepts framing the study is adult leaning. The discussions with participants suggest that collaboration among the teachers was valuable because it allowed the teachers to learn from one another. It has appeared from the discussions that the sampled principals perceive team work among the teachers as imperative because it allowed them to exchange ideas; it also granted them a platform to support one another, based on their knowledge, skills and experiences. This is in line with Dunn (2002) when he indicates that adult learners bring a great deal of experiences to the learning environment. Dunn (2002) further claims that adults would vary in levels of knowledge and also in their life experiences. Therefore, teachers as adult learners can learn from others' experiences.

The study is also underpinned by instructional leadership. Pansiri (2008) indicates that the role of the instructional leader would be to ensure teachers' involvement in a continuous cycle of discussing, implementing, planning and review curricular and instruction leading to improved learner-achievement. This style of leadership promotes continuous discussion among teachers and the focus of this leadership style is on learner-achievement. This has transpired from the sampled principals that they believed in team work to be an important way of working among the teachers and they linked it with learner-performance.

A culture of collaborative working among the teachers in the sampled schools appeared to be an important tool for effective teaching and learning. It has transpired from the discussions with the participants that collaborative working among teachers provided teachers with a platform to share ideas and learn from one another.

4.9 Challenges of developing and maintaining team working amongst teachers

Principals are facing different challenges in schools with regards to the development and maintenance of team work amongst the teachers. It has transpired from the discussions with participants that, team work among teachers cannot be forced on to teachers. Moreover, it has emerged from the discussions that teachers have got different personalities; some teachers like to work in isolation. Therefore, the challenges that principals face in promoting a collaborative culture, emanates from the above mentioned factors. This is what one of the participants had to say:

> *Eh, there are people who are difficult; people who cannot be able to work in partnership with other people. Eh you'll find that there is a group of teachers who are together because of their agenda. And they end up messing up the education of the learner* (**Mrs Chobile**).

The challenge of differences among teachers transpired in one of the discussions with participants, and this is what he had to say:

> *Yah, the challenge lies on differences; you cannot have a team when people do not acknowledge their differences. The challenge is to understand teachers and their differences... The biggest challenge is fear, teachers are fearful to work with others.*

They believe that they might be undermined by other colleagues; teachers also believe that allowing another teacher to teach their learners will open a room for comparison, and perhaps end up being rejected by learners at the later stage **(Mr Ndelu).**

The other challenge that emerged from the discussions with participants is discouragement of teachers when they do not achieve the results they expected. Mrs Shinga highlighted the following:

Eh the challenge that we have is that sometimes we don't achieve what we were expecting, after investing more than enough effort. This therefore demoralises educators in the process; it makes them not to see the value of team working **(Mrs Shinga).**

These discussions suggest that the challenges faced by school principals in developing a collaborative learning culture among teachers revolve around the teachers. The participants have found it complicated to get teachers to work together. The discussions reveal the following challenges: first, there are teachers who are not willing to collaborate with other teachers but who are always against the school's programmes. Second, it has transpired that teachers are different and therefore it is a challenge for different people to understand their differences. Third, it has also come out as a challenge that teachers sometimes fear collaboration. Finally, a challenge begins when teachers are not achieving what they themselves were expecting to achieve after enough effort has been invested.

These challenges raised by school principals confirm the argument made by Seo and Han (2012) when they state that establishing professional learning communities in secondary schools is more complex; it requires more time and effort for secondary school teachers to build professional learning communities because they need to make more dramatic readjustments, away from departments and specialisations, towards broader school-wide communities. This confirms some of the difficulties faced by the sampled principals in schools. Mohabir (2009) indicates that organisational learning requires commitment and high level of participation. Viewed from that perspective, the challenges faced by participants resulted from the lack of commitment from teachers, which in turn becomes a challenge for school principals. Hord (1997) confirms that nurturing the staff's willingness to change so

that improvement is continuous has been an ongoing challenge to would-be leaders of school change.

The other challenge is linked to the principals' roles; school principals must also change their operation in order to allow for a smooth development of collaborative learning in schools. Hord (1999) indicates that the traditional pattern that teachers teach, learners learn, and principals manage is completely altered. There is no longer a hierarchy of who knows more than someone else; rather there is a need for everyone to contribute. In support of this, Seo and Han (2012) indicate that school principals who are developing a collaborative learning culture among teachers are encouraged to build a collegial relationship with teachers in order to share leadership, power, and decision making, as well as, to create an environment in which teachers can engage in continuous professional learning and development.

All the participants indicated that their teachers collaborate in subject departments and none of the participants attended any of the department meetings. They only received reports from their HODs and their deputies. Such a bureaucratic practice of principals was also a challenge because it sent signals that the principals' operation and leadership has not changed; this also indicated that they were not learning from their teachers. In support to this, Hord (1997, p.18) indicates that "omnicompitance has been internalised by principals and reinforced by others in schools, making it difficult for principals to admit to any need for professional development themselves or to recognise the dynamic potential of staff contributions to decision making".

The study is framed by collaborative learning as one of the concepts. Roberts (2004) indicates that collaborative learning involves building of self-esteem, reducing anxiety, encouraging understanding of diversity, fostering relationships, and stimulating critical thinking. It has transpired from the discussions with the participants that collaborative learning among the teachers was not embraced by all the teachers in all sampled schools. First, the discussions revealed that some of the teachers did not like to collaborate; this indicates that the principal still needs to build teachers' self-esteem. Second, it emerged that differences among the teachers hampered their collaboration; again this indicates that there is still a need for principals to encourage understanding of diversity. Third, other teachers fear collaboration; therefore school principals are to reduce anxiety from the teachers. Finally, it

came up that other teachers were demoralised when they did not achieve positive outcomes; and this suggests that principals still need to build self-esteem on the teachers.

The challenges that transpired from the sampled schools seem to be caused by the teachers and the principals. The challenges include non-willingness of teachers to collaborate, failure to understand personal differences, fear collaboration and discouraging results. However, these challenges to a certain extent result from the lack of proper leadership qualities from principals. According to Roberts (2004) principals who are developing professional learning communities have to display certain leadership qualities, such as, building of self-esteem, reducing anxiety, encouraging understanding of diversity, fostering relationships, and stimulating critical thinking. Drawing from these two scenarios, it is evident that teachers' differences on one hand, and the lack of leadership qualities on the part of the principals, on the other hand, are two main sources of the challenges to developing and sustaining a collaborative learning culture.

4.10   Strategies applied by school principals to address the challenges

It has been discussed in the previous theme that the principals in this study faced a number of challenges which made it difficult to establish collaborative cultures in their schools. These challenges were cited as non-willingness on the part of the teachers to collaborate; failure of teachers to understand their differences; fear by some teacher to collaborate with the other teachers; and discouraging results. The discussions with the principals revealed that these challenges hindered the success of collaborative working among teachers in their school. As a result, out of three principals, two of them have developed strategies to address these challenges. However, the third principal had no strategy to address this problem. The extract below illustrates one of the strategies they have developed:

We have been giving awards to both the learners and the teachers; so this year in October we'll also have a prize giving day for the teachers and the learners. So it's a way of trying to motivate them **(Mrs Shinga).**

The following participant developed a different strategy; however motivation of the teachers is a common feature with both participants:

Teachers who are teaching the same subject alternate; so we swop them between Grades 10, 11 and 12. In this way we are trying to reduce fear from teachers and instil a culture of collaboration because they will liaise with one another from time to time. Moreover, we also award our learners at the end of each term; this develops competition because all teachers want their learners to excel **(Mr Ndelu).**

The other participant had no strategy in place, and this is what she had to say:

I don't have any strategy in place at the moment; it's still a continuing problem **(Mrs Chobile).**

It is evident that the two principals used different strategies to address the problem. First, the use of awards was found to be common as Mr Ndelu awarded the learners while Mrs Shinga awarded both the learners and the teachers. These principals believed that awards would bring about motivation on both the learners and the teachers. Therefore, the first strategy is to motivate the teachers through awards. Second, Mr Ndelu raised fear as a challenge. This participant indicated that his strategy to respond to this challenge of teachers' fear was to alternate teachers who are teaching the same subject between the three grades (Grade 10, Grade 11 and Grade 12). This participant believed that in that way, teachers would start to collaborate as they would be exchanging teaching material every year.

The strategy of exchanging teachers who are teaching the same subject which was raised by Ndelu is congruent with the views of Rismark and Solvberg (2011). These scholars suggest that knowledge sharing is the key to developing professional learning communities. In addition, two of the participants indicated that they motivated learners and teachers through awards; these awards were based on the learners' results. This therefore indicates that the focus of these principals was on result. Such a notion is shared by DuFour (2004) when he asserts that the concept of professional learning communities is implanted in three big ideas, namely, ensuring that students learn; ensuring that a culture of collaboration exists and finally, paying a special focus on the results.

Motivation as indicated by Mr Ndelu and Mrs Shinga is one of the qualities of transformational leaders. Bass (1996) accentuates that transformational leaders motivate others to do more than they originally intended and often even more than they thought possible. In addition, Dvir, Eden, Avolio and Shamir (2002, p.735) claim that transformational leaders exert additional influence by broadening and elevating the followers' goals and providing them with confidence to perform beyond the expectations specified. Therefore, the act of motivating teachers somehow, relates these principals to transformational leaders.

Two of the three participating principals have developed strategies to respond to the challenges they face in the development of collaborative working among teacher. Motivation of teacher through award came out as common strategy used by the principal. In addition, alternating teachers between the three grades was the other strategy that used by Mr Ndelu.

4.11   Chapter Summary

In this chapter a presentation of data generated through semi-structured interviews and documents analysis was made. The data was presented in eight themes and these were mentioned and discussed. The next chapter provides an analysis, findings and makes recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1   Introduction

The previous chapter has thematically presented and discussed the data from both data sources. This chapter is shifting from just describing the themes that emerged to an analysis and then make the findings drawn from the data. Ultimately, recommendations are made, based on the findings.

5.2 Summary of the study

This study has explored the experiences of secondary school principals in developing a collaborative learning culture among teachers. This was a case study of three secondary school principals who have attended an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACESL) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The first chapter has outlined the background to the study, including the discussion of the rationale, research questions and a brief discussion of the methodology. The second chapter has focused on the review of the related literature including the discussion of the conceptual framework. The third chapter provided a detailed discussion of the design and methodology that was used to produce data that would assist in answering the research questions. The fourth chapter presented the data which was organised into eight themes, and these are discussed in full. The last chapter summarises the study, present the findings as well as the recommendations.

5.3   Research questions restated

The findings are presented and summarised under each research questions that was posed in the first chapter. This is meant to indicate the extent to which the data has successfully answered the key questions that guided the study. As part of presenting the findings, the extent to which each research question has been addressed is also discussed.

5.3.1 What are the experiences of principals in developing a collaborative leaning culture among teachers?

The discussion below details the findings regarding the principals' experiences in developing a collaborative learning culture among teachers. After discussing the eight themes that emerged from the data, it may be difficult to summarise their experience of developing a collaborative learning culture. Clearly their experiences are comprehensive, including the experience of working with the teachers, trying to implement ideas learnt from the ACESL programme. Their experience also includes their sense of success in that ACESL has had a positive effect on learner achievement. When they see Grade 12 results getting better, and they associate that to initiatives such as collaborative learning, that must be a good experience.

The data also shows that the principals faced a number of challenges in trying to instil teamwork among the teachers. Some principals such as Mr Ndelu and Mrs Shinga tried some strategies to overcome some of the challenges. When such strategies prove to be working, it must be a good feeling, and that forms part of their experience. When Mrs Chobile gives up or does not try anything in order to address the challenges she is facing, that may be due to frustration she was experiencing. Perhaps she felt inadequate to even attempt to correct the situation. One may ask the question, where is collaboration in all this? Does she not care that the situation is not getting better? Has she forgotten that there is a need to share problems, challenges and strategies? Does she really seem to understand what collaborative learning is all about? All these questions are indicative of the challenges facing principals and they form part of the experience of developing a collaborative learning culture.

The study has established that the challenges facing principals in promoting collaborative learning culture among teachers are largely associated with the teachers, and seem to be more psych-sociological in nature. These challenges are non-willingness of the teachers to collaborate, failure of teachers to understand and embrace their differences, fear of teachers to collaborate with other colleagues, and discouraging results. It was also found that the principals are faced with a challenge of instilling commitment on teachers and this challenge may be a result of the lack of relevant leadership qualities from principals. Roberts (2004) recommends that collaborative learning involves building of self-esteem, reducing anxiety;

encouraging understanding of diversity, fostering leadership, and stimulating critical thinking, **4.9 in Chapter 4** provides more details.

5.3.2 How do school principals develop a collaborative learning culture within their schools?

The data has shown that there believed that learning communities of professionals are important and collaborative learning is central to realising such a goal. The question to be answered is about how principals developed such a culture of collaborative learning. There is one major method that all the principals in the study believed to be effective, that is, the creation of teamwork. They expressed a strong belief that collaboration has a number of efficacies. Such efficacies include the establishment of platforms for the teachers to share their knowledge, strategies, set targets for the year, and learn from one another. Based on the beliefs about what can be achieved by working as teams, different principals developed collaborative cultures differently. More details about these issues can be found in **Section 4.5 of Chapter 4.** It was therefore found that principals in different schools play different roles in developing a collaborative learning culture.

Among some of the things that they did was to encourage their staff to work collaboratively. They did this by, for instance, establishing awards days, alternating teachers who taught the same subjects between different grades. This strategy was intending at committing teachers to collaboration as they will from time to time share teaching resources, this is discussed in section **4.10 of Chapter 4.** Therefore, the finding is that, principals are using motivation of learners and teachers, as well as the alternation of teachers between different grades as strategies to respond to their challenges.

5.3.3 Why do principals develop a culture of collaborative learning among teachers in schools the way they do?

The culture of collaboration among teachers appeared as an important instrument in schools, according to this study. It transpired from this study that teacher collaboration is beneficial to both teachers and learners. More details about the ways in which participating principals viewed the need for creating collaborative cultures are found in **Section 4.6 and 4.8 in Chapter 4.** On this aspect, Mrs Chobile indicated that *"it provides us with time for*

integration and it also links teachers..." Mr Ndelu values team work and credits for moving his school performance from below 60% in Grade 12 examinations. However, the big question to be addressed in this section is about why the principals in the study developed collaborative learning culture the way they did. Before trying to answer this question, I should highlight what the principals did and how. I am trying to do that in the next paragraph.

The first thing to highlight is that the principals made what I can call sincere attempts to promote collaborative learning among teachers in schools for these reasons. I am using the word sincere because in my conversations with them I never got a sense that what they did was just made for me or for public consumption. The records also showed for instance, teamwork was one of the items in meetings which were meant to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. They also embarked on strategies to develop learning communities because they believed that such communities created the platform for teacher integration; allowed the teachers to share knowledge, and by performing these two, the results in the improvement of learner outcomes. However, the manner in which they attempted to all these do not indicate that they actually understood and fully committed themselves to achieving.

The data clearly shows that principals in the study were not as active as they should have in mobilising the teachers to engage in collaborative learning. In fact, the data does not show that the principals were themselves interested in learning with the teachers as it is the practice on collaborative learning. Therefore, the findings are that principals did not participate in departmental meeting or teacher collaboration activities. Instead, they only requested reports from other members of the SMT to check whether the teachers were working collaboratively. This can be seen in Mrs Shinga's statement when she said *"what I normally do in our weekly management meetings; I just ask for reports on what has been done..."* Similarly, Mrs Chobile said *"the role that I play; I involve the HODs; they must see to it that the good culture is continuing"*. It was therefore found that principals played a passive role in this process; they did not play any direct role in sustaining the culture of collaboration among teachers, as they were found not to be participating in departmental sessions.

One can surmise that the principals did not have a clear understanding of what it really means to be a learning community of professionals. Clearly, every leader or manager becomes worried when the staff under-performs. However, it is difficult to understand how Mrs Chobile can resign and say *"I don't have any strategy in place at the moment; it's still a*

continuing problem" when she is faced with challenges where teachers show reluctance to work as a team. What I can conclude is that the challenges are enormous and perhaps skills to address them are lacking.

5.4   Recommendations

This study has made two sets recommendations; the first set of recommendations is directed to secondary school principals, while the second set of recommendations is directed to the researchers.

5.4.1   Recommendations directed at secondary schools principals

The findings of this study revealed that team working in schools is taking place although not at the expected level. The study has also found that principals are faced with challenges of teachers who are not willing to collaborate, and those who fail to acknowledge their differences. It has also established that principals were not participating in PLCs as expected; instead the responsibility of sustaining the culture of collaboration among teachers was entrusted on HODs. It is therefore recommended that firstly, secondary school principals should fully participate in PLCs or sessions where departments collaborate. Their participation should not be dominant and superior, but they must attend with an intention of learning from other colleagues; during these sessions principals must promote the importance of collaboration among teachers.

5.4.2   Recommendations directed at the researchers

The findings show that some teachers are reluctant to work collaboratively despite the benefits thereof. It is therefore recommended that large scale research should be conducted that focuses on issues surrounding perceptions and or experiences of the teachers of working collaboratively as teams.

5.5   Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the findings and the recommendations that are directed at two categories of stakeholders, namely, the secondary school principals and also at the research community. The chapter begins by providing a summary of the entire study before presenting the findings which are organised under the research questions.

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The Principal

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH AT YOUR SCHOOL

I am Sibonelo Blose and I am conducting a research as a requirement of the University of KwaZulu-Natal towards my Master of Education degree. The title of the research study is "exploring the experiences of three secondary school principals in developing a collaborative learning culture".
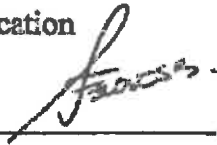
I therefore request your permission to conduct this study in your school. Since the study's focus is on understanding principals' experiences, it will be highly appreciated if you would agree to personally participate in this study. Should you agree to participate, we will hold interviews at the date and time that is convenient to you, and will last for approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Care will be taken that no disruption is caused during such interviews. Please be informed that your participation in this study is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. In addition, you are assured that details of the school and that of the participant will be kept confidential, and your identity will never be disclosed to anyone.

For more information and questions about the study, you may contact me as follows:

- ❖ Sibonelo Brilliant Blose Cell No.: 0827385569; email: sibonelob@vodamail.co.za
- ❖ My supervisor: Dr. TT Bhengu: Tel No.: (031) 260 3534; Fax: (031) 260 1598; Email: bhengutt@ukzn.ac.za or
- ❖ Officials in our research office: Ms. P. Ximba, (HSSREC UKZN Research Office). Tel: (031) 260 3587; Email: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za

Thanking you in advance.

Yours in Education

Mr. S.B. Blose

01 November 2013

1209 Inanda Glebe

Inanda

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RE-PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH AT OUR SCHOOL

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

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

Thank you

Yours in education

SIGNATURE: _____

01 November 2013

1209 Inanda Glebe

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SIGNATURE:_____

05 November 2013

1209 Inanda Glebe

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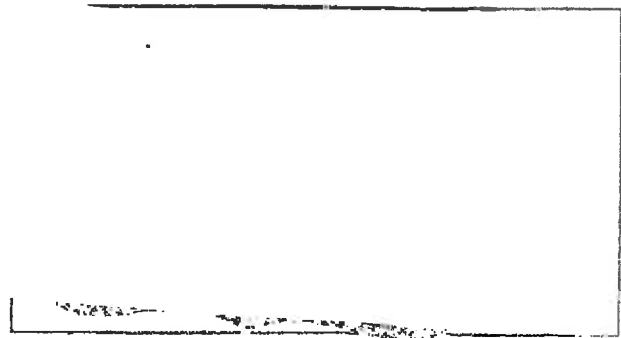## RE-PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH AT OUR SCHOOL

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Thank you

Yours in education

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The Principal

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REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH STUDY
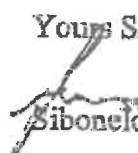
I am Sibonelo Biose and I am conducting a research as a requirement at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in completion of a Degree of Master of Education. The title of the research study is "exploring the experiences of three secondary school principals in developing a collaborative learning culture". The objectives of the study are: To determine the experiences of principal in developing a collaborative learning culture among teachers. Secondly, to explore the ways or the strategies which school principals use to develop collaborative learning culture within their schools. Finally, to establish the benefits of developing professional learning communities for schools, learners and teachers.

The study will therefore focus on schools where professional learning communities have been developed, and the participants will be school principals. This letter intends to elucidate the purpose to the study and to request your participation in the study. The researcher promises to ensure confidentiality in order to protect participants and sample institutions. As a result, the participants' names and institutions' names will not be disclosed. In addition, participants to this study have got a right to withdraw their participation at any point when they do not wish to continue anymore.

The data will be generated through semi-structured interviews with the participants and documents review; the researcher has therefore planned to interview three participants separately and also request a review of documents from each institution.

I hope this letter will find your favourable consideration, thanking you in anticipation.

Yours Sincerely

Sibonelo Blose

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SECTION FOR CONSENT OF PARTICIPATION:

I _____ (Full name of participant) hereby confirm that I understand nature and purpose of the study entitled: exploring the experiences of three secondary school principals in developing a collaborative learning culture. 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 consequences. 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 to have this interview recorded.

_____   _____

Signature   Date

The data will be generated through semi-structured interviews with the participants and documents review; the researcher has therefore planned to interview three participants separately and also request a review of documents from each institution.

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05|11|2013

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Signature

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Date

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_____   01/11/2013
Signature   Date

INTERVIEW GUIDES FOR PRINCIPALS

1. Would you say that teachers in your school embrace team working as a culture? Please substantiate.

   * shared goals in teams
   * team division (subject teams, department teams or phase teams)

2. Would you say team working among teachers in your school is helping them in becoming better teachers? Why.

   * Does it contribute to their professional development?

3. I do understand you have attained ACE (school leadership) at the UKZN. Please tell me how did it emphasise the culture of collaborative learning among teachers?

   * Supplied enough information regarding the development of teams

4. What was your role as a principal in the development of teacher teams?

   * how did you go about developing the teams
   * Leadership role

5. What role do you currently play as a principal in sustaining the effective teaching culture in the school?

   * Are you part of any team (except SMT)
   * Monitoring and Motivation

6. How often do teams meet in your school?

   * Weekly/ monthly: what is done during sessions?
   * To what extent do teachers support one another with regards to content and teaching strategies?

7. Do you observe any improvements in learner performance since teacher teams came into effect?

   * exam results
   * learners' attitude

8. In developing and maintaining a culture of collaboration among teachers; what challenges have you faced?

   * Infusing change is difficult how were teams promoted?
   * How did you overcome those challenges?

9. Is there anything I may not have asked that you would like to share with me?

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Professional development plays an important role in improving schools (Ono & Ferreira, 2010). Apart from courses offered by educational institutions, workshops and seminars, teachers can still develop themselves professionally through working in collaboration with other colleagues. According to Lieberman and Pointer-Mace (2010), professional growth of the teachers should be the prime means for them to advance their practice. Therefore, educators need to be continuously developed professionally in order to enhance their productivity, which ultimately results in school improvement. To that end, collaborative

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