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A Professional Learning Community as a vehicle for the development of writing pedagogy?

A case study of a teacher professional development project

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A thesis submitted to the

Wits School of Education

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the potential of an externally initiated and facilitated professional learning community (PLC) to influence and possibly change teachers' beliefs and practices with regard to the teaching of writing in South African senior phase English home language classrooms. The main research question is: What factors enable and / or constrain the development of a PLC which has as its focus the teaching of writing. Questions related to the main question are (1) What is enabling or constraining about the contexts in which teachers work in public schools? (2) What, if any, impact do teachers' life histories and current identities have on their take up of professional development opportunities in a PLC which focused on the teaching of writing? (3) In the context of South African public education, to what extent is a PLC a suitable vehicle for developing teachers' understanding of and enactment of writing pedagogies? I chose to undertake an action research project and participated in the process of establishing PLCs as both a researcher and a facilitator. The main sources of the data analysed are transcribed audio-recordings of meetings with teachers, transcribed interviews with each teacher participant, lesson observations (for only some of the teachers) and journal notes. The unexpected challenges encountered in finding teachers willing to participate in a sustained professional development initiative are described and critically reflected on and findings in relation to each of the research questions are presented and discussed.

A key finding is that societal culture and context fundamentally shaped the inception, development and sustainability of PLCs (Hairon and Dimmock, 2012) at the center of the study. It is argued that many South African teachers' participation in a PLC is likely to be constrained by their personal and professional life histories and by the passive and compliant identity created for teachers by the lasting effects of the apartheid educational philosophy of fundamental pedagogics and by the currently increasingly prescriptive approach to teaching and assessment adopted by the provincial and national departments of education. Such an identity is likely to impact on teachers' confidence and sense of agency to devise and drive their own professional growth agenda. The study found that the ethos of the schools in which teachers teach is also likely to be influential in enabling or constraining whether, and if so, how, teachers choose to participate in a PLC. An implication of this finding is that there is a need to acknowledge the impact of contexts on teachers' attitudes and values, and to structure PLC activities to challenge existing assumptions and create a dissonance that will enable current knowledge to be reconstructed (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995).

The teachers who participated in the study used similar, traditional approaches to the teaching of writing which involved the presentation of 'set prescriptions', with an emphasis on grammatical correctness and the final product rather than on writing as a process of thinking, drafting, reflecting and redrafting. In instances where teachers adopted strongly deficit discourses about learners, they tended to resort to low level drill and skill instruction (Ball and Ellis, 2008). I argue that providing opportunities for teachers to engage thoughtfully and critically on their understanding and enactment of writing pedagogy in their contexts and classrooms over an extended period of time in a PLC could contribute to the disruption of deficit discourses and to the reconstruction of writing pedagogies.

Key words: professional learning communities; societal culture; context; teacher life histories; teacher identities; dissonance; deficit discourse; teacher agency; writing pedagogies

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.

Marion Joseph

2017

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Table of contents

Table of Contents v

List of appendices xii

List of tables xiii

Abbreviations and acronyms xiv

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Introduction to study 1

1.1.1. Background, Aims, Research questions and Rationale 2

1.2. Teacher Education and Development 9

1.2.1. Professional Learning Communities 12

1.2.2. Focus on Literacy 14

1.2.2.1 Writing 16

Chapter Two: Literature Review **19**

2.1 Introduction 20

2.2 Education and Change 21

2.3 Teacher Development and Teacher Identity 22

2.3.1 Biographical forces that contribute to teachers' identities 24

2.3.2 Contextual forces that affect teachers' identities 25

2.3.3 Institutional forces that affect teachers' identities 27

2.3.4 Programmatic forces that affect teachers' identities 28

2.4 Professional Learning Communities 29

2.4.1 What is a PLC? 30

2.4.1.1 Shared Values and Vision 31

2.4.1.2 Collective Responsibility for Learners' Learning 32

2.4.1.3 Reflective Professional Enquiry 32

2.4.1.4 Collaborative Focus on Learning 33

2.4.1.5 Promotion of group as well as individual learning 34

2.4.1.6 Professional Teacher Learning in PLCs 35

2.4.1.7 Facilitating PLCs 39

2.4.1.8 DBE Policy on PLCs 43

2.5 Writing

2.5.1 Factors that promote effective teaching of writing 45

2.5.1.1 Teachers' knowledge 45

2.5.1.2 Teachers as writers 46

2.5.1.3 Approaches to teaching writing 50

2.5.1.3.1 Skills Discourse 52

2.5.1.3.2 Process Discourse 52

2.5.1.3.3 Genre Discourse 57

2.5.1.4 Deficit Discourses 59

2.5.1.4.1 Culturally relevant pedagogy 60

2.5.2 Learning to teach writing 62

2.5.2.1 Teachers' writing histories and contexts 62

2.5.2.2 Initial Teacher Education 64

2.5.2.3 Continuing Professional Teacher Development 64

2.6 PLCs as a vehicle for the development of teachers' writing pedagogies 65

2.7 Conclusion 67

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction 69

3.2 Action Research 72

3.2.1 Planning, Acting, Observing, Reflecting- stage one 73

3.2.2 Planning, Acting, Observing, Reflecting – stage two 75

3.3 Data Collection 76

3.3.1 Questionnaires 77

3.3.2 Interviews 77

3.3.3. Classroom Observation and samples of learners' writing 80

3.3.4 Group meetings 82

3.3.5 Personal Journal 84

3.4 Research Sites and Participants 86

3.4.1 Research site for first series of meetings 86

3.4.2 Participants in Group A 87

3.4.3 Research site for second series of meetings 88

3.4.4 Participants in Group B 89

3.5 Data Analysis 89

3.6 Ethics 93

Chapter Four: The PLC that wasn't

4.1 Introduction 95

4.2 Context 96

4.3 Action Research Plan and Action 96

4.4 Reflection 99

4.4.1 Role of leadership 99

4.4.2 Intensification of teachers' work 102

4.4.3 Teacher Incentives 103

4.4.4 Teacher Agency 103

Chapter Five: The PLC that wouldn't: teacher identities, facilitation style and other factors that prevented change to writing pedagogies

5.1 Introduction 106

5.2 Teachers 107

5.2.1 Anne -…in the old days 108

5.2.1.1 History as a learner 109

5.2.1.2 Initial Teacher Education and early teaching experience 110

5.2.1.3 Present practice and perception of learners 112

5.2.2 Beth….you never stop learning 115

5.2.2.1 History as a learner 115

5.2.2.2 Initial Teacher Education and early teaching experience 115

5.2.2.3 Present practice and perception of learners 116

5.2.3 Carien…that's how I was taught 117

5.2.3.1 History as a learner 118

5.2.3.2 Initial Teacher Education and early teaching experience 119

5.2.3.3 Present practice and perception of learners 120

5.2.4 Dineo….the what and the how 124

5.2.4.1 History as a learner 124

5.2.4.2 Initial Teacher Education and early teaching experience 125

5.2.4.3 Present practice and perception of learners 125

5.2.5 Eric….we get sidetracked with so many things 127

5.2.5.1 History as a learner 127

5.2.5.2 Initial Teacher Education and early teaching experience 128

5.2.5.3 Present practice and perception of learners 129

5.3 Reflection 131

5.3.1 Teachers' beliefs about how they have developed as teachers' of writing 131

5.3.2 Effective ways to continue to learn and develop as teachers of writing. 131

5.3.3 How did their beliefs promote or constrain their participation in a PLC? 132

5.4 Group meetings 133

5.4.1 Analysis of meetings 135

5.4.1.1 Teachers' beliefs about teaching writing 135

5.4.1.2 Teachers' beliefs about teaching English 145

5.4.1.3 Teachers' beliefs about learners 149

5.4.1.4 Teachers' beliefs about learning 156

5.4.1.5 The Learning Activity 158

5.4.1.6 Structure and support provided by school 160

5.5 Reflection 160

Chapter Six: The PLC that almost could: teacher identities, facilitation style and other factors that enabled changes to writing pedagogies to begin

6.1 Introduction 164

6.2 Finding Research Participants 166

6.3 The Teachers 167

6.3.1 Warren – I was never very confident 169

6.3.1.1 Warren's history as a learner 169

6.3.1.2 Initial teacher education and early teaching experience 170

6.3.1.3 Present practice and perceptions of learners 171

6.3.2 Xena – Schools out here… Schools out there 172

6.3.2.1 Xena's history as a learner 172

6.3.2.2 Initial Teacher Education and early teaching experience 174

6.3.2.3 Present Practice and perceptions of learners 177

6.3.3 Yasmine – I have learned along the way 180

6.3.3.1 Yasmine's history as a learner 180

6.3.3.2 Initial Teacher Education and early teaching experience 180

6.3.3.3 Present Practice and perception of learners 182

6.3.4 Zoe – Teaching opened up a new world 185

6.3.4.1 Zoe's history as a learner 185

6.3.4.2 Initial Teacher Education and early teaching experience 187

6.3.4.3 Present Practice and perceptions of learners 188

6.4 Discussion 190

6.5 Group meetings 192

6.5.1 Teachers' beliefs about the teaching of writing 193
6.5.2 Teachers' beliefs about teaching English 204
6.5.3 Teachers' beliefs about learners 205
6.5.4 Teachers' beliefs about learning 207
6.5.5 The Learning Activity 210
6.5.6 Structures and support provided by school for teacher learning 214
6.6 Reflection 214

Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction 218

7.2 Contextual variables that enable or constrain the work of PLCs in public schools 219

7.2.1 District level variables 220

7.2.2 School and Classroom level variables 223

7.3 Teachers' life histories and current identities as enabling or constraining productive participation in a PLC 227

7.4 The facilitation process as an enabling or constraining variable 230

7.5 Teachers' knowledge and beliefs about teaching writing 231

7.6 The potential of a PLC for developing teachers' understandings of writing 232

7.7 Limitations of this study 235

7.8 Recommendations 236

7.8.1 Promoting Teacher Agency 236

7.8.1.1 Too little attention has been given to how PLCs are conceptualised and implemented at district and school level. 236

7.8.1.2 Deeply embedded traditional school practices of 'top-down' school control need to be re-examined. 237

7.8.2 An awareness of the beliefs that teachers bring to class needs to be fostered in order to shift notions of deficit. 238

7.8.3 Appropriate and skilled facilitation of PLCs is essential in order to support teacher learning. 239

7.8.4 The school writing curriculum must be reviewed. 239

7.9 Concluding reflections 241

References 243

List of Appendices

Appendix A – GDE Letter of Permission

Appendix B – Teacher Questionnaire-consent form and questionnaire

Appendix C – Individual Interview Schedule

Appendix D – Consent Form: Interview

Appendix E – Consent Form: Audio Taping

Appendix F – Letter to the Teachers

Appendix G – Consent Form: Learner's Documents

Appendix H – Letter to the Principal

Appendix I – Transcripts of Debby and Fiona's Lessons

List of Tables

Table 1 – PIRLS 2011

Table 2 – Attempts to initiate PLC 2012 -2015

Table 3 – Gee's (2010) tools for discourse analysis

Table 4 – Summary of Group A teachers' qualifications and teaching experience

Table 5 – Summary of Group B teachers' qualifications and teaching experience

Table 6 – Discourse analysis of excerpt of Group B discussion

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ANAs Annual National Assessment Tests

C2005 Curriculum 2005

CAPS Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements

DBE Department of Basic Education (from 2009)

DHET Department of Higher Education and Training

DoE Department of Education (until June 2009)

ELRC Educator Labour Relations Council

FAL First Additional Language

GDE Gauteng Department of Education

GPLMS Gauteng Province Mathematics and Literacy Strategy

HL Home Language

HOD Head of Department (in a school)

ISPFTED Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa

NSC National Senior Certificate

PIRLS - The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study

SACMEQ The Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Introduction to study

1.1.1. Background, Aims, Research questions and Rationale

1.2. Teacher Education and Development

1.2.1. Professional Learning Communities

1.2.2. Focus on Literacy

1.2.2.1 Writing

1.1 Introducing the study

> "There is growing consensus in international and local literature that, to be effective, professional development activities (PDAs) should focus on ways of teaching that improve learners' learning, but there is no clear consensus on the teaching focus and the form in which teacher learning is organized." (de Clercq and Shalem, 2014, p.129).

Over the past two decades, South African teachers have participated in many professional development activities which have largely focused on introducing them to new or revised curricula through essentially 'top down' strategies. Very little change or improvement in the quality of education ('learners' learning') has resulted from these initiatives (Bertram, 2011). In recognition of the lack of impact that teacher development activities have had, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) published the *Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa 2011-2015'* (ISPFTED) in 2011. The ISPFTED lists a range of professional development activities for teachers to participate in, including Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). This study offers an account of an action research project which explored the potential of an externally initiated Professional Learning Community (PLC) to influence and possibly change teachers' beliefs and practices with regard to the teaching of writing in the Senior Phase (grades 7-9) English home language classroom. The research was undertaken in schools in Gauteng Province in South Africa between 2012 and 2015.

This introductory chapter presents an overview of the research: the background, aims and rationale, the context within which it was undertaken and the questions it attempted to answer. It ends with a summary of the chapters to follow.

1.1.1 Background, aims, rationale, research questions

Factors that promote the professional learning of teachers are complex (Timperley, H., Wilson, A., Barrar, H. & Fung, I., 2007). Bertram (2011) argues that in order for professional development initiatives to be more effective, these need to take much greater cognisance of the kinds of teacher knowledge that teachers need to acquire and the various ways in which they acquire these different types of knowledge. In a similar vein, Earl maintains that

> If teachers, school leaders and governments are going to expend energy and resources on professional learning an understanding is needed of the kinds of learning that help teachers develop and grow in ways that will serve all their students well (Earl, L. in the foreword to Timperley et al., 2007: vii-viii).

This quotation captures significant features of the study described and discussed in this thesis because the 'kinds of learning that help teachers develop and grow in ways that will serve all their students well' has been an ongoing challenge for the South African government in the post-apartheid era. Research continues to identify poor performance of learners in the South African education system (The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study [PIRLS)], 2006, 2011; The Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality [SACMEQ] 11 and 111, 2000, 2007) despite a significant number of professional development initiatives for teachers over the past two decades. Whilst the results of SACMEQ IV (2013) results, published in 2016, showed large gains in the reading and Mathematics scores of South African learners, these have been described as extremely unlikely by Spaull (2016) who maintains that the results are non-comparable to SACMEQ lll because different methodologies were employed when calculating test scores and the fact that weaker students had been excluded from the final results in the process.Thulas Nxesi, a previous General Secretary of the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) described teacher development in South Africa as

> A jigsaw puzzle whose pieces are mixed up and whose box-top picture is lost. Although structures, institutions and policies have been developed, it is not clear how these all fit together. There is duplication, with effort being made in silos where work is not coordinated across the field. The result is extra workload for teachers not benefit (Educator Labour Relations Council [ELRC], 2009, p. 29).

His observation encapsulates some of the reasons for the poor outcomes of the many professional development initiatives over the past two decades. Nxesi's words describe a

largely ‘top-down’ system (“structures, institutions and policies”) for delivery of professional development programmes to teachers which appear to have been ineffective for a number of reasons. He indicates that learning opportunities for teachers were too fragmented and scattered for them to be effective. His observation is similar to that of Fullan (1993) who maintains that integrated, sustained and in depth learning opportunities that consider the process of teacher change need to be provided. Darling-Hammond (2006) and Thompson and Zeuli (1999) also maintain that learning opportunities need to take place within extended time frames that allow for teachers to raise their own questions and concerns.

A report by the Department of Education (DoE, 2008), using data provided by Provincial Education Departments (PEDs), supports Nxesi’s assertions regarding the fragmented nature of teacher development. It shows that in 2008 alone more than 104 000 teachers were involved in a variety of provincial professional development activities. Some programmes were delivered by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) such as Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) courses, but a significant number of the programmes were facilitated by officials of the PEDs. A task team appointed by the DoE made up of departmental officials and South African Council of Educators (SACE) representatives reported that programmes focused of four broad areas: Curriculum, Management and Human Resources, Enrichment programmes and topics relating to specific policy issues such as safety in schools.

Largely quantitative data is available on these programmes. The little qualitative data available indicates that the majority of the programmes provided by the PEDs have been in the form of workshops which lasted anything from a few hours to a week. The focus of the programmes largely aimed at meeting the needs of the education ‘system’ rather than the identified needs of teachers.

The numbers reflected in reports indicating how many teachers had received professional development opportunities in 2008 seem impressive. However, yet another task team appointed in 2009 to investigate the implementation of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) found continuing poor levels of understanding and implementation of the NCS (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2009). It seemed teachers still did not know what they were required to know in order to effectively deliver the curriculum. The report recommended greater specification in curriculum content as well as guidance with sequencing and pacing of the content. The National Education Evaluation and

Development Unit (NEEDU) report in 2012 also noted that the biggest obstacle to the effective implementation of curricula was 'inadequate capacity on the part of teachers, school leaders and system-level officials specifically with regard to the subject knowledge required to interpret the curriculum and translate it into meaningful classroom activities' (p. 24) . These were described as being at generally low levels throughout the system. The NEEDU report states that 'it is discouraging to note that tens of thousands of teachers, school leaders and officials have received in-service training over the last two decades, with very little apparent effect on the system' (DBE, Curriculum News, January 2013, p. 4), and recommends that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) pay urgent attention to identifying interventions which have a positive effect in the classroom. The DBE responded to the identified weaknesses in the system by introducing a 'repackaged curriculum' and a document outlining a more cohesive approach to teacher learning and development.

Firstly, the recommendations that there be greater specification within the school curriculum were incorporated into the National Curriculum Statement – Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (DBE, 2010) which signaled the return of a content-based curriculum. The NCS-CAPS curriculum was implemented from 2011. According to Fataar "CAPS authorises a tightly scripted curriculum that can be considered 'teacher-proof' in its approach to implementation" (Fataar, 2012, p.58).

The response to the call for more effective models of teacher development is encapsulated in the *Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa 2011-2025* (ISPFTED), which was published in 2011. The document outlines plans for more cohesive, coherent, purposeful, relevant and meaningful teacher development initiatives. These include a variety of formal and informal professional development activities for teachers. Teachers may choose to enrol for formal study opportunities or to attend short courses and training workshops provided by a variety of service providers. District subject specialists and advisors are required to provide in-service support, guidance and mentoring while inter-school visits and peer consultation are supposed to take place within teacher clusters. While the planning framework document states that 'teachers are placed firmly at the centre of all efforts to improve teacher development, and enables teachers to take substantial responsibility for their own development' (DBE/DHE, 2011:1), 'top down' models of teacher development continue to predominate in the document. Of particular interest to me is the ISPFTED's proposal that

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) be established to provide support and development opportunities for teachers (DBE/DHE, 2011, p.14), a model of teacher development that seems to differ from the growing trend to 'teacher proof' and standardize most aspects of teaching and teacher development. It appears to offer possibilities for re-professionalising teachers whilst many of the teacher proofing initiatives serve to 'de-professionalise' them (Cereseto, 2009).

Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) define teacher proofing teaching as

> A laundry list of simple techniques that can be prescribed and even paced so that minimally trained and modestly paid teachers can perform them satisfactorily (p. 25).

In addition to the introduction of a tightly scripted content-based curriculum, other measures to 'teacher proof' teaching are evident, perhaps as a result of continuing reports of the ineffectiveness of teacher development activities and their failure to impact on South Africa's poor performance in national and international assessments (Taylor and Taylor, 2013; Carnoy et al., 2012; Taylor and Vinjevold, 1999). These include the Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign (QLTC), Dinaledi Schools Project, QIDS-up [Quality Improvement Development and Support] project and the Foundations for Learning Campaign/ Programme. These and other programmes reflect what Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) refer to as 'a passive view of the teacher' (p. 26). Teaching programmes, teaching aids, lesson plans and tests and exams are developed for teachers, not by them or with them. For example, workbooks have been developed for primary grade learners which teachers are required to use in their everyday teaching 'in ensuring that their learners cover the curriculum.' The statement on the national website indicates that the DBE "have taken care to guide the teacher through each of the activities by the inclusion of icons that indicate what it is that the learner should do"

(http://www.education.gov.za/Curriculum/Workbooks).

The introduction of the Annual National Assessments (ANAs)[1], ostensibly to monitor the health of the education system and to diagnose deficiencies in learning and teaching, with the emphasis on deficiencies in teaching, is yet another example of the growing 'passive' view of the teacher. The ANAs became a means of holding teachers accountable for

[1] In 2015, there was an impasse with teacher unions on the writing and impact of ANA. The ANA programme is currently under review and there has been extensive consultation with the teacher unions to develop another model of systemic assessment.

learners' performance (Graven and Venkat, 2014). Schools in Gauteng were labelled as 'underperforming' with ANA scores being used to determine whether schools should be part of the Gauteng Primary Literacy and Mathematics Strategy (GPLMS). The strategy was aimed at improving teaching and learning in 'underperforming' primary schools by providing teachers with 'well - designed text books, additional learner workbooks besides those provided by the DBE, graded readers and scripted lesson plans for teachers' (Gauteng Department of Education, 2010, p.19). Coaches were also appointed to assist teachers with their understanding and implementation of the lessons plans they were given.

One thing that has perhaps not been sufficiently noted in the numerous teacher development initiatives and various interventions is that during the past two and half decades, many South African schools have become increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse with learners who do not speak English as a home language attending schools where English, at home language level, is the language of learning and teaching (LOLT). Teachers at such schools need not only to have the subject knowledge required to interpret the curriculum but they also need to be skilled at teaching in classrooms characterised by a diversity that did not previously exist. Very often, learners learning through the medium of English speak a variety of different home languages and have very different religious and cultural practices to those of their teachers. These changing demographics have important implications for teacher education and development initiatives. Studies (Christie et al., 2007; Class Act, 2007; Chisholm et al., 2005) show that the introduction of new curriculum and training initiatives that provide superficial 'top down' input do not influence teachers' practices. Research suggests that teachers handle the resulting demands by pretending to implement the policies but, in fact, merely tick boxes on a checklist. The intentions of the policies are not being served because teachers' beliefs and practices have remained largely unaltered while they comply superficially or inconsistently with what is required. It is therefore important for teacher development activities to address not only teachers' knowledge and skills, but their attitudes and dispositions too (Timperley et al., 2007). Hoadley and Ensor (2009) maintain that there is a need to interrogate models of teacher education in the light of who is teaching and who is taught. They raise the question as to whether a relationship between teachers' own social class backgrounds, their professional dispositions and their pedagogic practices can be established. I believe that this is an important question and one that is relevant to this study,

Aim of the study and research questions

This study has aimed to investigate the potential of an externally initiated and facilitated Professional Learning Community (PLC) to influence and possibly change teachers' beliefs and practices with regard to the teaching of writing in the Senior Phase English home language classroom. The main question is thus: What factors enable and / or constrain the development of a professional learning community (PLC) which has as its focus the teaching of writing.

The following research questions are related to the main question of the study:

- What is enabling or constraining about the contexts in which teachers work in public schools?
- What, if any, impact do teachers' life histories and current identities have on their take up of professional development opportunities in a PLC which focused on the teaching of writing?
- In the context of South African public education, to what extent is a PLC a suitable vehicle for developing teachers' understandings of and enactment of writing pedagogies?

Rationale

The background to this study outlined concerns about the lack of significant progress in achieving quality educational outcomes in South Africa, particularly in Literacy/ Language and Mathematics. These concerns have led to an increasing focus on teacher performance and the need to 'think afresh about what support teachers need to teach better' (ELRC, Teacher Development Summit Working Document, 2009, p. 162). I have chosen, for various reasons, to explore 'thinking afresh' about the support teachers need to teach better, with a particular focus on the teaching of writing.

My own initial teacher qualification was a four year diploma in primary school teaching from a teachers' college. Whilst required to study two 'academic majors', educational studies and psychology, much of the remainder of the programme focused on methods and approaches to the teaching of primary school subjects such as History, Science, Afrikaans and English. The methodology course in English did not focus on teaching writing but offered a fairly broad approach on how to use 'themes' in the teaching of English. It was thus through trial and error that my own writing pedagogy developed. In my first year of teaching, I assigned writing tasks to learners and toiled through many hours of marking

generally poor responses. In my third year of teaching, the department of education at the time, the Transvaal Education Department (TED) issued a Study Guide on the teaching of writing which outlined the process approach to the teaching of writing. I conscientiously followed the 'steps' and used and adapted the exemplars in the study guide. I was encouraged to see an improvement in the quality of learners' writing. Later, a two year secondment to the college from which I had graduated exposed me to the work of two colleagues who lectured on the teaching of writing to students in their third year of study. Whilst they maintained that they were teaching the process approach (2.5.1.3.2) to the teaching of writing, I later realised that it included elements of the genre approach (see 2.5.1.3.3). For example, students were required to consider a variety of audiences and purposes for writing and to teach different types of texts and genres. When I returned to school, I found that this experience had further enriched my understanding of the teaching of writing and my ability to teach it, and assessment of learners' writing became a far less onerous task. I found it became easier to integrate the different components of the language curriculum more effectively and became a proponent of a synthesis of the process and genre approach to teaching learners to write. I conducted several workshops over the years in an attempt to share what I had learned. However, the only teachers I was really able to influence were those who were part of the English department when I was a head of department.

Since becoming the professional development officer for a teachers' union, I have offered courses and workshops on the teaching of both reading and writing. Whilst courses on the teaching of reading have been inundated with bookings, very few teachers have shown the same interest in the teaching of writing. However, Sperling and Freedman (2002) maintain that the connection or interrelatedness between reading and writing needs to be emphasised, and it has remained a priority for me to draw attention to the interrelatedness of the two. Kress (1994) maintains that reading is important to enable everyone to share in knowledge but he argues that the ability to produce written messages is as necessary in order to contribute to knowledge and ideological activity and for gaining measures of power. Kress believes that

> All school leavers [sh]ould gain some insight into the meanings of their own and others' writing, to understand the content of the messages to which they are subjected, and to provide them with the essential skills necessary to manipulate, control and organise language for their own purpose of becoming creative in their own sphere (ibid, p. 10).

1.2 Teacher Education and Development

Section 1.1 of this chapter included information on a significant number of professional development initiatives for teachers in South Africa over the past two decades. Despite these initiatives, there appears to have been little impact on the quality of education in the country (Spaull, 2013; Taylor, van der Berg & Mabogoane, 2013; Bertram, 2011). Because teacher learning and development is complex (Bertram, 2011), there are many possible reasons for this in addition to those suggested by Nxesi (2010). Teachers' own accounts of their experiences indicate various weaknesses in the professional development experiences they have had.

Pithouse (2001), at the time a grade 7 teacher of learners with special education needs, described her experience of training offered in October 1999. Teachers were required to start implementing Curriculum 2005 (C2005) the following year, and she noted that 'it is unlikely that this workshop adequately prepared teachers for the challenging task of implementing C2005 in January 2000' (Pithouse, 2001, p.157). She cited several reasons for this including insufficient planning and poor facilitation over a far too brief training period. Pithouse claims that this prevented teachers from 'taking ownership of the new curriculum' (p. p.155) and left them feeling insecure. She argues that the facilitation of the workshop contrasted sharply with the stated C2005 principle of 'a learner orientated approach'. There was an emphasis on the transmission of knowledge from facilitators to teachers, as well as a reliance on transmission-style resources, such as the overhead projector. Facilitators did little to demonstrate the creative use of teaching and learning resources and methods that would be required for the effective implementation of C2005 in their own classrooms (Pithouse, 2001, p.155).

Masterson (2013), recounting her experiences of attending departmental training and information sessions, sometimes for a week at a time, also complained of the quality of facilitation skills, but included criticism of the timing of the programmes (during school holidays) and the failure of the training to connect with teachers' knowledge frameworks. Masterson describes teachers as feeling 'resentment' which prevented them from engaging thoughtfully and productively with the materials or the new curriculum (2013, p.20). Kempe (2014), writing about her own journey and that of a group of colleagues through the curriculum changes, asserts that "Coping with a change of the magnitude of

Curriculum 2005 alone was stressful, having to adjust to further changes has placed a great burden on the country's teachers" (Kempe, 2014, p.6).

The emotions expressed by teachers about their teacher development experiences such as insecurity, resentment and stress are quite intense and negative. Professional development opportunities seemed to undermine teachers' confidence and their sense of ownership of the new curriculum. Hargreaves (1998) argues that teaching is an emotional practice and that teachers' emotions are inextricably bound up with the purposes of schooling. It is perhaps not surprising that experiences that evoked such negative feelings did not result in positive 'uptake' in teachers' classrooms. The responses of teachers reported here supports Earl's assertion that

> People come to learning with preconceptions about how the world works. If their initial understanding is not engaged, they may fail to grasp the new concepts and information that are taught or may learn them superficially and revert to their preconceptions in real situations (Earl in Timperley et al., 2007, viii).

Granville (1996) suggests that the conservative and reproductive forces in society, and particularly in schools, are often hostile to change. In similar vein, Wilson and Berne (1999) argue that to be effective

> …professional education would have to acquire a fundamentally different content and character than it now has. It would have to be sufficiently powerful to immunize teachers against the conservative lessons that most have learned from practice (Wilson and Berne, p. 6).

While I question the immunisation metaphor, I agree that more 'powerful' models of professional education need to be developed if we are to make a difference to teachers' classroom practices. The impact of 'old beliefs' on teacher professional learning is an important concern in any context but perhaps especially so in South Africa. In 2012, there were 426 000 teachers in the South African system. In 2013, the number of teachers between the ages of 40 and 49 was 169 000. This constitutes almost forty five percent of the teachers in the system (Hofmeyr and Draper, 2015). Thus, a significant percentage of South African teachers during the course of their lives have, firstly, been educated in the previously divided education system of apartheid in South Africa and secondly, they have been through three curriculum changes in less than twenty years. As a result of the kind of education teachers experienced under the different departments of education[2], they are

[2] Department of Education and Training schools (DET/ Black) House of Delegates (HOD/ Indian), House of Representatives (HOR/ Coloured) and House of Assembly (HOA/ White) schools.

likely to have developed different apprenticeship[s] of observation (Lortie, 1975), which may have left them with deeply entrenched models of teaching and learning (Reed, 2010). Many teachers have experienced years of dependency and bureaucratic control. Education policy in the autocratic apartheid state required teachers to comply with political and bureaucratic instructions. Teacher education, premised on fundamental pedagogy, a philosophy which promoted passivity and obedience to authority (Taylor and Vinjevold, 1999), reinforced submissive attitudes. School inspections, a prescriptive syllabus and hierarchical control were other means of enforcing compliance. Many teachers do not possess the knowledge and skills to match the demands of the new curricula they are required to teach. Jansen (2003) criticises education policy documents because they all contain "powerful images of the idealised teacher" which are conveyed "through drastic role changes for the teacher without addressing the practitioner directly" (p. 119). Harley, Barasa, Bertram, Mattson and Pillay (2000) maintain that the curriculum changes teachers have been required to implement during their teaching careers, while they may have resulted in changes to some of their practices (e.g. arranging desks in groups instead of rows), will continue to be superficial if there have been no changes at the level of their beliefs (Harley et al., 2000). Of interest, and concern, to me, is that this compliant identity contrasts with the identity that participation in a PLC requires of teachers who are expected to 'collaborate', 'reflect' and 'investigate' their own practices. According to Baxen and Soudien (1999) fundamental pedagogics left teachers with distorted professional identities, without the 'intellectual resources to critically assess their professional practice' (p. 132).

As stated earlier in this chapter, studies have shown that the introduction of new curriculum and training initiatives that provide superficial 'top down' input do not significantly influence teachers' practices, because 'when filtered through and shaped by old beliefs', the new curricula 'turn into something more traditional than not' (Wilson and Berne,1999, p. 177). Little (1999) maintains that professional development needs to be more closely tied to the actual contexts of teaching and the histories and capacities of teachers. Moletsane (2003) similarly argues that the ineffectiveness of many professional development activities is due to teacher educators' lack of focus on factors that shape the identities of teachers. She maintains that teacher education programmes need to recognise and respond to teachers' diverse 'life histories' (p. 325). In view of all the evidence of unsuccessful teacher development initiatives, and the many reasons given for this lack of success, I argue that research in the field of teacher education should respond to Bertram's

(2011) call for ‘a more nuanced and complex understanding of teaching learning and teacher knowledge’ (p. 3).

1.2.1 Professional Learning Communities

As the professional development officer for a teachers’ union, I am responsible for designing professional development programmes each term. These have included seminars, formal presentations/ lectures, workshops and conferences. Sometimes presenters or facilitators have been “outside experts” sharing their formal knowledge of teaching, at other times presenters have been ‘credible practitioners’ (Cochran Smith and Lytle, 1999), or ‘accomplished teachers’ (Lieberman and Mace, 2009) sharing the practical knowledge they have gained from their own experiences as teachers. Researchers have recorded the limitations of these types of professional development activities (Crouch & Patel, 2008; Bloch et al., 2008) while Bertram (2014) suggests that their effectiveness will shift and change depending on the individual teacher and the context in which they teach. Whatever their limitations, the variety of learning opportunities have provided occasions for teachers to network with one another and to improve mainly their ‘craft’ knowledge or ‘technical knowledge’ (Morrow, 2007). What I cannot be sure of, and what has been of continuing concern to me, is the level of ‘take up’ by the teachers, and the impact of their professional development experiences on the quality of learning and teaching in their classrooms. I have thus been motivated by the regular reports on the poor quality of the performance of many South African learners in both national and international studies to explore PLCs as a means of ‘development and growth of teachers in ways that will serve *all* their learners well’ (Earl, in the foreword to Timperley et al., 2007: vii-viii my emphasis).

South Africa is following a worldwide trend in its decision to promote PLCs as a vehicle of teacher learning. More than a decade ago, Dufour stated that “The idea of improving schools by developing professional learning communities is currently in vogue” (DuFour, 2004, p. 6).

However, he adds that the term is used to describe every imaginable combination of individuals with an interest in education and he bemoans the fact that the term has been used so ubiquitously that it is in danger of losing all meaning. It is thus necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the concept ‘PLC’. Whilst there is no single agreed definition of what a PLC is, there is broad agreement that in education it is “an inclusive and mutually

supportive group of people with a collaborative, reflective and growth-oriented approach towards investigating and learning more about their practice in order to improve pupils' learning" (Stoll, 2011, p. 104).

Words like 'collaborative', 'reflective', 'investigating' and 'learning more about their practice' suggest an active and interactive way for teachers to learn in contrast to other models outlined in the ISPFTED. Brodie (2013) confirms that PLCs offer a different approach to teacher learning and development that is gaining traction locally. She maintains that successful professional learning communities create environments where teachers can explore their strengths and weaknesses with colleagues, develop collaborative solutions to problems of practice and implement new ideas collectively for the benefit of learners. According to research findings from other countries and from South Africa (Cereseto, 2015; Brodie, 2013; Kamler and Comber, 2008; Kaplan, 2008; Hipp et al., 2008; Doolittle et al., 2008; Earl and Katz, 2006), PLCs may benefit South African teachers.

Social learning networks, like the National Writing Project (NWP) and other teacher professional learning communities (PLCs) offer a learning model in which, "new ideas and strategies emerge, take root, and develop, and where competence can be truly cultivated and nurtured" (Lieberman & Miller, 2008, p. 2). Findings from decades of research on professional learning communities and social networks suggests that such learning communities can lead to long term capacity development and gains in learner achievement (Fullan and Hargreaves, 2012; Cochran-Smith, 2009; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2003, 1999; Lieberman, & Miller, 2008; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Lieberman, &Wood, 2003; Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; DuFour & Eaker, 1998). This thesis describes and reflects on an action research project which focused on the potential of an externally initiated Professional Learning Community (PLC) to influence and possibly change teachers' beliefs and practices with regard to the teaching of writing. What I was particularly interested to observe and explore was whether, and if so, how, PLCs accommodate the actual contexts of teaching and the histories and capacities of teachers (Little, 1999). What are the implications for the functioning of a PLC within the South African public school system? How do teachers' histories and identities affect their participation in a PLC? Perhaps most significantly, I was interested to observe how teachers' histories and identities impact on their responses to the linguistic and cultural diversity in their classrooms- who is teaching

and who is taught? (Hoadley and Ensor, 2009). And how does this impact on their approaches to the teaching of writing in particular?

1.2.2. Focus on Literacy

Concerns about literacy have been high on the political agenda in South Africa for a long time. The Foundations for Learning campaign (FfLC) was launched in 2008 by the previous Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor. Resources and lesson plans have been developed as part of the FfLC. The writing of the countrywide ANAs is linked to the campaign. On 28 June 2011, the current Basic Education minister Mrs Angie Motshekga, announced the results of a countrywide assessment of grade three and six learners, once again revealing low levels of numeracy and literacy throughout the country. Section 1.1.1 also noted the PIRLS and SACMEQ studies which revealed ongoing poor levels of reading skills among most South African learners, results which were supported by the data provided by the ANAs. The following table indicates some of the disturbing results from the 2011 PIRLS study.

Table 1: PIRLS 2011

PIRLS 2011	Assessed reading literacy in grade 5 learners from 92 schools where the language of learning and teaching (across all grades) was English or Afrikaans.	57% had acquired basic reading skills compared to 95 % of grade 4 learners internationally.
Pre-PIRLS 2011	Assessed reading literacy in grade 4 learners' home languages	58 % could not read for meaning 29% were completely illiterate

In view of these findings, it is perhaps inevitable that interventions to improve levels of literacy in South Africa have focused largely on the teaching of reading. A number of national and provincial education departments have launched different reading initiatives, strategies, interventions and policy documents in the last decade, all focusing (to varying degrees) on reading in the Foundation Phase

Not as much data is available on the levels of performance of learners in writing as most external assessments focus mainly on reading literacy. In what is available, however, there are consistent findings that learners do not do enough extended writing in classrooms. The grade 6 Intermediate Systemic Evaluation (DoE, 2005) reported on language achievements according to the key learning outcomes of the Revised National Curriculum Statements (DoE, 2002). Scores for Reading and Viewing were slightly above 50%, whilst learners achieved the lowest score for the Writing outcome with an average of just 31%. In addition to the poor scores for writing, researchers also noted that when learners were required to write responses to open ended questions in their reading tests, they performed worse than they did on multiple choice questions. This finding suggests that learners are unaccustomed to extended writing, and constructing their own responses and ideas in written form. Hendricks (2005) in her study on the classroom writing of grade 7 learners in their additional languages also reached the conclusion that learners wrote relatively few extended texts and these tended to be mainly personal expressive texts rather than the formal and factual genres needed for disciplinary writing in the higher grades. The NEEDU report (2012) showed in most classrooms learners did very little extended writing. Part of the reason for this may be the requirements of the curriculum. The most recent curriculum, the 'repackaged' NCS-CAPS curriculum, which teachers were beginning to implement at the time of this study, requires teachers to teach in two week cycles. Each two week cycle stipulates the Listening and Speaking, Reading and Viewing, Writing and Presenting and Language Structures and Conventions that are to be covered. For example, in Term 1, Senior Phase (grade 7 to 9) learners are required to write a narrative paragraph, a descriptive essay, a dialogue, a poem and a review or a letter. In addition to the texts listed, teachers also have to teach the other sections of the curriculum which are not always linked to or relevant to the writing tasks learners have to complete. It is evident that developers of the curriculum have paid insufficient attention to the complexity of the teaching of writing, the extended time frames needed to do it effectively and the need to integrate the various aspects of the language programme.

However, research by Heugh (2000) suggests other possible reasons for the limited amount of writing being done in classes. She argues that in privileged schools, learners are doing more extended writing than those in less privileged schools. According to her the quality of writing pedagogy is spread unevenly across different schools, and inequities are thus

perpetuated. Heugh's research also showed that teachers who were additional language speakers of English lack confidence in their own ability to write in English. Linked to this, other researchers (Winer, 1992; Crowhurst, 1988; Hairston, 1982) found that it is difficult for teachers to teach writing effectively if they do not engage with writing themselves. It is thus likely that both curriculum requirements as well as teachers' knowledge and expertise impact on the quality of the teaching of writing.

1.2.2.1 Writing

Poor writing skills, according to Leibowitz (2000), are a 'gatekeeper', whilst being a competent and proficient writer is a 'gateway' to empowerment (Cremin and Myhill, 2012). Many learners, according to Welch (2002), were denied access to quality education in the past, and she maintains that issues of redress, repair and equity need to be addressed at school level. I believe that equipping learners with good writing skills can be an effective way for teachers to begin to address issues of redress, repair and inequity. By equipping learners with the complex knowledge and skills required for them to become good writers, teachers will enable learners to surmount the 'gate' or barrier that prevents many of them from achieving better levels of success in education and possibly, more broadly, in life.

Rijlaarsdam and van den Burg (2006) describe writing as a demanding activity that requires the cognitive, metacognitive and linguistic processes to be co-ordinated while Flowers and Hayes maintain that a writer is a thinker on 'full time cognitive overload' (Flowers and Hayes, in Torrance and Galbraith, 2006, p. 68). Both sets of authors suggest that writing is a complex, cognitive process. One of my concerns is whether teachers recognise this complexity and whether they are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to nurture and develop the writing knowledge and skills of their learners so that they acquire and are able to use this important tool for learning and communication. Englert, Mariage and Dunsmore (2006) argue that research shows that teachers have a critical role to play in developing learners as writers. They quote Daniels (2001) who found that if teachers do not effectively fulfil this role, learners never gain the necessary insight into and understanding of the way experts think and write in order to become proficient writers themselves (Daniels in Englert et al., 2006).

Kennedy (1998), in her study 'Learning to teach writing: Does Teacher Education make a difference?' raises questions and concerns about how teachers learn to teach writing. She maintains that much of the teaching of writing stays the same because of the organisational

constraints placed on teachers but also because of teachers' own beliefs about teaching and learning. She asks a question that is of particular importance to this study: "Can teachers who are trapped in traditional practices learn different ideas about teaching writing?" (Kennedy, 1998, p. 20). The word 'trapped' conveys a strong image of being 'stuck' or 'wedged' or 'imprisoned' in 'traditional practices'. The challenge confronting me has been to determine, firstly, whether teachers do use 'traditional practices' in their teaching of writing? Secondly, are they 'trapped' or 'imprisoned' in these practices? Thirdly, if they are 'trapped' in these practices, is a PLC a strong or effective enough model of teacher development to 'free' them from the 'traditional practices'? Kennedy maintains that the teaching of writing needs to be reconceptualised and taught, not as a set of prescriptions to be followed, but as a strategy for organising one's thoughts and communicating these thoughts to others (1998, p. 8). If teachers are to 'reconceptualise' how they teach writing, they need to identify and critically reflect on the writing discourses (Ivanič, 2004) already prioritised in their teaching and consider whether these are meeting the needs of their learners. Gee maintains that discourses acquired in a social institution are 'identity kits' and as such, they are an integral part of a person's social identity since discourses reflect "Ways of being in the world or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes and social identities" (Gee, 1990, p.142).

A 'traditional approach' to the teaching of writing, as indicated by Kennedy, involves the presentation of 'set prescriptions', with an emphasis on grammatical correctness and the final product rather than on writing as a process of thinking, drafting, reflecting and redrafting. Ball and Ellis (2008) indicate that teachers' approaches to the teaching of writing are also linked to deficit views of learners and as a result of this teachers tend to resort to low level drill and skill instruction. If this 'discourse' of teaching writing is an integral part of teachers' identities in combination with deficit views of learners, is a 'bottom up' approach to teacher learning and development such as a PLC likely to be effective in promoting more thoughtful and reflective teaching that will encourage the growth and change of teachers' classroom practices and an improvement in the quality of learners' writing?

This study documents my journey as a 'professional development practitioner' engaging with the complexity of teacher learning in the context of a PLC. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of the study reflect very different phases of an action research project in which I constantly learned and adapted along the way. Chapter 4 is thus a much shorter chapter than chapters

5 and 6 because it reports a failed attempt to establish a PLC and thus consists of a reflective description rather than a data based analysis.

The remaining chapters are as follows:

Chapter Two: Literature Review
Chapter Three: Research Methodology
Chapter Four: The PLC that wasn't
Chapter Five: The PLC that couldn't: teacher identities, facilitation style and other factors that prevented change to writing pedagogies
Chapter Six: The PLC that almost could: teacher identities, facilitation style and other factors that enabled changes to writing pedagogies
Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Recommendations

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Education and Change

2.3 Teacher Identities and Teacher Development

2.3.1 Biographical forces that contribute to teachers' identities

2.3.2 Contextual forces that affect teachers' identities

2.3.3 Institutional forces that affect teachers' identities

2.3.4 Programmatic forces that affect teachers' identities

2.4 Professional Learning Communities

2.4.1 What is a PLC?

2.4.1.1 Shared Values and Vision

2.4.1.2 Collective Responsibility for Learners' Learning

2.4.1.3 Reflective Professional Enquiry

2.4.1.4 Collaborative Focus on Learning

2.4.1.5 Promotion of group as well as individual learning

2.4.1.6 Professional Teacher Learning in PLCs

2.4.1.7 Facilitating PLCs

2.4.1.8 DBE Policy on PLCs

2.5 Writing

2.5.1 Factors that promote effective teaching of writing

2.5.1.1 Teachers' knowledge

2.5.1.2 Teachers as writers

2.5.1.3 Approaches to teaching writing

2.5.1.3.1 Skills Discourse

2.5.1.3.2 Process Discourse

2.5.1.3.3 Genre Discourse

2.5.1.4 Deficit Discourses

2.5.1.4.1 Culturally relevant pedagogy

2.5.2 Learning to teach writing

2.5.2.1 Teachers' writing histories and contexts

2.5.2.2 Initial Teacher Education

2.5.2.3 Continuing Professional Teacher Development

2.6 PLCs as a vehicle for the development of teachers' writing pedagogies

2.7 Conclusion

2.1 Introduction

> Teaching is at a crossroads: a crossroads at the top of the world. Never before have teachers, teaching and the future of teaching had such elevated importance. There is widespread agreement now that of all the factors inside the school that affect children's learning and achievement, the most important is the teacher- not standards, assessments, resources or even the school's leadership, but *the quality of the teacher* (Fullan and Hargreaves, 2012, p.xii my emphasis).

The above quotation reaffirms what was stated in The McKinsey Report (2007) regarding the key role of teachers in fostering quality education. That report stated that the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers and that the only way to improve education outcomes is to improve the quality of instruction (McKinsey & Company, 2007, p.7). Writers and researchers differ as to how this should be done but agree that teachers' knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions have direct and serious implications for the success of the students they teach, and it is therefore important to understand the kinds of learning that 'help teachers develop and grow in ways that will serve all their students well' (Earl in the foreword to Timperley et al., 2007: pp. vii-viii). Many writers acknowledge that the conditions that promote teacher learning and development are complex (Brodie, 2013; Timperley et al., 2007; Llinares & Krainer, 2006; Borko, 2004). This is perhaps why the literature reports studies of a range of models and approaches to the professional development of teachers (Finegold, 2010; Webster-Wright, 2009; Beijaard, Meijer, Morine-Dersimore, & Tillema, 2005; Mitchell & Mitchell, 2005; Borko, 2004; Adler, 2004; Elmore, 2002; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Lieberman & Miller, 2001; Loughran, 1999). In South Africa, professional learning and development is particularly complex because of the country's colonial and apartheid history (Samuel, 2008). Top down models of teacher development have been dominant during the past two and a half decades but the *Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa 2011-2025* (ISPFTED), published in 2011, has proposed a wider range of models. One of these, the Professional Learning Community (PLC), offers the possibilities of a more teacher centred and teacher driven approach to professional development.

This study has investigated whether PLCs could be a way to create an environment where teachers can 'explore their strengths and weaknesses with colleagues, develop collaborative solutions to problems of practice and implement new ideas collectively for the benefit of learners' (Brodie, 2013, p.6).

I begin this literature review with a brief overview of changes in education over the past five decades, and the resulting changes in the roles and identities of teachers, particularly in South Africa. Rather than engaging with the substantial literature on teacher learning, I have chosen to limit the literature review to consideration of the significance of teachers' identities in relation to professional development (section 2.3) and in section 2.4, to critically evaluating PLCs as a professional development model for teacher learning. Finally, I discuss approaches to the teaching of writing and reflect on the affordances of a PLC for the development of teachers' writing pedagogies (section 2.5).

2.2 Education and change

There is extensive literature on educational change and transformation worldwide (e.g. Fullan and Hargreaves, 2012; Hargreaves et al., 2002; Fullan, 2000; Tatto, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1995; Ma, 1999; Rudduck, 1991). In South Africa, educational changes have been shaped by the social and political changes that have taken place. Samuel (2008) contends that there have been dominant paradigmatic perspectives on education during the past five decades and that these perspectives have influenced what teachers should and could be doing in their classrooms and have also influenced teacher education. Thus, whilst South Africa introduced a particular trajectory during the apartheid era, since 1994 the government has attempted changes which, I will argue, have not taken sufficient cognizance of South African teachers' different apprenticeships of observation (Lortie, 1975) as well as other factors that may have shaped their professional identities.

Prior to 1994, behaviourist thinking underpinned the perceived roles of teachers in South Africa, thinking which also came to be infused with the ideology of the ruling nationalist government. During this period, teachers in South Africa were required to be 'technicians of state driven agendas' (Samuel, 2008) and the good teacher was deemed to be someone who obediently adhered to the goals of state education authorities. Teachers' colleges broadly focused on Christian National Education and its attendant authoritarian philosophy of fundamental pedagogics (Hoadley and Ensor, 2009). The philosophy underpinned a

pedagogy devoid of analysis and critique. Only a few institutions established for English speaking white students challenged the dominant discourse of Christian National Education (Ensor, 1999). However, despite the construction of teachers as 'technicians of state driven agendas' (Samuel, 2008, p.14), many became actively involved in campaigns to topple the apartheid education system. For a large number of teachers, the importance of establishing a more equitable society increasingly took precedence over compliance with 'state driven agendas'. Teachers viewed themselves as 'direct oppositional forces against the imposing apartheid education authorities' (Govender, 2004). This opposition led to the establishment of teacher movements and teacher unions that gave a voice to teachers' grievances.

The eventual election of a democratic government in 1994 ushered in rapid changes in education which resulted in many challenges. Carrim (2003) notes that learners' continued poor performance in national and international assessment studies indicated that teachers were not able to achieve the goals of the new education and training system. According to Samuel (2008) an increasingly judgmental approach to teachers emerged as they were blamed for learners' poor performance. He describes how teachers, once viewed as 'victims', became 'villains' who, rather than being 'agents of change' turned out to be 'agents who needed to be changed'. Teachers were once again framed as the technicians for a state agenda albeit a new state and a new agenda (Samuel, 2008), and they were vilified for not being able to make the changes required of them by a new curriculum. Samuel (2008) contends that when teachers are regarded as 'service workers' with the responsibility to deliver the goals of the state's 'transformation agenda', accountability to being members of a profession and holding up the ideals of the teaching profession, recede (p. 8). This assertion proved to be significant in the numerous attempts that I made to initiate a PLC with a focus on the teaching of writing.

2.3 Teacher Development and Teacher Identity

Discussions of effective teacher development initiatives generally focus on the quality and relevance of learning programmes, duration and type of activities, quality of facilitation, and the level of school support for teacher learning (Opfer and Pedder, 2013; Brodie, 2013; Timperley et al., 2007; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Whilst all of these aspects of effective teacher learning initiatives are important, I wish to foreground the importance of teacher development being closely tied to the histories, contexts and capacities of teachers

(Adler, 2002; Little, 1999). This focus entails 'treat[ing] teachers with seriousness and get[ting] a sense of the classroom and school world as they see it, of the meanings and frameworks of their actions' (Hargreaves, 1989, p. 58). In 2.2, I provided a brief overview of past influences on teachers' identities and argue that these have implications for present teacher development initiatives.

Teacher learning and development is complex and particularly so in South Africa with its history of discrimination and inequity. Samuel (2008) describes the teacher identities of the apartheid era as

> a kaleidoscope of permutations: race, class, gender, language, age and stage of career. Each of these different permutations yields particular kinds of interpretations and framings of their relationships to professional development. No uniform identity of being a teacher is thus possible (ibid, p.8).

The main contributor to this 'kaleidoscope of permutations' is the apartheid legislation that ensured very unequal access to quality education for most of the men and women who were required to implement democratic South Africa's transformatory agenda. In the apartheid era, separate Departments of Education received different levels of funding. Apartheid funding resulted in an average teacher pupil ratio of 1:18 in schools for white learners, 1:24 in schools for Asian learners, 1:27 in those for coloured learners and 1:39 for black learners. Since funding influenced the amount and quality of learning materials, facilities and teachers, disproportionate funding created significant disparities in learning environments. Furthermore, ninety six percent of the teachers at schools for white learners had appropriate teaching qualifications, whilst only 15 percent of teachers in black schools had appropriate teaching qualifications. Hoadley and Ensor (2009) describe the teacher education system as 'stratified', with white teachers receiving an initial teacher education at well-resourced and well-staffed colleges and universities, while many black teachers attended colleges that were under resourced and understaffed with some college lecturers seriously underqualified (Hartshorne, 1992).

Black students entering teaching often had low scores in public examinations. For example, in 1988, the successful senior certificate group of black students from which the main pool of teachers were recruited had scored 33% - 39% in their school leaving exam (Hartshorne, 1992, p.249). Thus, one of the challenges faced by many teachers presented with contemporary notions of 'best practice' is the gap between their own school experiences and current concepts of 'best practices'. Often their school experiences would

have been characterised by authoritarian relations and rote learning (Ensor, 2004). Hartshorne and Ensor's accounts offer strong support for Samuel's (2008) contention that it is necessary to understand the 'push and pull' of the different ideological and theoretical positions that different permutations exerts on teachers. Samuel maintains that for the professional development of teachers to succeed, cognisance has to be taken of a number of issues that impact on teacher identity. Teachers' life experiences which have influenced their conceptions of what it means to be a teacher must be recognised, as must their unique social, political and cultural contexts. Professional growth opportunities also need to take into consideration the ethos of the institutions in which teachers work, and the levels of choice or autonomy that teachers might or might not enjoy in these institutions.

2.3.1 Biographical factors that contribute to teachers' identities

Samuel (2008) maintains that teachers' different experiences are likely to result in different conceptions of what it means to be a teacher. Teachers' unique life histories have included a history of teaching and learning in formal settings as well as personal family and social settings. Teachers' 'life histories' offer a 'safe world' for teachers, a world into which they tend to retreat when external forces exert too powerful an influence on their identity. Samuel (2008) refers to this as a possible 'inertial force' (p. 12). He explains that a 'romanticised interpretation of teaching and learning' drawn from their past could be restrictive because it confines teachers to their history. Several teachers in this study appeared to retain this 'romanticised' interpretation of 'the old days' which prevented them from considering new ideas.

Timperley et al.'s (2007) proposed theory of teachers' professional learning also takes' 'life histories' into account. These authors describe teachers as coming to a learning situation with preconceptions about how 'the world works and maintain that experienced teachers do not approach learning situations as 'empty vessels' but as individuals with theories about how learners learn, about how to teach them and about what to teach them. Such teachers also have established beliefs about what the most desirable outcomes ought to be. These are often deeply entrenched views which are not necessarily supported by a theory (Welch, 2002). Teachers may become resistant to an idea that appears to require them to revise or change their beliefs or views as these are often closely connected to their teacher identities.

Masterson's assertion (1.2) that the training in relation to the new curriculum that she and her colleagues received led to feelings of resentment and a failure to 'engage thoughtfully and productively with the materials of the new curriculum' (Masterson, 2013, p. 20), is an example of Samuel's 'inertial force'. It also illustrates the importance of professional development initiatives recognising teachers' preconceptions of how the world works (Timperley et al., 2007). Stoll, Fink and Earl (2003) emphasise the 'emotional' dimension to learning and warn that "neglecting emotions can close people up to learning, and lead teachers to behave defensively to protect themselves from situations that they might feel expose their 'inadequacies' (Stoll, Fink and Earl, p.85).

Teachers' histories may pose a challenge to the establishment of a PLC. If former models of teacher education premised on fundamental pedagogies continue to influence teachers' beliefs and attitudes (1.2), they may not have the 'intellectual resources to critically assess their professional practice' (Baxen and Soudien, 1999, p. 132) and they may have different views of what 'best practice' looks like. Formulating a learning focus for the group may be more complicated than would have been the case in a group with a more uniform teacher identity. Timperley et al. (2007) argue that prior theories have a powerful effect on how learning experiences are understood. The next important factor to be considered in promoting the successful professional growth of teachers is their unique social, political and cultural environments.

2.3.2 Contextual forces that affect teachers' identities

Timperley et al. (2007) emphasise the importance of context and its potential impact on professional learning. They maintain that context extends beyond an individual teacher in a particular class:

> Part of the teacher's context is the broader organisational and social situation that influences how they make sense of new information. Social influences can range from the more distant political environment and related policies, to the types of literature accessed and/or colleagues with whom the teacher interacts each day (Timperley et al., 2007, p. 11).

In similar vein, Samuel (2008) maintains that teachers are generally the products of the unique social, political and cultural environment within which they find themselves. He argues that whilst teachers may have felt negative about policies during the apartheid era when it seemed as though education systems and processes would never change, post-apartheid policies engendered an optimism, a belief, that transformation to the education system was possible. Samuel (2008) suggested that the 'climate of free democratic

participation' (p. 13) might allow teachers to interpret their roles and identities as more flexible and potentially more powerful. However, the inequities of the past were insufficiently acknowledged in the build up to the implementation of Curriculum 2005 (C2005), an outcomes based curriculum. Despite the Department of Education's description of C2005 as 'an innovation both bold and revolutionary in its magnitude and conception', a curriculum that would 'simultaneously overturn the legacy of apartheid education and catapult South Africa into the 21st Century' (DoE, 2000, p.10), instead of it overturning the legacy of apartheid education, inequities were reinforced rather than being overturned (Harley and Wedekind, 2004). How teachers make sense of new information was, and still is, constrained by their histories and their contexts. Some schools are well resourced and can afford to subsidise professional learning opportunities for teachers whilst others, in poorer socio-economic contexts have fewer resources and can provide fewer development opportunities for teachers other than those provided by the department of education. Harley and Wedekind (2004) have reported that the more privileged, well-resourced schools coped better with changes required by the introduction of C2005 because of their access to material resources and to meaningful professional development and ongoing support and development.

A similar limitation is evident with the introduction in 2002 of a revised, more streamlined, version of C2005, the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) which eventually became known as the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). The NCS followed the world trend of implementing a standards-based mode of accountability (Carnoy, 1999; Elmore, 2002a and 2002b). It was regulated by several kinds of accountability practices including the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) and the Whole School Evaluation (Department of Education, 2001) which have been shown to increase bureaucratic demands and controls on teachers' work. Local research has shown that these measures have resulted in the intensification of teachers work (Shisana et al., 2005), undermining of their professional trust (De Clercq, 2007a), and lessening valuable teaching time (Chisholm et al., 2005). Most disturbing is that research on quality improvement is ambiguous about the usefulness of these measures as there is no clear evidence that using these bureaucratic measures results in improvement in the quality of teaching (Soudien, 2007; Taylor, 2006). They nevertheless impacted negatively on teachers' willingness to participate in a sustained professional development initiative like a PLC because of the increase in their administrative workload.

2.3.3 Institutional forces that affect teachers' identities

The institutions in which teachers either teach or learn become 'infused' with the ethos of the institution (Samuel, 2008, p. 13) which influences their conception of self, role and identity as members of that institutional community. Institutional ethos is likely to be influenced by a range of factors, not the least of which may be the inspiration offered by charismatic leaders, with vision and direction and with theoretical insight towards realising quality education. Unfortunately, the one principal in this study who promised to be such a leader, retired shortly after inviting me to work with the grade 8 English home language teachers at her school.

A school with strongly entrenched practices which are endorsed by experienced teachers who are considered to have a wealth of knowledge and experience may, however, limit professional learning. Teachers who have learnt new teaching strategies and methods outside of their school contexts may find it difficult to change their practices when faced with the established practices of the school. Again, this has important implications for teachers learning in a professional learning community. A study by Pella (2011) on developing writing pedagogies in a PLC, describes one of the four teachers in her study, 'Laura', as experiencing dissonance (Hannay and Ross, 2001). 'Laura' believed that her pedagogy had been too strongly influenced by the pressure to prepare her learners for on demand writing assessments and she began to revise her ideas. Her revised ideas were met with great enthusiasm by the other members in the PLC but not by her colleagues at school and especially not by her principal. 'Laura' taught at a school that enjoyed high scores on external assessments and her principal was fearful that the changes she wanted to make would influence those scores. His response to her suggestions was 'If it isn't broken, why fix it?' Her response was that if she could not engage her learners in a way that engaged all of them, then her pedagogy 'was broken' (p.119). 'Laura's' professional learning resulted from her existing assumptions being challenged, leading to what Hannay and Ross (2001) refer to as disequilibrium. According to Hannay and Ross (2001), dissonance challenges tacit, or implicit, knowledge, creates philosophical tension and requires current knowledge to be reconstructed. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) argue that one of the difficulties of challenging the current values and beliefs on which teachers' practices are based is that they are often implicit (tacit) and not explicit. Knowledge that has been built up over time is embedded in personal experience. Ramani (1987) contends that teachers' implicit beliefs need to be made explicit if they are to counter the reproductive effects of mechanistic

approaches to teacher education. PLCs have the potential to offer activities for teachers that may enable them to make their implicit beliefs explicit. The question arises as to whether South African teachers have professional identities that are sufficiently well developed to enable them to be as resolute as 'Laura' was if they see the need to revise their beliefs and to change their classroom practices if these are not supported by their colleagues or principal.

2.3.4 Programmatic forces that affect teachers' identities

A programmatic force, according to Samuel (2008), is a 'curriculum intervention force' (p. 13) which declares the sequence, content and direction that the teaching and learning process will follow. He maintains that a programmatic force is espoused and enacted in everyday practices to reinforce the quality of learning and teaching. Teachers who come under the influence of such a programmatic force come to interpret their role and identity in unique ways. For example, Batra contends that in India, teachers are viewed as implementing agencies of

> larger interests: national interest as defined by the State; a channel of reproduction of the officially approved curriculum often via rote learning. The teacher is seen as an empty repository which will be moulded and filled by an 'enlightened' and highly 'competent' teacher education system (Batra, 2009, p.132).

A similar trend in the positioning of teachers is evident in South Africa. The current 'programmatic force' in South African schools is the NCS – Curriculum and Assessment Statement (NCS-CAPS), which is being interpreted as a tightly scripted curriculum by most district officials. Blind compliance is required. The responsibilities placed on teachers are increasingly unrealistic and unattainable, and overload and burnout seem to occupy much of the reporting on teaching (Cereseto, 2009). This de-professionalises teachers, and their accountability to quality teaching and learning diminishes (Samuel, 2008), so that they function in a climate which is not ideal for the initiation and development of PLCs.

Samuel (2008) asserts that

> The autonomy of the teacher making a professional judgement in the interest of quality education is a fundamental building block of a vibrant and truly liberated education system. Anything less would be masked or disguised autocracy (p.14).

The autonomy of South African teachers is being eroded by increasingly prescriptive interventions such as the NCS-CAPS, GDE and DBE workbooks and standardised assessments. Professional development interventions need to create opportunities for teachers to recover their autonomy in the classroom. This is especially true of teachers in

the South African context who embody a range of diverse perspectives which draw on their location within the story of South African education. Furthermore, many teachers have a conception of professional development as the responsibility of some external agent (Samuel, 1998). Teachers see themselves as lacking competence and agency to drive their own professional growth. However, this can change according to Ryan (2014). In a discussion of the influence of particular teaching strategies on the quality of learners' writing, she suggests that the first step in the process of teachers believing that they can deliberate about the choices they have even in highly accountable conditions, is for them to engage reflexively with their teaching of writing. The question pertinent to this study is whether participating in a PLC can enable teachers to reflect on the implicit or explicit values, theories and beliefs that inform their everyday teaching practices and to use their insights to engage in a process of self-directed continuous learning.

2.4 Professional Learning Communities

During the past decade, PLCs have increasingly been endorsed as a preferred model of teacher development by ministries of education in a wide range of countries in varying contexts such as England, Finland, Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore, Australia and South Africa. However, professional collaboration as a means of teacher learning and development is not a new idea. For example, Stenhouse (1975) argued that teachers ought to be school and classroom researchers and play an active part in the curriculum development process. Riveros, Newton and Burgess (2012) outline a history of teacher collaboration initiatives dating back to the 1960s.

Hairon and Dimmock (2012) locate the origins of PLCs in the corporate business sector in the work of Senge (1990) on learning organisations. Senge's ideas, followed by those of Lave and Wenger (1991), evolved into the present popularised term "professional learning communities". (Hairon and Dimmock, 2012, p. 406)'. They indicate that the work of teacher educators such as Dufour (1998), Hord (1997), Feger and Arruda (2008) and Hamos et al. (2009) has placed PLCs specifically within the education context. PLCs are now widely endorsed as 'a vehicle for curricular and pedagogical change to achieve desired student learning outcome' (Hairon and Dimmock, 2012, p. 408).

2.4.1 What is a PLC?

There is no universally accepted definition of professional learning communities (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace and Thomas, 2006). They have been defined and described in

various ways. Fullan cautions that "terms travel easily ... but the meaning of the underlying concepts does not" (2005, p. 67). Several writers indicate that there is a lack of clarity and consistency as to exactly what constitutes a PLC (Wells and Feun, 2013; Richmond and Manokore, 2010; Seo and Han, 2012; Hairon and Dimmock, 2012, Brodie, 2013). Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace and Thomas (2006) indicate that there appears to be broad international consensus that a PLC suggests a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; Toole & Louis, 2002) and operating as a collective enterprise (King & Newmann, 2001). Summarising the literature, Hord (1997) blends process and anticipated outcomes in defining a 'professional community of learners' as one:

> ... in which the teachers in a school and its administrators continuously seek and share learning, and act on their learning. The goal of their actions is to enhance their effectiveness as professionals for the students' benefit; thus, this arrangement may also be termed communities of continuous inquiry and improvement (Hord, 1997, p.1).

Varied understandings of what constitutes a PLC become even more evident in the range of ways in which PLCs have been implemented in many different countries and contexts. Webb, Vulliamy, Sarjac, Hämäläinenc and Poikonenc (2009) state that "'professional', 'learning' and 'communities' are all contested concepts that lend themselves to a variety of interpretations and can be fitted into differing and potentially conflicting agendas". (Webb et al., 2009, p. 406).

Despite these challenges, Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas and Wallace (2005), after an extensive survey of literature on PLCs, have identified five key characteristics of the effective PLC. These are:

1. Shared values and vision
2. Collective responsibility for pupils' learning
3. Reflective professional enquiry
4. Collaboration focused on learning
5. Promotion of group as well as individual learning.

Each of these is discussed and critiqued in some detail in the sections that follow. Each characteristic needs to be considered within the context of a South Africa with continuing educational inequities (Spaull, 2013).

2.4.1.1. Shared values and vision

According to Dufour, Dufour, Eaker and Many (2006), participants in a PLC need to develop a shared vision. They maintain that in developing such a shared vision, teachers need to clearly define what they believe learners must know and be able to do in order to be successful. Katz and Earl (2010) assert that the vision should be "compelling and high-leverage" and be sufficiently challenging for teachers to rethink their beliefs and practices resulting in their unlearning and changing existing practices (p. 29). This assertion supports Timperley et al.'s (2007) view that teachers need to encounter knowledge and ideas that challenge their currently held beliefs in order to create dissonance (2.4.1.6).

Watson (2014), however, raises questions about the importance of 'shared values and vision' as a key characteristic of effective PLCs. In developing a shared vision, participants will each draw on their values and beliefs. She questions what it is that will be 'shared' and whose values and which values are recognised. She argues that the word 'sharing' can effectively mask difference and 'impose hegemonic closure on meaning' (p. 22). Shared adherence to values, rather than promoting change may in fact inhibit organisational change. In response to some of these questions, Cereseto (2015) maintains that all participants should contribute to the formulation of the group's vision and focus. This does not, however, address the question of whose and which values are recognised and the effect of possible power relations within a group, particularly in many South African schools where teachers come from diverse educational, religious, language and cultural groups. Tarnoczi (2006), in similar vein argues that shared values and shared vision in a PLC is merely a way to attain teachers' compliance with goals that are already set by educational legislators. He maintains that teachers are in fact perceived as the subject of change and not as agents of change (2.2), and that the change sought is the transformation of teachers' attitudes towards reform instead of a transformation of current educational practices. This argument seems consistent with the way in which Department of Basic Education (DBE) policy has presented PLCs and prescribed their establishment (see 2.4.1.8). Teachers, who were once envisaged as the 'agents' of implementing the new government's transformation agenda are now deemed to be incapable of making the transition to new expectations (Sayed and Jansen, 2001).

2.4.1.2. Collective responsibility for learners' learning

An important value that members of a functional PLC are expected to share is their commitment to and responsibility for their learners' learning. This is another value that

needs to be questioned in the context of South African learners. It seems unreasonable to expect South African teachers to shoulder the sole responsibility for learners' learning knowing that there are other significant factors that impact on learning. Shalem and Hoadley (2007) maintain that many teachers work in conditions, both social and material, that do not support quality learning. For Soudien (2007), social issues are at the core of South Africa's difficulties and challenges. He maintains that analysts who attempt to explain the continuing poor performance in many of South Africa's schools

> …need to understand the social aetiology of the schools of the difficulties that schools are going through and to recognize that they are deeper than the kinds of managerial malaises that one may be encountering elsewhere in the world, from whence the managerial prescriptions generally come, and that they have to be understood in the context of the social production of the people who inhabit our schools, our learners and the social relations that define their lives… (Soudien, 2007, p. 189).

Too often, the responsibility for bringing about change and improvement in teaching and learning is placed on teachers when in fact there are other contributing factors such as those highlighted by Shalem, Hoadley and Soudien. I suggest that this value may be adapted to teachers in a PLC sharing responsibility for finding ways to reduce the effects of the conditions that limit quality teaching and learning.

2.4.1.3. Reflective professional enquiry

Timperley et al.'s (2007) proposed theory of professional learning asserts that teachers need to make their implicit theories explicit in order to learn. It is during the process of questioning, reflecting on and seeking alternatives that teachers are able to make tacit or implicit knowledge explicit ((Earl and Katz, 2006; Little, 2005, in Katz & Earl, 2010). PLC members participate in conversations about issues of their practice and apply new knowledge to solve problems jointly (Stoll, 2011). Resentment and hostility can arise if teachers are not able to make their implicit theories explicit and to question and reflect on these in relation to the new ideas and knowledge presented (Masterson, 2013).

2.4.1.4. Collaboration focused on learning

Teachers are likely to work collaboratively in PLCs if they believe it is necessary to do so in order for them to achieve their stated goals or purpose but this does not mean that there are no conflicts. As Hargreaves notes

> Professional learning communities demand that teachers develop grown-up norms in a grown-up profession – where difference, debate and disagreement are viewed as the foundation stones of improvement (2003, p. 163).

Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) maintain that whilst collaborative cultures require broad agreement on values, they also tolerate and to some extent actively encourage disagreement.

Little (1990) has described a continuum of collaboration from weaker to stronger forms. According to her, scanning and storytelling is the weakest form of collaboration. If collaboration is limited to anecdotes, it will reproduce the status quo instead of challenging it. Help and assistance is next on the collaboration continuum and this is given only when it is requested. Sharing of materials and teaching strategies is third along the continuum with joint work being considered to be the strongest form of collaboration. In joint work, teachers teach, plan or inquire into teaching together. Prior to curriculum reform in Finland in 1994, Finnish teachers were unaccustomed to joint planning and curriculum decision making. Initially, in larger schools, this was experienced as a stressful process as it revealed different values and preferred practices (Webb and Vulliamy, 1999). However, collaborative or 'joint work' has now become the norm. Finnish teachers are required to participate for three hours a week in the school's joint instructional planning, in subject group and issue-group meetings, in school–home cooperation and in tasks related to instructional planning and development of school work.

Watson (2014) discusses the characteristic of 'collaboration' in a PLC using Pedder and Opfer's (2011) 'Goldilocks model' of collaboration: too much collaboration is stifling, too little collaboration results in teacher isolation and inhibits growth, but just enough collaboration and teachers receive the stimulation and support from colleagues necessary for change. Watson (2014) argues that 'too much collaboration' can do more than just stifle individuals. It "can give rise to PLCs that become inward looking, in effect preventing organizational learning and adaptability" (p.25).

Watson (2014) also warns of the danger that in PLCs local norms of practice become 'reified through consensus' while Little (2003) describes this as "in effect replacing the isolated classroom teacher with the isolated teacher group and balkanized workplace" (p. 939).

In view of this possibility, it is important to consider the recommendations of Graven (2002), Maistry (2008) and Brodie (2013) that someone with outside expertise may need to participate in a PLC at least at the outset to ensure that a broader perspective is established (2.4.1.6).

Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) also note particularly alarming findings regarding effectively generating collaborative behaviour in PLCs. They state that it is difficult to establish any kind of professional collaboration in contexts where there is the memory of one or two generations of former authoritarian regimes and where fear and corruption were, and possibly still are, widespread. In these instances, habits of compliance and suspicion are deeply ingrained. Furthermore, where there is deep seated political culture of top down control, it is also difficult to establish collaborative learning initiatives. Given the history of education in South Africa, it should not have been a surprise that establishing PLCs proved to be difficult (See chapters 4, 5 and 6).

2.4.1.5 Promotion of group as well as individual learning

In Rosenholtz's (1989) 'learning enriched schools', ''professional self-renewal'' is ''a communal rather than solitary happening'' in which teachers in PLCs learn alongside their colleagues. They share what they learn with others and everyone engages in dialogue about information and data. This learning is then ideally translated into better classroom practices and improved learner outcomes. Stoll et al. (2006) emphasise that PLCs are a means to an end. They state that the key purpose of a PLC is to enhance teacher effectiveness for the ultimate benefit of learners, an objective emphasized in much of the PLC literature and in Timperley et al.'s (2007) proposed theory of teacher learning.

Watson (2014) queries the value of limiting teacher learning to only that which will improve learners' achievement in various external assessments while Servage (2008) argues that the focus on learner achievement in collaborative work is short-sighted and impoverished. She asserts that a problem with PLCs is that they largely focus on what she calls instrumental learning (the pedagogical and technical aspects of teaching). Servage (2008) acknowledges that while these have a positive effect on academic outcomes,

> …this good work still leaves many questions unanswered and many problems unaddressed. Teachers can improve standardized exam results but cannot seem to educate the public about the narrowness of the learning represented therein. Teachers can streamline curriculum, but they cannot challenge its content or the stifling quantity of what is mandated. Teachers can improve and differentiate pedagogy to reach more diverse student populations but cannot ameliorate the effects of poverty and racism in their larger communities. In short, the perennial and systemic problems of education remain outside the scope of teachers' improvement efforts, whatever forms these take (p. 72).

In the above quotation, Servage highlights teachers' limited 'agency' or autonomy in their PLC activities. Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2013) argue that 'agency' is not to be

understood as something that people can have but rather that it is something that people do. They state that viewing agency in such terms enables us to understand 'how humans are able to be reflexive and creative, acting counter to societal constraints, but also how individuals are enabled and constrained by their social and material environments' (p.2). Servage (2008) indicates the significant constraints on the work teachers in a PLC can or cannot do due to their social and material environments. Views of the teacher are culturally embedded and in many contexts, they continue to be perceived as an 'implementing agency of larger interests' (Batra, 2009, p.132).

Riveros et al. (2012) argue that in order to develop strong professional learning communities, teachers' sense of agency needs to be supported. A study by Hargreaves, Berry, Lai, Leung, Scott and Stobart (2013) on PLCs in London and Hong Kong concluded that there is evidence to support the argument that limiting teachers' sense of autonomy or agency through a focus on prescribed, measurable and predictable outcomes may in fact limit outcomes. They advocate a focus on revitalising the teacher's initiative, independence and critical reflection (2.3.4).

2.4.1.6. Professional teacher learning in PLCs

This section explores what teachers learn in a PLC. The study of the development of teachers' writing pedagogies in a PLC reported by Pella (2011) was especially chosen because the four teachers in her study taught grade 7, 8 and 9 as do the teachers in this study, and they also taught in culturally, linguistically and economically diverse contexts.

Pella's (2011) study of a PLC included four middle school English teachers from four different schools in Northern California. The teachers also came from four different school districts. Teachers met once a month and sometimes had to drive long distances to the meeting venues. Meetings were held in school conference rooms, restaurants or the homes of participants. Schools varied from affluent to low income school populations. Two of the schools were in affluent suburban areas with a majority of white middle class learners and the other two classrooms were in large urban school districts with a majority of low income families. All four teachers had participated in the National Writing Project (NWP) which Pella (2011) describes as 'one of the most noteworthy social learning networks' (p.109). The teachers were selected for their 'compelling and passionate interest in improving their writing instruction'. (p.110) In addition, teachers incorporated Japanese lesson study into their PLC work because they wanted to develop their knowledge base for

teaching middle school writing in their culturally, linguistically and economically diverse classrooms.

During the initial sessions of the project, teachers shared what they had learned about the teaching of writing and the different contexts in which they had learned what they knew. These included district curriculum training sessions and the NWP. The way that teachers in this study appeared to 'cue and retrieve' prior knowledge was through the sharing of their respective learning experiences and then sharing the resources they had used to implement what they had learned in their classrooms. Pella (2011) indicates that

> As they discussed each resource, participants shared prior knowledge and experiences adapting the various resources. They were engaged in synthesizing not only the values that support the materials, but their knowledge and experiences using these materials with their diverse student populations as well (p. 114).

What is noteworthy in the above study is that prior to participation in a PLC, participants took part in processes or activities that expedited the 'cueing and retrieving' (Timperley et al., 2007, p.9) of knowledge. The four teachers in the study had all experienced participating in the NWP and had thus substantive shared knowledge about the process approach to the teaching of writing. The question arises as to what might be the effect on the functioning of the PLC when teachers do not have the same breadth and depth of knowledge and experience as the teachers in the Pella study.

Pella (2011) describes the four teachers in her study as having to negotiate balance between competing theories in the teaching and learning of writing. One of the participants named 'Rachel' described her struggle with the desire to move away from formulaic structures to encouraging learners to write independently. She eventually found ways to balance learner choice with teacher directed activities- essentially a balance between how much structure is needed and how much freedom. Her initial 'dissonance' was created by observing one of the other group members, 'Laura', teach a lesson that the four teachers had planned together. 'Laura' invited learners to choose topics and to develop points of view for their persuasive essays. She provided outlines, templates, scaffolds and outlines for learners to use as guides rather than as rules and encouraged them to adapt these scaffolds to meet their individual needs. 'Rachel' expressed a concern that was raised in a study by Mendelowitz (2010) and by teachers in this study. Mendelowitz (2014) maintains that in a writing classroom context, one needs to find a balance between unlimited freedom and excessive structure. In an article entitled 'Permission to Fly', she reflects on her

attempts to find a balance between unlimited freedom and excessive structure. She proposes a concept of structured freedom that facilitates intellectual and affective engagement; structure that opens up possibilities of learners' cognitive and imaginative engagement rather than structure that invites replication (Mendelowitz 2010). McCallum (2012) similarly argues that creativity and constraints can be interdependent rather than oppositional.

'Laura' explained how her thinking was challenged when she observed practices in the lessons of her colleagues that yielded surprising outcomes. She described being motivated to change her repertoire and include more challenging writing activities for her learners after seeing how the teachers teaching in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms challenged their learners to rise to high expectations.

It should be noted that several unique qualities of the PLC described by Pella (2011) possibly made this type of teacher learning possible. As mentioned previously, the group of teachers had similar and rich prior professional learning experiences in the teaching of writing. Teachers had also participated in some form of teacher action research. Their breadth and depth of subject knowledge, experience and expertise enabled them to purposefully direct their own learning trajectory and the researcher served as an observer and not as a participant or facilitator in the group as I chose to do in this study.

Teachers had also been carefully selected to participate in the PLC on the basis of their commitment to improving the way in which they taught writing. I found it interesting to note the concerns and questions raised by teachers with the background and experiential knowledge these teachers had. They expressed the desire to find 'theoretical equilibrium' by including activities that represented the broad spectrum of philosophical foundations in teaching and learning writing. In their classrooms the group also wished to find ways to include the direct teaching of writing as well as opportunities for collaborative writing. Teachers wanted to move away from writing instruction that was too formulaic and which undermined learners' wealth of prior knowledge, to promoting and encouraging independent writing. Most significant for me however, was that dissonance was created, not through discussion or debate, but from teachers seeing their counterparts teach in ways that challenged their thinking.

Pella (2011) describes this particular PLC as a 'locally adapted teacher PLC model'. (p. 111) Teachers did not just participate in group meetings and discussions, they chose to

introduce another model of teacher development, the Japanese lesson study, as part of their learning process. Being able to participate in the Japanese lesson[3] study process points to two important aspects of PLCs in this particular example. The research was funded by two grants which paid for substitute teachers to take the classes of the four participants on the days when they needed to observe each other teach collaboratively planned lessons and then meet afterwards for debriefing meetings that followed immediately after the observations. Teachers thus had time to fully engage in the learning process and it did not have to be added to their normal teaching responsibilities. Teachers also demonstrated a sense of agency in being able to introduce the lesson study as part of their PLC learning process.

A study by Wells and Feun (2013) reveals yet another important factor that contributes to the effective establishment of a PLC. Two districts, 'District A' and 'District B', demonstrated very different responses to the opportunity to develop new knowledge and skills in a PLC. One of the key factors identified as contributing to 'District B' teachers responding more positively to PLC work than their counterparts in 'District A' was the support provided by their district. The district officials ensured that teachers had time to do their PLC work and successfully encouraged collaborative engagement. Wells and Feun (2013) acknowledge that time was a key factor in this study. They state "It takes a period of time to effect cultural change, and teachers need considerable time to interact with each other, build shared knowledge, and learn how to collaborate" (p.247).

Furthermore, the 'inertial force' (Samuel, 2008, p.12) of a teacher's 'life history' seems to be another factor that prevented teachers in District A in the Wells and Feun study from working effectively in a PLC. The teachers appeared to retreat into 'the safe world of their background '(2.3.1), a "comfort zone of what and how… they want[ed] to keep doing what they've done before". (Wells and Feun, 2013, p. 244)

The 'comfort zone' that some teachers may seek to retain is likely to prevent them from making their previously held beliefs explicit and allowing these to be challenged.

[3] Lesson study is a popular form of professional development in Japan which involves teams of teachers in collaborative action research. Lesson study teams select a topic, observe a teacher from the team deliver a lesson and then collect and analyze data from learners' learning. Teachers then revise the lesson and repeat the cycle several times during a school year.

Many factors contributed to the effectiveness of the PLC observed and described by Pella (2011) and to the professional learning of teachers in District B in the Wells and Feun (2013) study. However, when teachers do not have the same level of knowledge, expertise and opportunity as the teachers in Pella's study, or the support from their district as did the teachers in District B, can a PLC still provide an effective model for teacher learning? Many South African teachers reportedly have poor levels of subject content knowledge (Taylor and Vinjevold, 1999; NEEDU report, 2012). In such an instance, it would seem that the 'learning' in a PLC can run the risk of perpetuating poor teaching practices. Graven (2002), Maistry (2008) and Brodie (2013) advise that one way of preventing this is to ensure that there be someone with outside expertise to participate in a PLC at least at the outset to ensure that a broader perspective is established (2.4.1.4). Another consideration is whether a PLC can be effective if teachers do not have support from their district or even senior staff who make time available for participation, and encourage active participation and positive attitudes towards the sustained involvement in a PLC. These all appeared to be important factors in the establishment and successful development of PLCs. Another, according to Cereseto (2015), is the provision of skilled PLC facilitators.

2.4.1.7. Facilitating a PLC

Cereseto (2015) identifies effective facilitation as 'a key enabler of PLC functioning, sustainability and teachers' learning through PLC work' (p. 253). Brodie at a colloquium convened on PLCs by the DBE in September 2014, also foregrounded the important role of the facilitator maintaining that the facilitator needs to set the tone of a PLC by establishing a constructive challenge for the group, promoting rigorous inquiry and encouraging helpful and relevant conversations (DBE PLC Colloquium, 18/ 19 September 2014). Highly skilled facilitators are needed to promote a strong culture of learning and to maintain the focus needed for successful collaboration in a PLC. Without these, teachers may use the time to complain about various aspects of their teaching (Easton, 2012). If teachers have conservative views of their subjects, school and the curriculum, how can a facilitator influence them to shift to attitudes that prioritise effective learning and to become willing to promote better learning outcomes?

Perhaps one of the first things facilitators need to do effectively is to assist and guide participants to identify the group's focus and to assist them to sustain that focus. Nelson, LeBard and Waters (2010) state that an effective method is an inquiry cycle. Nelson et al. (2010) explain that teachers may talk about goals and values at the beginning of the inquiry

cycle, but during the analysis phase, a common vision is likely to become clearer. Once the focus of the group is determined, implementation and analysis phases may take place throughout the remaining life of the PLC. They emphasise that an inquiry cycle should not be rigidly implemented in a sequential way because there are times when 'teachers will want to loop back in the cycle to revisit ideas' (Nelson et al., 2010, p. 36).

Timperley, Wilson, Barrar and Fung (2007) also recommend an inquiry cycle entitled the 'Teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle to promote valued student outcomes'. This inquiry cycle includes the identification firstly of learners' learning needs, followed by the linking of teachers' own learning needs in order to enable them to address learners' learning needs. Teachers then design tasks and experiences that they wish to test and try out in attempting to meet learners' needs. These are implemented in the classroom and then followed by a reflection on and evaluation of the impact of changed actions. The inquiry cycle then begins again. (Diagram 1).

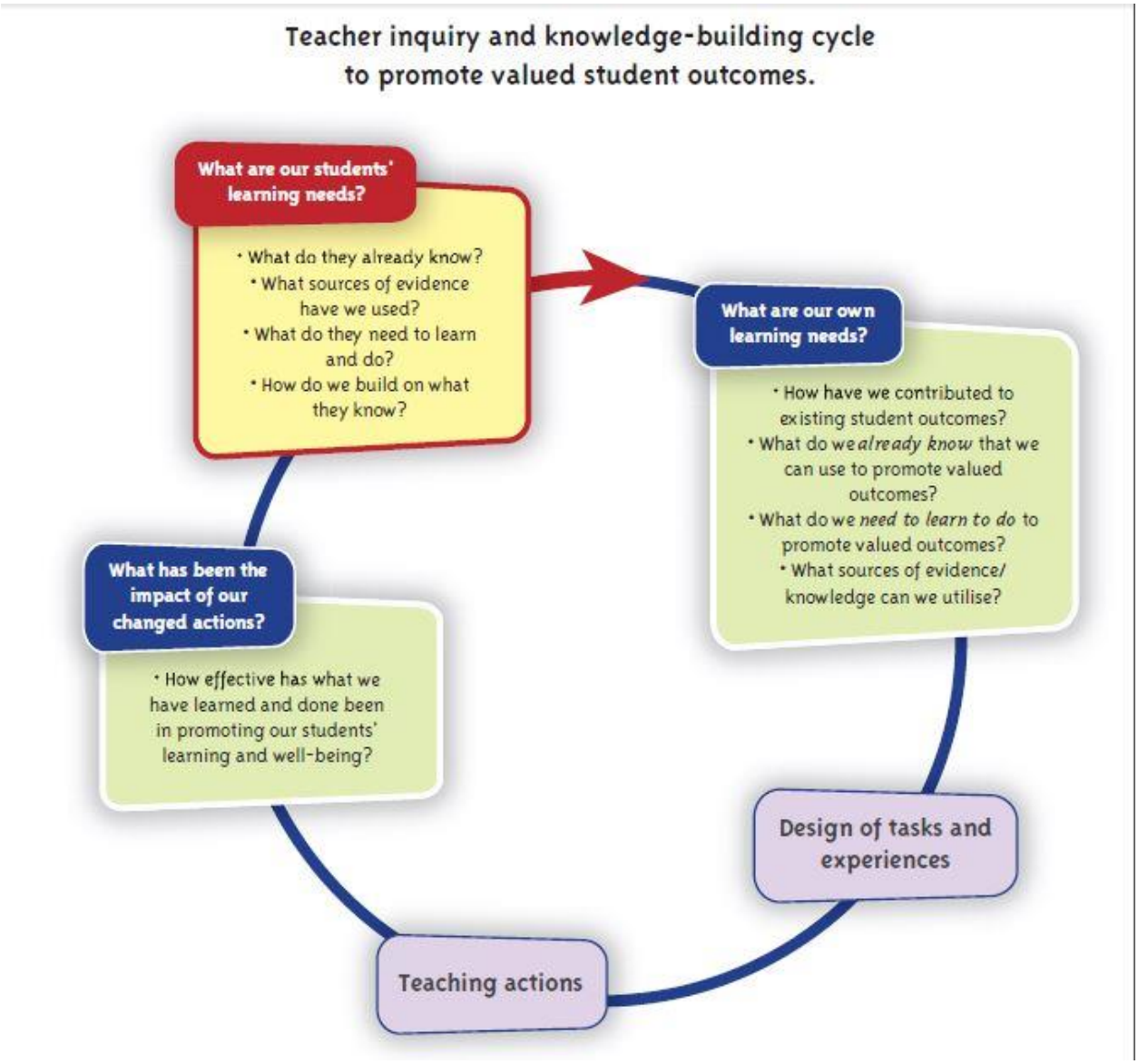

Diagram 1

H. Timperley, A. Wilson, H. Barrar & I. Fung (2007)
http://educationcounts.edcentre.govt.nz/goto/BES

Another important skill for a facilitator to develop is the ability to recognise when to use a directive style of facilitation and when to be non-directive. Langer et al. (2003) maintain that a directive style of facilitation entails teaching, modelling and providing feedback to participants. Non-directive facilitation requires listening, prompting and generally playing a less dominant role in discussions. The knowledge and skills (of both their subject and of the process of collaborative learning in a PLC) are likely to influence which style of facilitation is selected and it is important for a facilitator, especially if he or she is not part

of the same school group or context, to get to know something of the levels of knowledge and skill of participants.

A facilitator also acts almost as a 'conduit' for the group's collaborative learning, either by identifying those in or outside of the group who can provide examples of exemplary teaching, knowledge of theory and research, or other necessary skills such as an understanding of how to reflect or to do learning enquiries (Katz et al., 2009, pp. 52, 61).

Chappuis et al. (2009) maintain that the duties of a facilitator include doing the reading and activities in advance of meetings so that he or she can 'steer team members through unfamiliar or complex concepts' (p. 58). The facilitator's task is to assist participants to become more competent, more independent and more skilled as practitioners.

'Substantial' or 'deep' conversations are necessary if teachers are to move away from merely polite interactions, to the kind of thinking, problem-posing, and problem-solving (Lambert et al., 1995) need to foster learning in a PLC. Nelson et al. (2010) recommend that facilitators begin what may be difficult conversations by focusing on learners' learning. They advise facilitators to 'build collaborative norms such as paraphrasing and probing' (Garmston and Wellman, 1999) and using predetermined probing questions and protocols that can help teachers feel safe in asking and responding to difficult questions. Facilitators also need to develop skills to deal with negativity and 'sacred cows' (untouchable issues or practices) (Cereseto, 2015, p. 36). Little (2006) states that a facilitator needs to be able to put teachers at ease with disclosing their teaching dilemmas and to promote a disposition of interrogating questions more deeply and working together to create solutions. Furthermore, facilitators need to be able to help teachers to find ways to air their differences, to explore those differences and to tolerate conflict. Brodie (2013) believes that professional conflict is to be encouraged, as it promotes rigorous inquiry and growth. In order for professional conflict not to become personal conflict, an ethic of care and trust is necessary. Interestingly, teachers in the Pella (2011) study, whilst not always sharing the same perspectives, were able to use their knowledge and experience to 'co-construct new knowledge for teaching writing' without the guidance or intervention of a facilitator.

In many contexts the role of the facilitator is a critically important but also an extremely demanding one. Brodie, recognising this from her work with Mathematics PLCs, advocates that facilitators be part of their own PLCs as well as the group PLCs which they facilitate

in order to ensure that they too have support and the opportunity to learn and develop expertise from a broader community (DBE PLC colloquium, 18/19 September, 2014).

The above discussion of PLCs suggests that South African schools face a complex mix of challenges which are likely to make establishing effective PLCs difficult. Not only do teachers have to deal with the intensification of their work which makes the time available for professional development activities severely limited but, in addition, many have to contend with the legacy of apartheid under which they were educated either as learners or as both learners and as teachers. This study explores some of the implications of these and other possible factors that enable and/ or constrain the working of a PLC with a focus on the teaching of writing.

2.4.1.8. DBE Policy on PLCs

It is important to note, in light of the above discussion, how PLCs are conceptualised in the ISPFTED. The ISPFTED describes PLCs as

> communities that provide the setting and necessary support for groups of classroom teachers, school managers and subject advisors to participate collectively *in determining their own developmental trajectories*, and to set up activities that will drive their development (ISPFTED, 2011, p. 14 my emphasis).

The ISPFTED (DBE and DHET, 2011) envisages PLCs working in conjunction with other types of professional development. For example, the policy advocates that teachers do diagnostic self-assessments, and, in addition to attending short courses or workshops to address their learning needs, they should use expertise within the PLCs to help them to deal with their difficulties. Furthermore, it is anticipated that teachers will develop both their content knowledge and their knowledge of practice (presumably pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge) in their PLCs. Finally, it is proposed that teachers focus on developing their expertise in analysing results of the ANAs or National Senior Certificate (NSC) as this will also enable them to identify their learning needs in relation to their learners' learning needs. I question the assumption that an analysis of the ANAs or the NSC results will provide useful guidance regarding teachers' learning needs. It may pinpoint what learners do not know but may not necessarily reveal why they do not know it. The teachers' lack of knowledge or expertise may be just one of a number of possible reasons.

Whilst the directive to use the results of the ANAs and the NSC are consistent with the trend towards 'data driven' professional learning, the question arises as to whether teachers

are truly 'determining their own development trajectories' (DBE, 2015, p. 4) if they are constrained by such instructions. Furthermore, Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) caution against the growing trend towards data driven initiatives. Whilst they agree that it is good to have data to help make better informed decisions, they remind school administrators that data is there to enable them to know their learners better and it is important to remember the real people behind the numbers. They also warn against using data only to identify shortfalls, problems and deficits and encourage schools to use data to benefit the learning and achievement of all learners. Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) also maintain that evidence of what needs to change does not necessarily indicate how it needs to change. For example, while there is research that has shown that learners write relatively few extended texts (NEEDU, 2012; Hendricks, 2005), and that the quality of writing pedagogy is spread unevenly across privileged and underprivileged schools (Heugh, 2000), we need to know more about how to change and improve the status quo. This study explores the potential of a PLC to improve and possibly change teachers writing pedagogies.

2.5 Writing

Numerous writers have emphasised the importance and role of writing for academic success e.g. MacArthur, Graham and Fitzgerald (2006) and Hendricks (2005). Not only does writing enable one to convey knowledge and ideas or display acquired knowledge, but it is also an important means of personal self-expression. Cremin and Myhill (2012) capture the importance of writing within and beyond formal education in the following statement:

> Being able to write is a gateway to empowerment. Not only does academic success in most countries still depend on writing as the dominant mode for assessing learning, but being able to write gives access to social and cultural power….Writing can hold records of the past and shape visions of the future; it can bring down politicians and build up personal relationships; it can make us laugh, weep or scream. (Cremin and Myhill, 2012, p. 10).

Most relevant to this study is the fact that South Africa, like many other countries, continues to rely on writing as the 'dominant mode for assessing learning'. The Department of Basic Education's (DBE) diagnostic report of the 2015 NSC results includes numerous comments on the importance of writing competently:

- All the subject reports in this publication indicate that the poor language skills of numerous candidates are a major reason for under-achievement. This adversely affects the ability of those candidates to interpret questions and source material accurately, and to frame appropriate responses to questions (DBE, 2015, p. 6 my emphasis).

- Teachers need to train learners to express themselves clearly and succinctly where comments or explanations are required (Accounting, p.12/ Economics, p.57)

- In many responses, the basic writing skills like vocabulary, sentence construction, paragraphing, spelling, verb tenses and concord were found to be lacking. Many candidates lacked the skills to convey their ideas successfully (English FAL, p. 83 my emphasis).

- Learners should be taught paragraph-writing and interpretation techniques. Areas which need attention are repetition and poor punctuation. Regular practice of this in short informal and formal tests as well as in internal examinations will allow the learners to improve these skills and be confident in attempting these questions (Geography, p.90)

- Candidates were generally weak at writing paragraphs, in responding to questions on source-based material and in addressing questions involving comparisons, reliability, usefulness and validity (History, p.107).

Interestingly, all the comments focus on narrow, structural aspects of writing such as paragraph construction and correct tense usage and spelling. There is reference to the need for teachers to equip learners with an understanding of the linguistic devices that make texts more effective and how these work in particular subjects and genres.

It would seem concerns about poor levels of writing proficiency are not only evident in South Africa. Cremin and Myhill (2012), Dix and Cawkwell (2011) and Jackson and Vavra (2007) report concerns about learners' poor performance in writing in the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States of America and New Zealand.

The remainder of this chapter explores, firstly, factors that promote the effective teaching of writing and secondly, factors that promote learning how to teach writing well.

2.5.1. Factors that promote effective teaching of writing

2.5.1.1 Teachers' knowledge

> A review of a century of investigations into literacy teaching (Chall, Jacob, & Baldwin, 1990) makes it clear that the most important variable at school in making a difference for students is *the teacher*. (Comber and Kamler, 2004, p.294 my emphasis).

Numerous writers maintain that for teachers to be a specialist in the teaching, learning and assessment of a subject, they need to have content knowledge of the subject they teach (de Clercq and Shalem, 2014; Bertram, 2011; Morrow, 2007; Adler, Slonimsky and Reed, 2002; Shulman, 1986). Johnston and Ahtee (2006) concur with this and argue that relevant and in-depth knowledge of a subject is a prerequisite if teachers are to develop the pedagogic content knowledge needed to transform their subject knowledge into the content of their instruction. It is thus important to consider the specific and relevant, in-depth knowledge that teachers of writing need.

Cremin and Myhill (2012) maintain that teachers need a knowledge of genres and their features at text, sentence and word level, knowledge of language features and of how texts work to achieve their purposes. They emphasize, though, that "writing is far more than the sum of its textual parts: a writer's ideas and intentions, and their sense of audience/ reader also play a critical role in the creative process of composition". (Cremin and Myhill, 2012, p. 139)

Most importantly, however, they add that the teacher's subject knowledge needs to be augmented by 'insider knowledge of the writing process and the experience of writing'. This, Cremin and Myhill (2012) maintain, is essential if teachers are to demonstrate "the ability to articulate and make accessible to developing writers that which is implicit and often at a level below conscious thought; to unpack what writers do as they engage in the writing process". (p.147)

2.5.1.2. Teachers as writers

Cremin and Myhill (2012) suggest that a way for teachers to bring to conscious awareness their implicit knowledge about writing is to develop both 'teacher-writer' and 'writer-teacher' identities in their writing classrooms. This proposal is consistent with Graves' assertion that teaching writing "demands the control of two crafts, teaching and writing" which cannot be separated (1983, p. 5). To enact these identities, teachers need to demonstrate or model writing, jointly compose with learners and write 'alongside' the young writers in their classrooms. Some teachers who claim to value the demonstration of writing authentically, quite often do not spontaneously compose in front of their learners. A survey by Grainger (2005b) revealed that teachers prepared pieces for demonstration at home. This practice was apparent largely in teachers who expressed low self-esteem as writers.

Mendelowitz (2010) explains how modelling can be used in a number of different ways depending on the values, beliefs and purposes of the teacher. Model texts can, for example, be used in a mechanistic way that elicits imitation. Whilst a certain level of imitation is part of learning (Vygotsky, 2004), it should only be a step in the process and 'creative reworking" should be the next step. Model texts can thus be used as an integral part of a dynamic process in which learners are encouraged to engage with texts on their own terms as springboards for their own imaginations (Mendelowitz, 2010).

Two distinct meanings of the concept of modelling are evident in the writing pedagogy literature. The first meaning is foregrounded in the genre approach to writing and entails exposing learners to the features of a specific genre through the use of texts which model the schematic structure, discourse and grammatical features of the relevant genres (Richardson, 1994). The second meaning focuses on the teacher as model of the writing process and emphasizes the importance of the teacher's own participation in the classroom writing process (Courtland, Walsh and Kennedy, 1987, Grainger et al., 2005).

Cremin and Baker (2010; 2014) conducted two case studies in the United Kingdom. The first included two teachers, Elaine and Jeff (2010), whilst the second focused only on Elaine who Cremin and Baker (2014) describe as having a more typical teaching role as a class teacher. The two teachers who participated in the study gained important insights through the difficulties and dilemmas they experienced. They reported having developed an increased awareness of the possible writing identities they made available to their learners and sought to broaden these and to pay more attention to learners' agency as authors. In a study by Grainger, Goouch and Lambirth (2005) teachers, in contrast to their usual practice of moving around and intervening in response to needs, sat alongside learners and undertook the same writing task. These teachers also reported gaining new insights, most notably that they sometimes set tasks that were too difficult not just for learners but for the teachers too. Feedback from learners in this study showed positive perceptions of teachers writing alongside their learners, with one learner being quoted as saying "It makes it easier, she doesn't interrupt" (Cremin and Myhill, 2012, p. 131),

There are ongoing debates around the value of the teacher adopting a 'writer's stance' in the classroom. Calkins (1983) and Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) support the principle of teachers modelling the writing process. Scholars such as Draper, Barksdale-Ladd, and Radencich (2000) and Murray (1982) indicate that as teachers develop their confidence as writers and model writing in their classes, their attitudes to teaching writing improve.

Guthrie (1996) and Kaufman (2002) claim that when teachers share an enthusiasm for writing, it motivates learners to write. Likewise, when teachers demonstrate 'writerly' behavior and share the challenges they experience during the composing process, their learners benefit (Root and Steinberg, 1996; Susi, 1984). On the other hand, there is research that indicates that teachers' perceptions of the importance of writing and their faith in the ability of their learners are more significant indicators of efficacy than their own involvement as writers (Robbins, 1996). 'Fiona', a grade 7 English teacher featured in a paper by Mendelowitz (2014) is an example of this type of teacher. Even though she used modelling as a pedagogic strategy, 'Fiona' maintained that it was her belief in the importance of creative writing and her love of the children's writing that was responsible for her learners' success.

A further reason to investigate the idea of teachers adopting a 'writers' stance' and modelling the writing process is foregrounded by Mendelowitz (2010). Whilst acknowledging the research that shows that it is difficult for teachers to teach writing if they do not engage with writing themselves, she indicates that the issue is more complicated in a South African context. Many teachers teach in a second or third language and are not comfortable with English. For many teachers, the medium of instruction (English) is an additional language learned from teachers for whom it was also an additional language. Her work with in-service teachers revealed their 'deep seated fears about writing in English and being judged by colleagues' (Mendelowitz, 2010, p. 10). The fear of being judged by their learners may be an even greater deterrent. Mendelowitz raises the question as to whether the cycle of disadvantage thus perpetuates itself due to teachers' feelings of fear and inadequacy. However, two important questions arise in relation to this study of PLCs as a vehicle for the development of teachers' writing pedagogies. Firstly, can a PLC provide a forum for teachers to share their fears about writing and the teaching of writing and eventually to overcome them? The other question relates to the recent findings of a systematic review of empirical work on teachers as writers from 1990 to 2015 by Cremin and Oliver (2016) which indicates that there is very little empirical evidence that teachers' sense of self as writers has any impact on the writing of learners. In view of this, is it perhaps more important to encourage and develop teachers' belief in the importance of writing and a love for the writing of their learners? Considering Brooks (2007) and Gleeson & Prain's (1996) argument that valuable teaching time is lost through teachers modelling the writing process, this may be more worthwhile.

However, it is not only teaching that appears to be consuming teachers' time. Teachers report being pressured to 'prioritise tests, targets and written products' (Cremin and Myhill, 2012, p.1) rather than focusing on, and modelling, the processes of writing and the experience of being a writer. 'Prioritizing tests, targets and written products' is largely due to the trend towards standardisation and marketisation in education. There is a renewed focus on standardised curriculum and instruction geared towards learner achievement benchmarks (Skerrett, 2011). In keeping with this trend, the current South African curriculum specifies the sequence and pacing of teaching and states what will be assessed, when and, quite often, how. The Senior Phase English home language curriculum stipulates that during the course of the year, grade 7, 8 and 9 learners will be assessed on 4 'oral tasks', 2 'writing tasks', 3 'tests' and a June examination comprised of two exam papers: the first focuses on 'Comprehension, language use and literature' and the second on the writing of an essay and a transactional text. Learners are required to write a final exam in the fourth term and this counts for 60% of their final mark. This has proved to be very time consuming for teachers and once again shifted their focus from teaching to testing and related processes. Nevertheless, these trends make it more important and necessary, for those who can, to offer what Jackson and Vavra describe as "a strong voice in support of best practices for teaching writing which *accommodate realities* and yet advocate for needed changes that will support the overall effectiveness of the instructional delivery system for writing". (Jackson and Vavra, 2007, p. xiii my emphasis)

Ryan and Barton (2013) suggest that a way for teachers to accommodate realities but to also introduce needed changes is for them to be equipped to're- imagine everyday realities'. They refer to this as a 'thirdspace' (p. 31). While professional learning opportunities need to acknowledge the 'realities' of teachers experience, rather than offering generic content, these need to specifically address the questions and concerns of the teachers. In doing so, teacher educators need to find opportunities to open up discussion of alternative ways to accommodate their day to day 'realities'. Theoretically, PLCs should be able to offer opportunities for these conversations to happen. However, Hargreaves et al. (2013) reported that some teachers in PLCs in Hong Kong and London experienced limited autonomy in terms of being critical and taking initiatives (see 2.4.1.5). If teachers are to 're-imagine everyday realities' they will need to have some sense of autonomy or agency.

Cremin and Myhill (2012) justifiably describe teaching writing as complex and challenging. Teachers need support and opportunities for development in order to improve the effectiveness of the teaching of writing in their specific contexts. Ivanič (2004) suggests that a way to assist teachers is to encourage them to develop better understandings of how particular instructional strategies foster specific student learning outcomes, a point made by several other scholars (Hillocks, 2003; Huot, 2002; Murphy, 2002; Smith, 1991; Durst, 1990). Ivanič indicates that teachers can benefit from being aware of the different pedagogic approaches to writing and from recognising which discourse(s) most influence their classroom practices.

2.5.1.3 Approaches to teaching writing

Whilst Ivanič posits six main discourses of writing, Grainger (2005) prefers to locate the teaching of writing in three main paradigms: the genre paradigm where literacy is viewed as social practice, the skills paradigm where the focus is on a range of discrete language skills and the process writing paradigm which positions the writer as an author and theorises writing as a recursive, cognitive process. Ivanič's (2004) six discourses are a Skills Discourse, a Creativity Discourse, a Process Discourse, a Genre Discourse, a Social Practices Discourse and a Sociopolitical Discourse of the teaching of writing.

I have chosen to use the three main paradigms proposed by Grainger (2005) for this discussion as all three are evident in the Senior Phase CAPS English Home Language document even though it states that 'the process approach will be used when learners produce oral and written texts' (DBE, 2011, p. 10). Reference is also made to some of the discourses described by Ivanič.

The policy document continues to explain the 'process approach' as a linear strategy which includes:

- Planning/Pre-writing
- Drafting
- Revising
- Editing
- Proofreading
- Presenting

However, despite this explicit outlining of the process approach, there is also evidence of both the skills and the genre paradigms in the CAPS document. The curriculum statement

includes instructions for teachers to explicitly teach topic sentences, supporting and main ideas, an effective introduction, body and conclusion and a closing sentence when teaching paragraph writing. Writing drafts, teachers are told, must also show evidence of the purpose, audience, topic and genre of the text. These aspects of writing fit more appropriately into a genre paradigm or discourse. They are dealt with in little more than a tokenistic way (types of writing texts are listed on pages 40 – 46, DBE, CAPS English Home Language, 2011) but they are not given substance in the curriculum document.

Perhaps particularly revealing of the skills discourse in the curriculum is the statement that "Writing is important because it enables learners to think about *grammar and spelling.* This encourages learners to process the language, speeds up language acquisition and increases accuracy". (DBE, 2011, p.34 my emphasis)

Page 36 also includes the statement that learners will 'employ the writing process to produce well organised, *grammatically correct writing texts*' (my emphasis).

Dornbrack and Dixon (2014) find evidence of the genre discourse in CAPS and maintain that the conflating of the process and genre approaches in the South African curriculum documents means that the specificity of each approach has been lost. They state that

> This conflation requires teachers who can read between the lines by drawing on prior knowledge of both approaches as well as understand the significance of each (missing) step in both approaches. This is a challenge for any teacher but more so for teachers who have had little access to these approaches in their own education and training (ibid, p. 2).

Teachers participating in the study conducted by Pella (2011) showed a knowledge and understanding of competing theories in the teaching and learning of writing. Finding out whether teachers in this study have knowledge of at least the approaches and perhaps underlying beliefs regarding the teaching of writing specified in the NCS-CAPS documents in order to 'understand the significance of the missing steps' is part of the investigation.

Features of both the process and genre discourses evident in the curriculum statement, as well as the skills discourse, also evident in the NCS- CAPS, are described and discussed below. Because the process approach is the only approach mentioned in the CAPS document, and the only approach included in national and provincial training evident over a three year period of implementation in the different phases of education, I will discuss it

in more detail than the skills and genre approaches. It is the approach most widely perceived as being implemented in South African classrooms.

2.5.1.3.1. Skills Discourse

The skills discourse is the most traditional of the six discourses described by Ivanič. Interestingly, Kress (1989) claims that the approach a teacher adopts to the teaching of writing is influenced by the approach he or she adopts to the teaching of reading. For example, if a teacher considers reading to be largely a decoding skill, then writing is likely to be regarded as a process of encoding in a similar manner. The skills discourse may be the approach such a teacher adopts as Ivanič (2004) maintains that at its most extreme, this discourse reflects the belief that writing is a context free activity with the same rules and patterns applying to all text types. In this view, good writing is determined by the correctness of spelling, sentence construction and text formation. Teachers would thus focus on the teaching of handwriting, spelling, punctuation and sentence structure. They would also teach grammar explicitly. Although the NCS-CAPS for English Home Language in the senior phase (grade 7 to 9) states that the process approach to the teaching of writing will usually be used, in the term teaching plans, the punctuation and grammar structures to be taught in each two week cycle are listed specifically and in detail in a column alongside the writing texts required. However, there are seldom apparent links between texts to be written and the language structures to be taught in spite of statements in the policy document to the contrary. As an observer of both the national and provincial training of senior phase home language subject advisors and teachers, my experience has been that these links were never foregrounded or made explicit. The following two statements indicate the ostensible aim to create an integrated curriculum.

> Select a theme or topic for each two-week cycle that will enable you to link the activities successfully (DBE, 2011, p. 55).
>
> The content of the 'Language Structures and Conventions' column is related in most cases to the types of texts prescribed in Listening and Speaking, Reading and Viewing, and Writing and Presenting, and will naturally be given attention in the process of engaging with the texts and during the time allocated for Listening and Speaking, Reading and Viewing, Writing and Presenting (DBE, 2011, p.56).

2.5.1.3.2. Process Discourse

Internationally the focus of teaching writing has shifted from a focus on the teaching of grammar and mechanical aspects of writing to an emphasis on the process as a result of the development of socio –cognitive and socio-cultural models of writing (Flower and Hayes,

1981). According to Cremin and Myhill (2012) ‘the process approach advocated the creation of classrooms as writing communities where composing, and its joys and tribulations were made visible’ (p.19).

In North America and Britain in the 1970s and 1980s, the process approach developed and gained momentum. The National Writing Project (NWP), in the United States of America, has its roots in this approach and fosters the belief that writing consists of recursive, discrete tasks that include planning, drafting, revising, editing and publishing (Kaplan, 2008). In teaching writing the focus shifts from the completed text (the product) to the processes required for writing. Graves (1983), in his seminal work *Writing: Teachers and Children at work* also divides writing into several stages beginning with initial discussion and drafting, and continuing with conferencing, revising, editing and publishing. Ivanič (2004) maintains that this view of learning to write ‘in principle encompasses both the cognitive and the practical processes: the cognitive processes might be learned implicitly, while the practical ones are extremely amenable to explicit teaching ‘(p. 231).

Ivanič (2004) states that teachers and policy makers find the process approach to the teaching of writing very attractive because the practical processes involved in writing can be translated into syllabuses and textbooks. The South African language curriculum, as mentioned previously, also identifies the ‘process approach’ as the approach teachers are to use to teach writing.

Many chapters and activities have been developed to generate ideas for writing and to guide the planning, drafting, structuring of feedback, editing and revising processes. Cognitive processes of writing do not appear to have received the same attention. There is a risk that if teachers focus mainly on practical processes they are likely to develop a technicist approach to teaching writing. Again, this trend is evident in the South African context (Dornbrack and Dixon, 2014; Kerfoot and Van Heerden, 2014). There are, however, models of teaching strategies that can be used to sustain the practical processes of writing whilst at the same time developing the cognitive processes of writing. For example, Grainger et al. (2005) argue that the initial stage of writing (pre-writing) is crucial. They are critical of this stage being reduced to a quick brainstorm or a spider diagram because the focus should be on involving learners in a range of creative texts and the generation of ideas. Activities during this stage should incorporate a range of oral, visual and kinaesthetic experiences. Ellis (2002) too, has developed strategies that encourage teachers to think more critically about engaging learners in the writing process,

both practically and cognitively. Rather than using classroom discussion/ brainstorming to generate enthusiasm and ideas for writing, she advocates that learners do paired brainstorming around key questions if teachers wish to ensure a wide variety of ideas. This should then be followed by a very brief classroom discussion before learners are then encouraged to take an 'overnight thinking time' in order to make decisions about the written work they will be required to do the next day. In this way, Ellis maintains, teacher led discussions that can lead to a uniform set of ideas can be prevented through the above-mentioned strategies.

Talk during the writing process is also foregrounded by Cremin and Myhill (2012). They use the work of Vygotsky (1978) to show that talk develops thought and thus encourage talk in the initial stage of the writing process and advocate debate, drama, storytelling or the performance of poetry as a range of ways to generate and share ideas. Cremin and Myhill (2012) explain that writing makes high demands on working memory which psychologists describe as 'cognitive load'. A way to reduce the load is to break a task into 'sub-tasks'. Oral rehearsal and 'writing aloud' is a way of doing this "By orally rehearsing a phrase or sentence out loud before writing it, the tasks of generation of written texts and transcription of written text are separated, thus reducing the demand" (p. 40).

Making the transition from talking to writing can be very challenging for young writers and being allowed to talk and collaborate throughout the process can support the developing and shaping of their writing.

Ivanič (2004) identifies assessment as a challenge in relation to this process discourse maintaining that if the shift in emphasis is to the process of writing rather than the product, it is difficult to assess the product. She suggests a way to solve this dilemma is to assess a completed text (the product) alongside a written reflection on the processes involved in the production of it. Reflection is a key aspect of cognitive processes in learning (Dewey, 1933; Kolb, 1984) and is no less so in learning to write. Encouraging learners to think about the processes through which they have moved as they worked towards their final product, enables them to make a cognitive connection to what they have learnt (Eyler et al., 1996). Hillocks (1995) notes

> Each writing experience, to some extent, provides an opportunity to reinvent the self. With each writing, we review our knowledge. In doing so, we have an opportunity to rethink, realign, and reintegrate it, a process that, in effect, changes who we are (ibid, p. 212).

According to Willis and Hunter (2007), reflection can also be an effective tool in the development of teachers' understanding of themselves as teachers of writing, particularly in public school classrooms in the United States of America which are becoming increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse. They explain how they use reflection in their course in English methodology for pre-service teachers to help student teachers better understand themselves as learners/ teachers in a diverse society. They maintain that for many of the candidates it is the first time that they are asked to reflect and be critical of themselves, their ideas and their practices. The process, it seems, leads to an awareness of the undeniable link between teacher beliefs and the academic success of their learners.

The CAPS English Home Language document advocates that the 'various stages in the writing process should also be assessed' (DBE, 2011, p.118). In fact, pre-writing / planning has, in many instances, been reduced to a spider diagram or 'mind map' which is allocated a mark in the Annual National Assessment (ANA) tests. The narrow and reductionist interpretation of process discourse is evident in practices like this. Delpit (1988), however, quite astutely asserts that "Teachers do students no service to suggest, even implicitly, that 'product' is not important. Students will be judged on their product regardless of the process they utilised to achieve it". (p.287).

Research has shown that there are different understandings of the process approach to teaching writing (Pritchard and Honeycutt, 2006). Some authors have presented it as a loosely monitored series of steps, 'a natural process' in the context of authentic tasks, without explicit instruction in planning, revising and other strategies. Others regard direct strategy instruction and guided practice integrated into the writing process as crucial to the definition of the process approach (Pritchard and Honeycutt, 2006; Honeycutt and Pritchard, 2005; Cramer, 2001; Defoe, 2000; Applebee, 1996; Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1986). In the South African curriculum, it is conflated with the genre approach (Dornbrack and Dixon, 2014).

Pritchard and Honeycutt (2006) quote Cramer who concludes that

> …the writing process has its weaknesses; it is poorly implemented in many instances; it is not a panacea. But it is a better candidate for improving writing performance than the traditional approach…….We must listen to the critics; we must be willing to rethink and adjust our theories, procedures and practices. But there is not sufficient evidence to cause us to abandon the writing process (Cramer, 2001 in Pritchard and Honeycutt, 2006, p.282).

Whilst the approach is more learner centred than the traditional approach to writing, it has nevertheless been subjected to strong criticism. Learners choosing topics and being guided and supported by the teacher has been criticised for not challenging learners' writing particularly with regard to how one deals with stereotypes, racist and sexist content in this writing (Gilbert, 1989; Kamler, 2001). The approach also does not acknowledge the cultural writing practices and constructions thereof of different learners. Delpit (1995) challenges the assumption by process approach proponents that all learners bring middle class literacies to school and argues that their failure to address linguistic and textual features sufficiently tends to perpetuate social inequalities. In addition, having complete control of topics may mean that learners limit themselves to particular topics and genres. Furthermore, the development of a personal voice is often subject to a teacher's subjective and implicit criteria that can at times tend to have a middle class bias which is invisible to learners.

Dornbrack and Dixon's (2014) argument that writing pedagogy requires careful sustained planning that integrates reading and discussion in order to develop thinking and reasoning resonates with the idea of 'writing as a process'- a process which includes the integration of all the literacy skills. Cremin and Myhill (2012), in a similar vein, caution against the 'plan-draft-revise' version of the process approach included in many school curricula, including the South African CAPS documents, being interpreted as a linear sequence. If this happens, they warn that young writers are likely to be limited and inhibited. Cremin and Myhill (2012) maintain that 'reading repertoires enrich writing repertoires', but explain that it is not just reading widely that enables learners to write well, but "Fine grained opportunities to study texts in context, to discuss their forms and features and to imitate them" (Cremin and Myhill, 2012, p.58).

Cremin and Myhill (2012) maintain that reading not only extends 'young people's ear for language' but also widens their vocabularies and helps them to create an 'inner treasure chest packed with words on which writers can draw' (2012). Teachers, Cremin and Myhill state, need to 'recruit reading to the task of writing and recruit writing to the task of thinking and meaning making" (Cremin and Myhill, 2012, p. 62). These statements indicate a need for a far more purposeful and explicit linking of reading and writing by the teacher rather than just a belief that reading impacts on learners ability to write well. Regrettably, the 'standalone lesson' perception of the teaching of writing is widely held by many South African teachers and is reinforced by the curriculum which stipulates the

number of hours to be allocated to the different literacy skills. The time allocation for writing in the English Senior Phase Home Language document is 3 ½ hours per two week teaching cycle of a total of 9 hours (DBE, 2011, p.12).

2.5.1.3.3 Genre Discourse

The genre approach to the teaching of writing originated mainly in Australia in the mid to late 1980s. The key point underpinning this approach is that texts vary structurally and linguistically according to their purpose and context. Good writing according to this view is not just linguistically correct but it is also linguistically appropriate according to the purpose that it serves. According to Martin (2000), Hallidayan work in systemic functional linguistics(1989,1994) in which he argues that there are culturally specific ways of using language and that different contexts are associated with different registers or genres, underpins a genre approach to the writing curriculum. The condensed and abstract nature of writing requires an awareness of the appropriateness of specific genres in relation to audience and purpose. Learners thus need to be able to distinguish between procedures, descriptions, reports, explanations, arguments and various types of narrative. Research by both Dornbrack and Dixon (2014) and Kerfoot and Van Heerden (2014) in additional language classrooms in the Western Cape indicates that many learners are likely to benefit from genre based pedagogies because they need explicit focus on the textual and linguistic features of texts.

Supporters of a genre approach to teaching writing maintain that learners can be empowered through learning the features of what are thought of as powerful genres (Ivanič, 2004). They also claim that teaching grammar in context promotes writing development. Both assertions are challenged by critics of the genre approach. Firstly, they argue that teaching genres can become formulaic, with teachers providing little more than ‘recipes’ for writing. Furthermore, Boscolo (2008) contends that with teachers determining the choice of genres learners may come to believe that these genres are the most important. Secondly, genre proponents’ claim that teaching grammar in context promotes writing development is as yet insufficiently supported by research. Nevertheless, the National Literacy Strategy (NLS), an initiative introduced in England in 1998 in order to raise standards of literacy is strongly underpinned by genre pedagogy and requires teachers to achieve yearly teaching objectives which include explicit grammar focus objectives and teaching grammar ‘in context’ . Myhill (2005) explains that classroom observations have indicated that the notion of “in context” means little more than grammar teaching which is

slotted into English lessons where the focus is not grammar but some other feature of English learning. In other words, 'in context' may simply mean 'not decontextualised'" (p.82).

Myhill (2005) shows that this approach can become as decontextualised as grammar exercises in discrete grammar lessons, and can create a curious set of misconceptions about writing with the objectives of the NLS becoming more important in children's writing than applied understanding of the knowledge of grammar. She asserts that only the most effective teachers of literacy make meaningful connections between linguistic points at word and linguistic level, and engagement with whole texts. She quotes research by Wray et al. (2000) who state that less effective teachers "tended to teach language features directly, without providing children with a clear context in which these features served a function" (in Myhill, 2005, p. 86). For Myhill the teaching of writing 'with language in mind', requires English teachers to have substantive subject and pedagogic knowledge which apparently has not been provided for many of them in their career pathways into teaching (Myhill, 2005, p. 90). Noting that "teaching grammar in context" has become a widely accepted 'mantra' Myhill warns that the danger of a mantra is 'repetition without reflection' (Myhill, 2005, p. 81) with the impact of an important idea or concept being diminished or lost.

Ivanič (2004) asserts that when assessing writing in terms of genre, teachers will rate a piece of writing as excellent even if it is 'dull in terms of content and style' (p.233). As long as it includes the appropriate linguistic features for a particular text type, it will be deemed successful. Proponents of this discourse describe it as logical, systematic, down to earth and teachable. Critics consider it to be prescriptive, simplistic and based on 'a view of text types as unitary, static and amenable to specification' (ibid, p.234)

McCarthey et al. (2014) support Ivanič's (2004) suggestion that writing teachers can benefit from knowing about the six discourses, knowing pedagogical practices associated with them, and 'recognising which discourse(s) of writing they are inhabiting' (p. 242). However, they argue that it is important for teachers to become aware of the dominant discourses expressed in the curriculum they work with as well as the discourses they employ in their instructional approaches and the underlying philosophies. Since some discourses appear to be contradictory (e.g., skills versus social practices), teachers need to be aware of the similarities and differences among discourses to actively negotiate the tensions among them. Furthermore, when developing their writing pedagogies, teachers

also need to make connections between writing and learners' backgrounds particularly when learners come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Jesson, Parr and McNaughton, 2013). However, often teachers can interpret 'diversity' as 'deficit'. In section 1.2.2.1, I indicated that teachers' approaches to the teaching of writing are linked to their views of learners. If these are deficit views, teachers are likely to resort to low level drill and skill instruction (Ball and Ellis, 2008).

2.5.1.4. Deficit Discourses

The achievement of social justice through education systems remains an elusive goal in a number of countries, including South Africa. Given the history of South African education, an agenda that emphasises social justice and equity is critically important. It has been proved that the continuing inequities in South African education and society are one of the key underlying issues influencing the recent 'fees must fall' protests at South African universities (Spaull, 2016).

Regrettably, too few teachers ask questions about equity and access and instead are 'inducted into counter-productive discourses that constitute certain learners as "deficit" – the poor, the willful, the disabled, the non-English speaking, the slow, the bottom 10%' (Comber and Kamler, 2004, p. 293). Comber and Kamler (2004) identify deficit discourses as so dominant and pervasive that they are reproduced in learner files, educational journals and conferences and reported as fact in media coverage of education. They argue that teachers need to move out of deficit discourses (blame the family, blame the child, blame the teacher) if they are to move ahead and be able to 'engineer pedagogic designs that make a difference' (p. 308). Mendelowitz (2014), for example, shows how enabling discourses lead to 'pedagogic designs that make a difference' (p.171). She writes about 'Fiona', a teacher whose enabling rather than deficit discourse in relation to her learners proved to be highly significant in the learning outcomes in her classroom because the discourse was coupled with productive pedagogical strategies such as negotiated scaffolding, modelling and collaboration. Deficit perceptions of learners emerged in group meeting discussions, and the 'back to basics' methods and strategies for teaching writing were prevalent in some pedagogical choices of the teachers in my study. Ball and Ellis (2008) point to a crucial link between teachers' deficit assumptions of linguistically diverse learners and the use of low level drill-and-skill instruction, which in effect perpetuates limited writing development. Deficit views of learners were also evident in approaches to providing feedback on learners' writing. Teachers tended to focus on error correction

rather than on learners' meaning-making. Mendelowitz (2010) refers to the emphasis on what's wrong and instructions for fixing these errors as 'the discourse of deficit and prescription' (p. 257).

2.5.1.4.1 Culturally relevant pedagogies

One way in which teachers may develop more enabling discourses is by gaining a knowledge and understanding of the literacy knowledge that learners do have rather than focusing on what they do not have (Jesson et al., 2013). Jesson et al. (2013) quote Rueda (2011) who states that "attempting to learn in an unfamiliar cultural context will make a task more difficult by increasing the cognitive load of the task, making it harder for students to learn" (Rueda, 2011, in Jesson et al., 2013, p. 216).

Jesson et al. (2013) thus advises teachers to find ways to incorporate what learners already know and have experience of doing and create instructional bridges from those practices to what might be unfamiliar but is highly valued in the curriculum. This entails building a knowledge of the learners' cultural contexts and their funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti, 2005), and planning deliberate instruction that focuses on the intertextual work needed to move from the 'cultural repertoires' of learners to using similar practices on unknown and canonical texts.

However, Jesson et al. (2013) raise questions and concerns regarding both the inclusion of learners' funds of knowledge and the use of instructional bridges in the teaching of writing. In order to do well academically, learners have to master traditional writing forms and conventions. This emphasis may not necessarily enable them to learn writing in a way that develops their identities as writers. Furthermore, in contexts where the process approach to the teaching of writing is implemented with a limited amount of teacher direction and explicit instruction, will learners without the necessary cultural capital benefit (Delpit, 1988)? Research has also shown that there are problematic and unintended consequences when the voice the learner is drawing on does not fit the expected discourse (Dyson, 2009). In linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms, the different experiences and worldviews of teachers and learners becomes apparent in the teaching of writing. There is a gap between teachers' expectations and what learners (for example, those who do not speak English as their home language, immigrants or learners from underprivileged communities) bring to the classroom (Willis and Hunter, 2007). Nevertheless, Ladson-Billings, a proponent of culturally relevant pedagogy states

> …culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes. These cultural referents are not merely vehicles for bridging or explaining dominant cultures; they are aspects of the curriculum in their own right (Ladson-Billings, 1994, pp 17-18).

Jackson (2007), in reflecting on the challenges linked to the introduction of culturally relevant pedagogies raises the question that many teachers ask "How can we, in good conscience, allow students to express their home experiences, including their home dialects, in the writing classroom when we know that Standard English is privileged in our educational system and in society?". (p. 113)

Perhaps the more important question is 'how can we not allow students/ learners to express their home experiences'? According to Jesson et al. (2013), this is necessary if 'instructional bridges' are to be established and if learners are to be equipped to move from expressing themselves in their home dialects to expressing themselves in the 'Standard English' that is required for success in the educational system.

Rychly and Graves (2012) raise specific teacher qualities as yet another important issue regarding the effective implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy in classrooms. They maintain that, firstly, teachers need to be caring (Nieto, 2004; Irvine, 2003; Gay, 2002; Dalton, 1998) and empathetic (McAllister and Irvine, 2002; Robins, Lindsey and Terrell, 2006) if they are to be fully effective. However, they explain that the 'caring' as used in the literature does not mean 'kind' but rather describes teachers who care so much about their culturally diverse learners that they are unwilling to tolerate underachievement and demand the same standards from them as they do from any other learners (Gay, 2002). Empathy appears to refer to a teacher's ability to understand the classroom from the perspective of his or her learners. They assert that teachers also need to be willing to investigate their own attitudes and beliefs about other cultures (Nieto, 2004). Teachers have to come to terms with their preconceived notions of the abilities of learners from diverse backgrounds. Stereotypical views, according to Nieto (2004) often surface in the ways that teachers discuss learners and often express deficit views. Furthermore, teachers need to reflect on their own cultural frames of reference or worldviews, and be willing to learn about the cultures and worldviews represented in their classrooms. Such reflection may enable teachers to acknowledge their need to learn more about teaching and to identify opportunities for additional learning. Rychly and Graves (2012) argue, however,

that becoming reflective practitioners is a process that must be continuously taught and learned if we are to achieve the potential of cultivating culturally responsive teachers.

Teachers participating in this study taught in classrooms that had become increasingly multilingual and multicultural during the past two decades, much like those in a study by Kempe (2014) who conducted a study of teachers in a post-graduate study group. She describes how teachers have struggled to locate themselves within the new paradigm of integrated schools because most teachers' initial teacher education did not equip them to teach in a democratic South Africa. Furthermore, Janks (in McKinney, 2017, xi) states that teachers select and present knowledge through their own cultural frames. This was the case for some of the teachers in the two PLCs in this study and it seems to have led to the development of deficit and sometimes elitist discourses. Most of the learners they taught did not speak English as their home language and some teachers labelled learners as having inadequate English language proficiency. Plűddermann (2015) maintains that the 'prevailing monoglossic discourses' should be countered by heteroglossic practices. He asserts that teachers have an important but underrated role to play in realising the ideals of the Language in Education Policy (LiEP, 1997) which envisages the establishment of 'additive multilingualism' as an approach to language education and to counter disadvantages resulting from different kinds of mismatches between home languages and languages of learning and teaching (LiEP, pp. 1,2). Plűddermann (2015) states that teachers can achieve these aims through 'heteroglossic practices' in classrooms that encourage the use of all languages as learning resources. However, this is not presently the practice in most South African classrooms and leads to the exploration of what influences teachers' classroom practices and more specifically, their writing pedagogies.

2.5.2 Learning to teach writing

2.5.2.1 Teachers' writing histories and contexts

According to Gee (2000) teachers' identities are influenced by their apprenticeship of observation and through their initial teacher education. Teachers in a particular grade, phase or subject are likely to develop a discourse identity related to the grade, phase or subject. Literacy teachers' identities are often initially constructed through their experiences of at least twelve years of educational experience (Lortie, 1975). They then enter their initial teacher education programmes which have varying impacts on their teaching identities. For Freeman (1996) these can be a 'very weak form of intervention' compared with the powerful influence of a twelve year' apprenticeship of observation'

(Lortie, 1975). If these beliefs and values remain unexamined or unchallenged by new learning, they may perpetuate a cycle of inadequate writing instruction (Jackson and Vavra, 2007). Several studies on the teaching of writing indicate this to be the case in many South African classrooms (Kerfoot and Van Heerden, 2014; Dornbrack and Dixon, 2014; Mendelowitz, 2010; Hendricks, 2005). Comber and Nixon (2009) note that teachers are often positioned as technicians who simply implement policy. Batra (2009) maintains that very often teachers are framed as the users and not as the creators of curriculum and regarded as implementing agencies of larger interests. Thus, if as indicated in section 2.5.1.3, the NCS-CAPS presents writing as a linear process, teachers without prior pedagogical knowledge of the teaching of writing are likely to apply the 'steps' outlined in the curriculum.

A question raised by Goodburn and Lambert thus seems particularly relevant "how can we help English teachers imagine themselves as powerful advocates for change rather than technicians of particular pedagogical practices, curricula and teaching practices?". (2007, p. 32)

Their question is increasingly pertinent as 'high quality education' is discussed, in South Africa and other countries, in terms of prescriptive (and sometimes scripted) curricula, standardized assessment and bureaucratic reporting. Gennrich and Janks (2013) maintain that in 'an age of increasingly prescriptive curricula, what and how teachers teach is constrained'. They explain that

> …Compliance replaces curiosity as teachers play by the 'rules of the game'. They are seldom given the space or time to question the arbitrariness of these rules, in fact these become so internalized that teachers misrecognize them as the truth. (Gennrich and Janks, 2013, p. 461).

Samuel (2008), too, indicates that the state's emphasis on teachers being accountable to the authority of the employer diminishes teachers' accountability to being members of a profession and upholding the ideals of the profession. The issue of teacher agency or teacher autonomy is significant with regard to the teaching of writing. Vavra and Spencer (2007) quote Atwell (2002) who argued programmed instruction takes away teachers' professionalism and turns them into mere technicians or puppets. If teachers are to direct their own learning in PLCs, they need to be able to question 'the rules of the game' and to test whether they promote the best possible outcomes for the learners they teach.

2.5.2.2 Initial Teacher Education

Effective teaching of writing requires substantive subject content and pedagogical content knowledge (Myhill, 2005). However, Vavra and Spencer (2007) indicate that in a survey of a number of universities' English Education programmes, they found that on average students are required to study literature three times more than they are required to study other aspects of language. Graves (2002) claims that less than half of teacher education institutions in the United States offer courses on the teaching of writing. Teachers who have graduated from courses such as these are likely to feel more confident teaching literature than they do teaching writing. Pardo (2006) also observes that in many elementary schools, literacy classes tend to prioritise reading. Like their counterparts in the United States, it seems that teachers in England also do not receive adequate preparation to teach writing (Myhill, 2005). In South Africa, a report by Reed (2014) on the content of initial teacher education programmes for Intermediate Phase teachers at five universities revealed that the range of English subject courses offered to students contribute to very different constructions of teachers of English and that insufficient attention is paid to equipping student teachers to guide Intermediate Phase learners to become proficient readers and writers.

Initial teacher education courses, according to Jackson and Vavra (2007) can create cognitive dissonance for student teachers and newly qualified teachers because they learn research - based writing pedagogies at university, but they do not encounter these approaches at schools because of the time constraints and other curricular demands of the classroom. Richmond (2007) in describing strategies she uses to prepare students for the conflicting aspects of teaching that they will encounter states the teachers she invites to speak to students are her most popular guests because students value their work in the 'real world'. This account of student teachers' enthusiastic response to teachers sharing their 'real world' experiences suggests a reason for the success of a programme like the National Writing Project (NWP), discussed in the next section, which works on the principle of 'teachers teaching teachers'.

2.5.2.3 Continuing Professional Teacher Development

Writing about research on the factors that influence how qualified teachers teach writing, McCarthey et al. (2014) identified the curriculum (2.5.2.1) as one of the strongest factors. Other factors included rich personal histories of writing as well as meaningful professional

development activities. The kinds of professional development activities that teachers in the McCarthey,, Woodard, and Kang, (2014) study had previously experienced included district workshops, participating in Master's programme courses, literacy coaches, attending a Summer Academy series of workshops and the National Writing Project (NWP). McCurrie (2007) claims that "the National Writing Project has been a key force in not only the professionalization of teachers in the schools, but also in helping teacher candidates connect writing theory and practice". (p. 69)

The NWP was initiated in 1974 and is well known for its approach to teacher development through creating networks devoted to teachers teaching teachers. One of its main goals is to improve learners' literacy through writing.

> Two features of the NWPs approach to teacher development seem to set it apart: an awareness of the social and relational practices that motivate and sustain teachers; and small, informal networks that organize and extend relationships among the larger, more formal writing groups (McCurrie, 2007, p.71).

McCarthey et al. (2014) maintain that these collaborative professional development experiences, especially if they have a particular framework such as a Writer's Workshop, can have a powerful effect on teachers' epistemologies and instructional practices (Troia et al., 2011; Whitney, 2008). Pella (2015) also maintains that writing research and teacher education research has consistently affirmed that the learning contexts, or models of teacher professional development, powerfully influence how teachers appropriate knowledge for teaching writing (Lieberman, & Miller, 2008; Lieberman, &Wood, 2003; Grossman, Valencia, Evans, Thompson, Martin, & Place, 2000; Sperling & Woodlief, 1997).

The experience of participating in an NWP programme appears to equip teachers with the type of mindset necessary to participate effectively in a PLC which is also a collaborative model for teacher learning. The NWP principle of 'teachers teaching teachers' may have a positive influence on the potential of the PLC to promote learning as teachers appear to value the knowledge other teachers have gained through their practical classroom experiences (Pella, 2011).

2.6 PLCs as vehicles for the development of teachers' writing pedagogies

Lieberman and Miller (2008) claim that PLCs offer a learning model in which 'new ideas and strategies emerge, take root, and develop, and where competence can be truly

cultivated and nurtured' (p. 2). Pella's (2011) study of teachers developing their writing pedagogies supports this claim. However, it was noted that those teachers had high levels of knowledge and skill. They had all participated in the NWP, had district professional development workshops on the teaching of writing and had taken part in action research initiatives. Teachers thus participated in the PLC with well-developed identities as 'teachers of writing' and with a sense of agency (2.4.1.5). Many South African teachers do not have the same knowledge and experience to draw on and they are increasingly pressured to prepare learners for standardised assessments. Staff at schools also face the intensification of their work which severely limits the time and energy available for participation in PLCs. However, four studies on PLCs in South Africa suggest that PLCs can be a vehicle for developing both the content and pedagogical content knowledge of teachers. Only one of the four studies included a PLC group that focused on the teaching of English home language and will therefore be discussed first. Two focused on the teaching of Mathematics whilst the study by Feldman and Fataar (2014) focused on 'transformative learning'.

The study by Cereseto (2015) investigated what knowledge teachers learned in three subject-based professional learning communities (PLCs), how they learned it, and the conditions that enabled this learning. A key finding of this study was that teachers learned more practical knowledge than subject matter knowledge and that teachers with the ability to make inferential connections between propositions (Winch, 2010; 2013a), dependent on sound subject matter knowledge, were able to contribute more knowledge and were more confident than teachers whose subject matter knowledge was weaker. In this instance, although there were varying levels of subject knowledge and expertise in the Mathematics and Geography groups, the group of English teachers all had initial degrees and relevant teaching qualifications. Teachers were thus confident enough to assert that they did not require 'outside experts' to participate in their PLC group. Four teachers participated in fifteen PLC meetings, all lasting just under an hour. They selected several curriculum topics for their learning focuses. These included basic writing, essay writing, visual literacy and poetry. The basic writing sessions focused on mainly syntactic aspects of writing, whilst the essay writing sessions focused on how to improve learners' ability to respond appropriately to visual essay topic prompts. Approximately eight of the fifteen sessions were spent focusing on these writing related topics, with almost seventy percent of the time dedicated to discussing and developing lessons and tasks to teach sentence

construction and correct tense usage. The group, without outside input, displayed a limited understanding of the teaching of writing and did not question or challenge the curriculum's linear construction of the process approach to the teaching of writing, evident in one of the teacher's comments about "insufficient time to follow *the steps* involved in 'process writing' thoroughly". (Cereseto, 2015, p.119 my emphasis)

A study reported by Brodie (2013) showed how a focus on learners' errors in Mathematics, and on training teachers to carefully analyse these errors, enabled teachers in PLCs to accurately determine learners' learning needs. Teachers collectively supported each other to make sense of learner errors, to consider their current teaching practices and think about possible new practices and new ways of thinking about Mathematics. It is important to note that there were 'outside experts' participating in and guiding the learning process.

Marchant's (2015) study of teachers of Mathematics showed that PLC members spent more time on pedagogical content knowledge than they did on content knowledge conversations. However, the pedagogical content knowledge conversations triggered content knowledge conversations, suggesting a close relationship between the two. Marchant (2015) concluded that the type of PLC activity strongly influenced the type of conversations that occurred. For example, she found that content knowledge conversations tended to occur during lesson planning meetings.

The study by Feldman and Fataar (2014) explored the potential of a PLC to promote a 'pedagogy for transformational learning'. They report having conceptualised the PLC as a possibly messy, staccato and non-linear process that does not necessarily focus on finding the answers, but rather on questioning and disrupting the teachers' current notions of their classroom pedagogy. Feldman and Fataar (2014) believed that by building trust among the teachers in the PLC and encouraging critical reflexivity (2.3.4) teachers' pedagogies would be challenged. They aimed to promote Servage's (2008) 'pedagogy for transformational learning' which lies at the heart of a socially just pedagogical approach to teaching and learning (Feldman and Fataar, 2014, p. 1538). The PLC group in this study was supported by university lecturing staff.

2.7 Conclusion

Currently, learner performance in reading and writing is poor in many South African schools. Resulting from this, there has been a proliferation of intervention programmes, mainly focused on the teaching of reading. I concur with the view that the teaching of

writing has not had the same attention paid to it as reading instruction (Dornbrack and Dixon, 2014; Kerfoot and van Heerden, 2014; Mendelowitz, 2010; Bazerman, 2008; MacArthur, Graham and Fitzgerald, 2006). For this reason, my study focuses on the potential of a PLC to influence and possibly change teachers writing pedagogies. The review of the literature shows that former and current approaches to teacher development in South Africa have had little impact on the quality of education. I have argued that disregarding the enduring influences of apartheid teacher and learner education has contributed to the lack of impact of professional development initiatives. Evidence from the literature suggests that Professional Learning Communities can provide a supportive and enabling setting for teachers to reflect on and critically assess their professional practice. This study thus explores the extent to which a PLC is a suitable vehicle for developing teachers' writing pedagogies.

It is to the collection and analysis of data that I now turn in Chapter Three.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Action Research

3.2.1 Planning, Acting, Observing, Reflecting- stage one

3.2.2 Planning, Acting, Observing, Reflecting – stage two

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 Questionnaires

3.3.2 Interviews

3.3.3. Classroom Observation and samples of learners' writing

3.3.4 Group meetings

3.3.5 Personal Journal

3.4 Research Sites and Participants

3.4.1 Research site for first series of meetings

3.4.2 Participants in Group One

3.4.3 Research site for second series of meetings

3.4.4 Participants in Group Two

3.5 Data Analysis

3.6 Ethics

3.1 Introduction

This study aims to investigate the potential of an externally initiated and facilitated Professional Learning Community (PLC) to influence and possibly change teachers' beliefs and practices with regard to the teaching of writing in the Senior Phase English home language classroom. The main question is thus: what factors enable and / or constrain the development of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) which has as its focus the teaching of writing. More specifically:

- What is enabling or constraining about the contexts in which teachers work in public schools?
- What, if any, impact do teachers' life histories and current identities have on their take up of professional development opportunities in a PLC which focused on the teaching of writing?

- In the context of South African public education, to what extent is a PLC a suitable intervention for developing teachers' understandings and enactment of writing pedagogies?

I chose to undertake action research to try to find answers to my questions about the possibilities of PLCs because, as stated by Kemmis

> Action research aims to explore new ways of doing things, new ways of thinking, and new ways of relating to one another and to the world in the interest of finding those new ways that are more likely to be for the good of each person and for the good of humankind, and more likely to help us live sustainably (2010, p. 425).

I had anticipated that a PLC would offer me a 'new way' to support and promote the continuing professional development of teachers of English Home Language. However, I needed to know what would promote the effectiveness of a PLC and what would limit or constrain such effectiveness. Kemmis (1992) claims that there is always a tension in education between 'tendencies towards social reproduction' and 'tendencies towards social transformation'. While it may be important to change the practices of individual practitioners, it is also necessary to change the historically located traditions which shape and inform the practices as it is these traditions that often encourage 'tendencies towards social reproduction'. The context within which this research was conducted was dominated by 'top-down' models of teacher development where teachers were accustomed to being largely passive participants in workshops or conferences offered by the department of education, teacher unions and other approved service providers (De Clercq and Shalem, 2014). When this study began, I hoped that by introducing teachers to a PLC, a different approach to teacher development, it would enable them to direct the learning process and thus improve or change their writing pedagogies. I also hoped to develop my own knowledge and understanding of PLCs and more broadly, of teacher learning and development in relation to writing pedagogies.

In attempting to find answers to key questions, I tried to facilitate the establishment of PLCs as a participant and not an observer. Kemmis (2012) argues that

> …. praxis is only accessible as such from the first-person, participant perspective: the second and third person perspectives do not have unmediated access to the intentions and lived experience of the participant. On this view, researching praxis means in the light of individual and collective self-reflection, to re-orient oneself in the practice of the practice, to re-orient one's understandings of the practice, and to re-orient the conditions under which one practises (Kemmis, 2012, p.896).

Heron and Reason (1997) similarly refer to a 'participatory paradigm' through which we gain knowledge of our world by participating in it because 'to experience anything is to participate in it, and to participate is both to mould and to encounter' (p. 278). Whilst it was necessary as the facilitator of the group to 'mould' or 'give a particular shape' to the process of developing the PLC, it was also important to remain open to understanding teachers' ways of experiencing the learning process of a PLC and to 'reorientate' my understanding of classroom practice and the 'conditions under which [teachers] practised'.

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) emphasise collaborative action and group decision making as fundamental to an action research project. However, not all writers on action research subscribe to the view that an action research project must be conceived by a group. They argue that it may begin with an individual who then draws others in to the project. An initiator may thus 'raise consciousness about common concerns and awaken a shared commitment to do something about them' (Kemmis and Di Chiro, 1990) and in this way provide leadership that is not necessarily coercive or manipulative.

> On the whole our own view is that genuine commitment to and honest negotiation about a current situation and how it might be improved is actually necessary as a starting point for collaboration, not a denial of it (Kemmis and Di Chiro, 1990, p. 4).

I chose to explore the potential of PLCs by participating in one as both a researcher and a facilitator. I intended as the facilitator of the group to raise teachers' consciousness about the importance of the teaching of writing and to 'awaken a shared commitment' to identify ways in which to improve the teaching of writing. I hoped not only to be able to change and improve my own practice as a designer of professional development opportunities for teachers through this study, but also to enable teachers to change and improve their own practices through an intervention that centred on their questions and concerns about teaching writing, and not concerns imposed on them by others. Apart from the central focus of action research on change and improvement, action research 'encourages participation by teachers in their own professional development' (Grundy, 1982, p. 356).

This chapter begins with a discussion of the action research approach taken in this study. Changes that were made to the project as it developed are indicated and methods of data collection are outlined.

3.2 Action Research

According to McNiff (2013), action research, originally positioned as a powerful form of learning, but not widely accepted as a methodology for knowledge creation and theory generation, struggled for legitimacy until the late 1990s. Action research did not produce what Gibbons et al. (1994) refer to as 'Mode 1' knowledge, knowledge which included abstract, conceptual forms of knowing and which was, for a long time, deemed superior to 'Mode 2' knowledge, more practical forms of knowing. Action research, as is evident in the above quotation from Kemmis (2012) values 'practical forms of knowing' and thus fits more easily into 'Mode 2' type knowledge.

Schőn (1983) also identifies two 'modes' or ways of 'knowing' which he refers to as 'professional landscapes'. The first is the 'hard high ground' where technical rationality is valued and the second is the 'swampy lowlands', where, like 'mode 2' knowledge, intuitive and practical forms of knowledge are respected. While conceding that scientific approaches to research can address educational problems, Schőn argues that these are not always the most important ones:

> In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground where practitioners can make effective use of research-based theory and technique, and there is a swampy lowland where situations are confusing 'messes' incapable of technical solution.... the problems of the high ground, however great their technical interest, are often relatively unimportant to clients or to the larger society, while in the swamp are the problems of greatest human concern' (Schön 1983, p. 42).

'Technical' solutions have been attempted to address many of the challenges facing education in South Africa. New or revised curricula have been launched, large scale generic teacher development initiatives implemented, curriculum materials created and distributed to schools and yet poor academic performance and inequities continue to plague the education sector. Spaull (2014) argues that there are 'two public schooling systems in South Africa'. In an article written for City Press in January, 2014, he states

> In South Africa we have two public schooling systems: one which is functional, wealthy and able to educate students (about 25% of public schools); with the other being poor, dysfunctional and unable to equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills they should be acquiring in their schooling career (roughly 75% of public schools) (City Press, 12 January 2014).

Bertram (2011) maintains that there are complex reasons for the limited changes and improvements in South African educational outcomes. She identifies the following as some of these:

- the social and material conditions in which teachers work
- the ongoing legacy of apartheid in the form of disorganised and dysfunctional schools and
- major reforms in curriculum which have not been accompanied with the necessary, ongoing support for teachers and schools.

Whilst this study is not located in 'poor, dysfunctional schools', issues of access and inequity are also present in 'functional' schools where 'good' matriculation results are often misleading. Critics of the matriculation results (Soudien, 2015; Jansen, 2014; Spaull, 2013) have pointed out that the National Senior Certificate (NSC) pass requirements are sub-standard and encourage mediocrity. Furthermore, widespread drop-out before Grade 12 is a serious problem and it appears that over time, more pupils are choosing less demanding exam subjects. Furthermore, in some 'performing' schools, increasing levels of linguistic and cultural diversity have emerged. Often teachers have interpreted the 'differences' they have encountered in their classes as 'deficit' (1.2.2.1) and this interpretation can impact on the expectations teachers have of learners and the approaches they adopt to teaching. This is the 'swampy lowland' in which I located this action research study in order to investigate the affordances of a PLC for the development of writing pedagogies.

3.2.1. Planning, Acting, Observing, Reflecting- Stage One

Action research conventionally proceeds through recurring cycles of 'planning, acting, observing and reflecting'. There is a 'dynamic complementarity which links these four processes into a spiral of such cycles' (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988, p. 10). The processes are interrelated and should be implemented self critically and systematically.

The initial plan for this research was to recruit ten Grade 8 teachers of English as a home language in 5 schools located in one school district of Gauteng. I made the decision to work within one particular district for two main reasons. Firstly, I hoped to rotate the venue for the meetings. If all schools were located quite near to each other, it would minimise travelling time and travelling costs for teachers. Secondly, I was interested to see whether teachers working within the same district might find they faced very similar or very different challenges. Expecting there to be no more than three or four teachers of grade 8 per school, I requested that at least two per school agree to participate in the study.

I then did some research on the performance of the fifteen Gauteng districts in the previous year's matriculation examinations. I decided to approach the best performing schools in one of the poorly performing districts. I surmised that teachers at these schools were producing acceptable results in spite of being in an underperforming district and would quite possibly be good at not only identifying problems and articulating concerns but also of proposing ways to address the problems. Also, while recent research has documented that there are advantages to locating a PLC within individual school sites (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Nelson & Slavit, 2008), a study by Pella (2011) has shown that there are advantages to locating the PLC across multiple sites. Fullan (2006) also maintains that PLCs need to be part and parcel of creating new multiple school and district sites so that learning and improvement can be more widely influenced by different experiences and perspectives. I chose to try to work across sites and approached several schools in one district.

In accordance with my initial plan, I first approached the Senior Phase Subject Advisor for English in the selected district and thereafter contacted principals of the selected schools. I had applied for and received permission from the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) to conduct research in the schools and I presented copies of the letters of permission to the district official and the principals (see Appendix A for a copy of the GDE letter of permission. The letter of permission was re-issued three times over the duration of my data collection and the most recent letter is included in Appendix A). Principals seemed positive and willing to allow me to approach their staff members with my request. After I had met with the district official and the principals, I requested meetings with the grade eight English teachers at the schools.

The story of the challenges that followed is told in chapter 4, the title of which reveals the eventual outcome of the above process: 'The PLC that wasn't'.

Research by Wells and Feun (2013) states that

> Despite the considerable volume of discourse on the importance of implementing PLC principles, *the transformation is ''extremely difficult''* (Stoll and Louis 2007, p. 6). The literature continues to report the many failures of the attempts to transform schools into learning communities, despite good intentions and hard work (Wells and Feun, 2013, p. 235 my emphasis).

I had had my first ‘taste’ of the challenges of initiating PLCs despite my ‘good intentions and hard work’. Much as I wanted to learn more about this model of professional teacher development, the failure of my first attempt was deeply disappointing. It was thus necessary to develop another ‘plan’.

3.2.2 Planning, Acting, Observing, Reflecting – Stages two, three and four

Instead of the conventional process of planning, acting, observing and reflecting on several cycles of action research, revised ‘plans’ had to be implemented with other possible groups. The opportunity to work with a second group of five grade 8 English Home Language teachers at one school arose out of a discussion with the person who was then the principal of the school. Five grade eight English teachers met with me late in 2012 and agreed to participate in a series of meetings starting in January 2013. Six meetings were held during the course of the first, second and third terms and even though it was necessary to continue meeting if the group was to progress beyond the initial stage of a PLC, it was not possible to embark on a second cycle of action research in 2014 as four of the five teachers had left the school by the end of 2013. Another school within the same district was thus approached to work with me in 2014, but just two teachers agreed to participate, and then only within ‘non-teaching’ times in their timetable and this initiative was thus also abandoned. The next attempt included an invitation to teachers in other Senior Phase grades i.e. not only grade 8, but grade 7 and 9 teachers as well. After appealing to more than a dozen schools, eventually four grade seven teachers agreed to a series of meetings with me in 2015. They participated in seven meetings during the four terms of 2015, and requested to continue meeting in 2016.

The following table summarises the four main initiatives:

Table 2: PLC attempts 2012-2015

	First attempt to initiate a PLC	Second attempt to initiate a PLC	Third attempt to initiate a PLC	Fourth attempt to initiate a PLC
When	July to November 2012	January to September 2013	January to March 2014	January to October 2015
Meetings	5 introductory meetings at 5 schools. No recorded group meetings	1 introductory meeting November 2012. Six recorded group meetings 2013	I introductory meeting December 2013. No recorded group meetings	1 introductory meeting January 2015. 7 recorded group meetings in 2015.
Number of teachers	15 grade 8 English Home Language teachers attended the various introductory meetings.	5 grade 8 English Home Language teachers	2 grade 8 English Home Language teachers	7 grade 7 English Home Language teachers attended introductory meeting. 4 agreed to participate in a series of meetings.
Venues	School staff rooms(3) and classrooms (2)	English Head of Department's office	Staffroom	Grade 7 teacher's classroom at the host school.

In chapters five and six, it is the second and fourth attempts that will be the focus and the groups will be referred to as Group A (chapter 5) and Group B (chapter 6).

3.3 Data Collection

As indicated above, from the four attempts, only two sets of group meetings were conducted, the first in 2013 (first action research cycle) and the second in 2015 (second action research cycle). Several methods were used to collect data during each cycle.

- Teachers completed questionnaires that provided information about their teaching qualifications and experience.
- All nine teachers participated in semi-structured individual interviews which were audio-taped with the teachers' permission and transcribed after the interviews.
- Four of the nine teachers allowed classroom observation. Field notes were taken during the classroom observation sessions.
- Six group meetings were held in 2013 and seven in 2015. Each of the group meetings was audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. These were transcribed after each meeting so that issues raised could inform the focus of the next meeting.
- Six of the nine teachers allowed me to make copies of samples of learners' writing.
- I kept a personal journal throughout the period of data collection.

3.3.1 Questionnaires

Questionnaires as a method of data collection have the advantage of being economical and of posing the same questions to all the respondents (Chilisa and Preece, 2005). In order to obtain background information about teachers (for example, their professional and academic qualifications, teaching experience) I used a questionnaire (copy of questionnaire included in Appendix B). As only factual details of teachers' qualifications and teaching experience were required, closed questions were used. At the start of the first meeting, I took a few minutes to explain to teachers what consent forms needed to be signed and I then distributed the questionnaires. I explained each section so that teachers would understand what information was required, and invited them to ask questions if they were unsure of anything. I then asked them to complete these and to bring the completed questionnaire to the second meeting. The information provided by the questionnaires at first seemed fairly innocuous, but as I proceeded with the data analysis, when and where teachers received their initial teacher education, the classes and subjects they taught and the kind of education they themselves had received became increasingly relevant and significant.

3.3.2 Interviews

Interviews, as a data gathering tool play an important role in much qualitative research. To be effective, the purpose and structure of the interview need to be clear as does the role of the interviewer and the respondent. However, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) maintain that

"The spoken or written word has always a residue of ambiguity, no matter how carefully we word the questions and how carefully we report or code the answers" (p. 645).

Merriam (1998) places interviews along a continuum from structured through semi-structured to unstructured. The structured interview is characterized by highly structured questions, asked in a very specific order and controlled by the interviewer, who is expected to be neutral. This approach is frequently used for surveys with a high proportion of closed-ended questions. The respondent is viewed as a passive provider of answers to pre-determined questions rather than as a constructer of meaning in a specific context. The interviewer expects a pre-existing answer to predetermined questions which fit into predetermined categories (Fontana and Frey, 2000). Unstructured interviews are located on the other end of the continuum. In a typically unstructured interview the format is not standardized and the interviewer does not expect normative responses (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Such interviews are exploratory and the respondent plays a much more active role, answering and asking questions and shaping the direction of the conversation. According to Merriam (1998), such interviews are often used in early phases of research, before the researcher knows enough about the object of enquiry to ask specific questions. The typical relationship between interviewer and respondents is that of peers. Semi-structured interviews are located on the midpoint of the continuum. In qualitative research projects, semi-structured interviews are most commonly used. These are more open-ended and less structured than structured interviews. The most substantive part of such an interview is 'guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored' (Merriam, 1998, p. 74). The format is flexible and creates space for new questions and issues to arise. The interviewer and respondent can jointly construct meaning and direction.

There are a growing number of researchers who question traditional assumptions about interviews. Fontana and Frey (2000) maintain that interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering but active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results. The interview is not a neutral means of obtaining information with the interviewer asking questions and the respondent providing answers. Holstein and Gubrium (2004) indicate that post structuralist, post-modernist, constructionist and ethnomethodological inquiry have raised a number of questions regarding the assumption that a conventional approach to interviews presupposes: 'if the interviewer asks questions properly and the interview situation is propitious, the respondent will automatically convey the desired information' (p. 44). Fontana and Prokos (2007) state that

> Social scientists are more likely to recognize that interviews are interactional encounters and that the nature of the social dynamic of the interview can shape the nature of the knowledge generated (ibid, p.13).

Fontana and Prokos (2007) advise that interviewers need to perfect the style of 'interested listening' that rewards the respondents' participation but does not evaluate their responses. Because I had my own views and opinions about the teaching of writing, I had to consciously avoid 'evaluating' teachers' responses. I was, however, at all times genuinely interested in their stories and had no difficulty being an 'interested listener'.

I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews as opposed to structured or unstructured interviews. A semi-structured interview was chosen so that some structure could assist the flow of the discussion while allowing the opportunity for follow-up on responses to questions (See interview schedule in Appendix C). The interviews became 'guided conversations' rather than structured queries so that a line of enquiry could be pursued in a fluid, as opposed to a rigid, manner (Rubin & Rubin, in Yin, 2003; Rule & John, 2011). Structured interviews would not have allowed the same flexibility as the semi-structured interviews. Unstructured interviews would not have been appropriate either as there were specific themes, such as teachers' own experiences of learning to write, which I wanted to investigate. I also needed to be aware of power relations in face-to-face interactions as these relations have the potential to bias the data collected (Maxwell, 1996). I was not in a position of authority in relation to teachers, or an employee of the department of education, so there were no overt power imbalances and teachers appeared to interact and respond to me in an open, honest manner. All nine teachers participated in a semi-structured interview of approximately forty five minutes. I audio recorded all of the interviews with the permission of the teachers and then transcribed them (Appendices D and E). Transcripts "offer a highly reliable record to which researchers can return as they develop new hypotheses" (Silverman, 1993, pp. 10-11).

As teachers always seemed to be pressed for time, I scheduled interviews as and when they could accommodate me. These were thus slotted between the group meetings. This meant that teachers had all participated in at least one group meeting before their individual interviews took place. They seemed at ease with me and I am assuming it was partly because the interview was not their first encounter with me. I had also given them the list of questions beforehand that would be used to guide our discussion. The questions that seemed to pose the most difficulty for the three more experienced teachers were those pertaining to their school experiences and their initial teacher education. Having qualified

more than thirty years ago, they could recall very little of the detail of those years. It did not appear that the three older research participants were adopting 'avoidance tactics' (Cohen and Manion, 1994) when confronted with questions going as far back as their own school careers and their initial teacher education.

3.3.3 Classroom observation and samples of learners' writing

Chilisa and Preece (2005) maintain that the advantage of using observations is that this form of data collection reveals what cannot be revealed through interviews and questionnaires. Observation is, however, time consuming and can be influenced by observer bias (Chilisa and Preece, 2005). Bickman and Rog (1998) also assert that behaviours and actions can be adapted because of the presence of an observer. Even though I tried to be as unobtrusive as possible (Merriam and Simpson, 1984) so that my presence in the classroom would have as little impact on the natural behaviour of the participants as possible, it was evident that in at least two of the four lessons I observed, the behavior of both teachers and learners was influenced by my presence.

Only four of the nine teachers invited me to observe the teaching of writing in their classrooms. In action research cycle one with Group A, it was only Anne who allowed classroom observation, and even though I had emphasized that the lesson should be one that was part of a series of 'normal' writing lessons, she planned and presented a lesson that was specifically prepared for me to observe. The remaining teachers in Group A did not allow observation for various reasons. Dineo was ill throughout term 2 and there were several disruptions during the terms which created additional workload for teachers. The writing of the Annual National Assessments (ANAs) in the third term for grade 9s also diverted teachers' attention from their work with me on the teaching of writing in grade 8.

Zoe in Group B invited me to visit her classroom as soon as I made the request to do classroom observation and assured me that I could come as many times as I wished to. I visited her classroom the week after the first group meeting. It took Xena and Yasmine much longer to feel comfortable enough to invite me to their classrooms. Warren did not continue as part of the group after the first term as he was withdrawn from the English department and timetabled to do all the Natural Sciences teaching from Term 2 onwards. Yasmine invited me to her classroom late in the second term, Xena early in the third term.

I believe that their reticence may have stemmed from a perceived link between classroom observation and evaluation. During most teachers' initial teacher education, their teaching

is observed and evaluated and currently, when a senior member of staff observes teaching, it is to evaluate teachers for Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) scores. Even though I assured teachers I would not be evaluating their teaching, I understood that they might still feel 'exposed when others observe them in their teaching arenas' (Richards and Farrell, 2005, p.85). I explained that my intention was not to assess or to evaluate, but to learn something about their approach to the teaching of writing. It was evident that Xena and Yasmine were anxious at the start of their lessons. Yasmine's account of what she perceived to be the 'bad behaviour' of her learners during my visit to her classroom may have influenced Xena to try to ensure that her learners were 'on their best behaviour'. When I reviewed my field notes on Yasmine's lesson, I'd noted that one learner in her class in particular was slow to follow instructions and did not have his books. Several others gave what seemed to be unexpected answers to some of Yasmine's questions about what was or was not appealing in an advertisement. She responded cautiously, not openly rejecting learners' ideas, but encouraging careful consideration of them. Yasmine was at all times very composed and efficient in her managing of the lesson and it surprised me to hear her express her distress about the behavior of her learners. Despite my reassurances, however, I noted that the learners in Xena's class were extraordinarily quiet and well behaved, suggesting that they had perhaps been warned in advance to be on their best behavior for 'the visitor'.

I made field notes during these lessons and found it extremely challenging as classrooms are complex places with many participants and often several different things happening at the same time. Events unfolded very quickly, so recording multiple events in real time was difficult. I wanted to learn as much as I could about the teacher and the learners during these brief opportunities which passed all too swiftly. I focused mainly on what the teacher said and did but tried to take note of learners' responses too. In each instance, I requested that teachers allow me to make copies of the writing that was produced by learners at the end of the series of writing lessons. Whilst Anne did give me samples of learners' writing, these were not related to the lesson I had observed. Zoe met with me soon after learners had completed their writing and invited me to select the samples I wanted. She shared information about the various learners as we worked through the pile of books, showing a remarkable knowledge about the learners she taught. Eventually we selected the samples and she made copies for me. She would not allow me to take the books away with me to make the copies. Yasmine selected several books and allowed copies to be made just

before one of the group meetings at the host school. Xena also selected samples of learners' writing from her lesson and made copies of these for me. I did not ask teachers to explain how they chose the samples they gave me. Whilst Xena's samples included what appeared to be different levels of performance (poor to very good), Yasmine's all seemed to be very similar.

3.3.4 Group Meetings

The transcripts of the group meetings were one of the main sources of data. Six group meetings of approximately one hour each were recorded with Group A and seven one hour meetings with Group B. Being both the researcher and the facilitator of the group proved to be quite challenging. During the first series of meetings, I understood my role as facilitator to be non-directive. I used 'The Professional Development Cycle for Continuous Improvement' outlined by Timperley et al. (2007, 71) to guide discussions during the six group sessions (2.4.1.7). It included the following steps:

1. Identify student learning needs
   - what do they know?
   - what sources of evidence have we used?
   - what do they need to learn?
   - how can we build on what they know?

2. Identify related teacher learning needs
   - how have we contributed to existing student outcomes?
   - what do we already know that we can use to produce valued outcomes?
   - what do we need to learn to do to promote valued outcomes?
   - what sources of knowledge can we use?

3. Learn or review concepts

4. Apply concepts to lessons

5. Critique and reflect on lesson
   - what impact have changed actions had on the quality of student learning?
   - how effective have we been?

During the first session, I handed each teacher a 'discussion sheet with the outline of what was to be discussed in 'step one': the identification of learners' needs. I opened the discussion to teachers and intervened only when it was evident that some group members were dominating the discussion. I then specifically asked for the quieter teachers, such as Dineo, to comment on issues being raised by the other teachers.

I suspect there were several reasons why this approach was unsuccessful, the main one perhaps being that teachers lacked the necessary skills and knowledge of how a PLC should function. I expected them to make an almost quantum leap from the models of teacher development they were accustomed to which required largely passive participation, to the PLC which required active participation, reflection and collaboration from them. Just telling teachers about PLCs was not sufficient to enable them to understand the focus which needed to be introduced gradually and systematically. The result of this oversight with this particular group of teachers probably contributed to the failure of group meetings to develop into a PLC. My inexperience as a facilitator of a PLC is very likely yet another factor which contributed to the group never developing into a PLC. Doing more thorough research on the role of the PLC facilitator between the series of meetings with Group A and the meetings with Group B led me to adopt a more directive approach to the facilitation of meetings. In the initial meetings with Group B I did more teaching about discourses of writing and played a more dominant role in discussions but had mixed feelings about doing so. On the one hand, I felt 'comfortable' as the facilitator teaching during group sessions, but as the 'researcher' I wanted to draw much more on the 'voices' of the teachers. Despite my unease, however, the second group moved closer to becoming a PLC than the first group. Whilst there were several reasons for the different outcome, the different approach to facilitating the meetings probably contributed to this improvement.

For Group A, I transcribed the audio recordings (Appendix E) after each meeting in order to identify the main issues that emerged during the meeting and I used these to inform the discussion in the next meeting, or to access relevant readings for the teachers. With Group B, I adapted the ideas of Mezirow (1990) regarding the facets and phases of transformative learning. These include:

1. A triggering event that causes an awareness of existing incongruent thoughts, or a realisation of views and approaches that no longer seem adequate
2. A feeling of disequilibrium, or uncertainty
3. Recognition and expression of presuppositions and assumptions that are mostly held unconsciously
4. Examining and questioning these assumptions and the reasons why these are held
5. Engaging in dialogue for reflecting on assumptions and constructing viewpoints
6. Revising assumptions and perspectives to make them more justifiable and discerning
7. Planning a course of action
8. Acquiring knowledge and skills for the plan
9. Action based on the revision of assumptions

10. Experimenting or trying out new roles
11. Building competence and self-confidence in the new roles and related relationships.

I was able within the eight months of the second action research cycle to focus on mainly 1, 2, 3 and 4. For example, the 'triggering event' (phase 1) entailed the reading and discussion of grade 7 writing lesson transcripts (Mendelowitz, 2010). The discussion of writing discourses in relation to these lessons provided opportunities for teachers to express their beliefs and assumptions about the teaching of writing. This was followed by an examination of the writing section of the Senior Phase CAPS home language curriculum, and an examination of teachers' understanding of the teaching of writing in terms of this document. The process enabled a more dialogic exchange within the second group than had been evident for Group A.

I used transcriptions of the first three sessions to identify the main concerns that emerged from the discussions. I then sent emails to teachers before the fourth meeting which was scheduled to take place after the school holidays, outlining the two main issues that had emerged: assessment of writing and the mediating and scaffolding of writing. I invited them to choose which one they wanted us to focus on for the next few meetings. They all chose to focus on the mediating and scaffolding of writing. Having selected a focus for the group's investigation, we revised some assumptions about the teaching of writing. Of particular concern was the unrelated way in which aspects of the English curriculum were taught, and the mechanistic approach to the initial stages of the writing process. We planned a course of action to address this. Unfortunately we were unable to implement our plans because the demands of the school programme became more demanding and non-negotiable.

3.3.5 Personal Journal

Keeping a self-reflective journal is a strategy that can facilitate reflexivity, because a researcher can use it to examine "personal assumptions and goals" and clarify "individual belief systems and subjectivities" (Russell & Kelly, 2002, p. 2). I was both researcher and participant in the two groups and thus needed to 'self-search' my own assumptions or preconceptions and how these affected my research decisions. A personal journal was a useful way for me to do this.

Journal entries were most often made after a group meeting to record my concerns and questions, and sometimes frustrations, about the content of the sessions. I would add to

those reflections after I had completed transcripts of a session. I recorded growing concerns about not being able to move teachers in Group A from the deficit discourse that increased with each session rather than decreased. I surmised that I should have tried to do a closer analysis of transcriptions of meetings before determining the focus for successive sessions. This might have enabled me to adopt a more dominant role in directing discussions in each follow up session.

My role as researcher should perhaps have been more dominant in reviewing the content that emerged from each meeting.

At the end of the fourth session, I wrote about my struggle to resist the teachers' discourse because it was beginning to influence my own thinking. I often found myself empathizing with them because I understood the reasons for their negativity and I found myself, after one particularly negative session, asking the question: 'DOES writing matter?' This is an extract from my journal Monday, 13 May, 2013:

> I found the discussion today very difficult. Teachers are tired and frustrated. They've had to take on extra classes because Dineo is still in hospital. I was tired and frustrated after attending a meeting with the GDE in the morning. I found it difficult to counter teachers' negativity with different perspectives – about their learners, about education, about assessment and about the teaching of English and writing in particular. Today it seems like a 'different way' is out of reach- there just seem to be too many obstacles along the way, and I am struggling to maintain the resolve to influence and possibly change teachers' beliefs and attitudes.

I used the question 'Does writing matter?' as the focus of the next session because I sensed that the deficit discourse was preventing the group from moving forward and, as the facilitator, I knew it was my responsibility to challenge it. However, after the fifth session in which the above question was discussed, I recorded my realization that I had perhaps waited too long to challenge the negativity of the group. Beliefs and attitudes needed to be addressed much earlier in the work of a PLC. Hynds, Sleeter, Hindle, Savage, Penetito and Meyer (2011) identify two possible approaches adopted by teachers who adopt deficit discourses. Teachers either see the disparities in achievement between learners who have social, cultural, racial and economic advantages and those who do not as beyond their control or they 'engage in deficit theorising'. If teachers believe they have no power over the performance of learners, they resort to lowering their expectations of their learners, opting as it were, for a 'pedagogy of self-preservation' rather than a 'pedagogy of social justice'. Deficit theorizing on the other hand, allows teachers to make learners responsible for their failure or underachievement (Hynds et al., 2011, p.340). In Group A, both

approaches were evident. However, studies reported by Timperley et al. (2007), show that teachers' social constructions of learners can be changed through well designed professional learning opportunities. They report that successful interventions were able to shift a discourse prevalent among teachers that was based on the assumption that some groups of learners could not or would not learn as well as others. These interventions were usually conducted by external experts or by strong and influential individuals within the school who were willing to challenge the status quo.

The other persistent question that emerged in my journal was: "How does one change teachers' beliefs and attitudes?' and, linked to that, "Is the PLC an appropriate vehicle for influencing changes in teachers' beliefs and attitudes?'

I tried to remain mindful that even though I had taught learners from disadvantaged contexts for twelve years, I had not taught in the same contexts as the participants in the study nor faced the constraints and challenges they faced each day. I observed their weariness and frustration during several meetings, and heard them express a sense of powerlessness too. As the year progressed teachers seemed to become more tired and stressed and less and less inclined to acknowledge shortcomings in their own performance. Poor work, it seemed, was discussed more and more in what Comber (2006) refers to as a 'discourse of blame'.

There was a perception that the expectations of the GDE were impractical, and yet there was pressure from senior staff to meet these for fear of possible repercussions such as being labelled 'underperforming'. The school management staff prided itself on the school's status as one of the top performing schools in the district.

3.4. Research sites and Participants

3.4.1 Research site for first series of meetings

The school at which the teachers taught was the research site for the six meetings held in 2013. It is a secondary school located in the north eastern suburbs of Johannesburg near taxi routes with access to several nearby 'townships[4]'. The school, which is an 'ex model C school[5]', has experienced a change in demographics over the past ten years as learners

[4] A "township" is the term for a proclaimed housing settlement. In South Africa, however, the most common daily use of the term refers to high density and originally poorly serviced dormitory settlements on the outskirts of towns established by the apartheid government for African persons, often assigned on the basis of ethnicity and language.

[5] From 1992, formerly white suburban schools were opened to children of all races. Different models were

from not only the surrounding suburb have enrolled, but many from nearby townships too. There is thus considerable cultural, linguistic and religious diversity within the school, both among the learners and the staff. The school is deemed to be an 'achieving[6]' school in a district with a number of 'underperforming[7]' schools.

We met in the head of department's (HOD) office, an office he shared with another HOD and which was very close to the school's staffroom. There was a lot of noise from the activity to and from the staff room and a number of interruptions from learners wanting to consult one of the two HODs for various reasons. Transcribing the recordings of the meetings proved to be quite challenging at times due to the background noises and I noted that it took on average six hours to transcribe twenty minutes of discussion.

3.4.2 Participants - Group A

The group of five teachers who agreed to participate in the research included a teacher in her second year of teaching (Dineo), another who has taught for ten years (Carien), a third (the English department HOD and the only male member of the group) who has taught for just over twenty years (Eric), a fourth teacher who has over thirty years of experience as a language teacher (Anne) and the eldest who is a retired teacher (Beth), in her late sixties at the time, teaching in a School Governing Body post (SGB). Teachers in the group also teach several grades and not just grade 8 - all teach at least one other grade higher up in the school. Beth also teaches Afrikaans and Carien teaches Speech and Drama as an extra mural activity.

adopted. Most of them became Model C schools, which meant that the government paid teacher salaries but the schools were responsible for rates and taxes. A smaller number of schools became Model D schools. These
schools were fully funded by the state and served as community/project schools. Fees for Model D Schools were minimal and much lower than Model C schools.

[6] "Achieving" is used to denote schools that achieve a NSC pass rate close to 100% each year.

[7] Schools were termed "underperforming" when they achieved a Grade 12 NSC pass rate under 60%, later adjusted to under 80% and termed "priority" schools..

Teachers	Qualifications	Teaching experience
Anne	B.A (l980) HDE Majors- English/ Art German Afrikaans	Has been teaching mainly grade 11 and 12 for over 30 years. Presently teaching grade 8 and 9.
Beth	B.A (mid 1964) TTHD Majors – Afrikaans/ Psychology	Has taught for over 40 years. Retired teacher presently in a governing body post.
Carien	B.Ed. (FET) (2003) Major- English	Is in her tenth year of teaching
Dineo	BA Languages (2011) PGCE	Is in her second year of teaching.
Eric	BA (1992) HDE Majors- English/ Psychology	Has taught for 20 years. Head of Department (English) and grade 8 English subject head

3.4.3 Research site for second series of meetings

Grade 7 teachers of English from two schools participated in the series of meetings in 2015. Both primary schools are located in the south of Johannesburg, less than ten kilometres apart. Both schools have a significant number of learners who travel to the schools from Soweto[8] as well as learners from the surrounding suburbs.

Three of the four teachers taught at the same school and it was thus agreed that this would be the school to host the meetings. The meetings were held in the classroom of one of these

[8] Soweto is a township south west of the city of Johannesburg, Gauteng. It was a township developed for black people under the apartheid system.

three teachers. On two occasions, the noise from learners playing nearby was quite disruptive and there were often interruptions from the intercom.

3.4.4. Participants – Group B

The group of four teachers who agreed to participate in the second series of meetings in this study included a teacher in his second year of teaching (Warren), another who has taught for seventeen years and is the English HOD at her school (Yasmine), a third who has taught for just over twenty five years (Xena) and the fourth teacher who has over thirty years of experience as a language teacher (Zoe). Except for Yasmine, the rest of the teachers in the group teach both grade six and seven, and they teach other subjects besides English.

Teachers	Qualifications	Teaching experience
Warren	Bachelor of Education (2013)	Second year of teaching
Xena	Higher Diploma in Education 4 (1991)	25 years
Yasmine	B. Ped (1997) majors in English and History B.Ed (Hons) (2004)	14 years
Zoe	Higher Diploma in Education(1984) Further Diploma in Education (1999)	33 years

3.5 Data Analysis

I analysed the data collected using mainly the grounded theory approach developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The focus and intention of this approach is to understand 'what is going on' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p.2). The approach was developed to offer 'a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived theory about a phenomenon' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.24). Grounded theory is about discovery (Strauss, 1987), characterized by four primary criteria: fit, relevance, workability, and modifiability (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1998).

When taking a grounded theory approach, it is necessary to consistently review the data and continually evaluate the process. I thus began the analysis of the transcribed data from

the first series of group meetings by doing a close reading of over one hundred pages of 'talk'. This was then broken down into the 'story' of the six meetings (seven for group B). In writing this story, I recounted the main issues that emerged session by session. This enabled me to develop some sense of what teachers valued and prioritized in their teaching of writing. I learnt something about their questions and concerns about the teaching of writing and gleaned some understanding of the 'steps' they followed when they taught writing. This account was mainly descriptive and was then revisited to arrive at preliminary categories. These included teachers' writing discourses and their discourses about learners. The next stage of the analysis of Group A's meetings entailed selecting themes or concepts that would enable deeper analysis of the data.

A similar process was followed when analysing Group B's meetings. The series of meetings developed differently, partly due to the fact that there was a very different dynamic amongst the teachers in the group and partly due to the changed facilitation style. The meetings also proceeded along a stronger 'developmental' trajectory. The second group's discussions progessed slowly, but they did progress whereas discussions in Group A never seemed to progress beyond identifying teachers' perceptions of learners' learning deficits. However, in the final stage of analysis, the same categories were eventually selected to allow for comparability between the two groups. I hoped that this would enable me to identify possible reasons for the different outcomes in the two groups.

The decision to categorise the analysis of the data from the group meetings according to teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning in the language classroom was influenced by the words of Hargreaves (1989) who states that it is important to 'treat teachers with seriousness and get a sense of the classroom and *school world as they see it,* of the meanings and frameworks of *their actions*' (p. 58 my emphasis).

Analysis of the data from the individual interviews was also done in stages. At first, teachers' 'stories' were summarized before they, too, were organised into three main categories. The decision to focus these categories once again on the beliefs that emerged from teachers' personal narratives was prompted by Timperley et al.'s (2007) assertion that effective professional development initiatives allow for teachers to retrieve their understandings of 'how the world works'. These narratives were then analysed in relation to teachers' perceptions of 'how the world works' in order to enable me to ascertain which teacher qualities and characteristics enhanced and which limited their constructive participation in a PLC.

When teachers had allowed classroom observation, data from this was linked to their interview data if it seemed either to support or contradict what teachers said. Data from samples of learners' writing, where relevant, were also referred to. However, because teachers had granted such limited access to samples of writing and with one exception had not permitted me to select the samples, these offered little data for analysis.

Discourse analysis (Gee, 1999) was also used as it was evident that teachers' use of language was indicative of their beliefs and attitudes. Whilst not used extensively, there was one instance in particular that allowed for a fine grained analysis of teachers' discourse (6.5.1, Table 6).

Many disciplines make use of discourse analysis and it can take many forms (Johnstone, 2002; Heller, 2001; Taylor, 2001; van Dijk, 1997; Tannen, 1989 ;). Taylor defines discourse analysis in its widest sense as "the close study of language in use" (Taylor, 2001, p. 5). It is a close study not only of the organisation of words in a conversation, but of the context of usage: the physical and temporal context surrounding the talk and what is being accomplished through the talk. Teacher talk in group discussions was analysed to learn about some of the beliefs and attitudes that informed teachers' practices. Beliefs are usually seen as 'the way things really are' by the groups holding them, and they become the taken-for-granted ways of making sense of the world'' (Meighan & Harber, 2007, p. 212). Bakhtin (1981) refers to the way that people come to these 'systems of belief' as 'ideological becoming'. He states that at some point people are shaped by an authoritative discourse that is socially accepted, rarely challenged, and infused with authority acknowledged in the past. At other times, people are influenced by an internally persuasive discourse in which a person makes sense of something on their own in a flexible and responsive way. Internally persuasive discourses acknowledge that there is no 'final word' in the construction of meaning: we use the ideas of others to build our own understanding (Bakhtin, 1981 p. 345).

Discourses, then, refer to the language used that represents and fosters a particular ideology within a community of practice (Gee, 2010). Gee (2010) provides tools for discourse analysis and these are shown in the following table:

Table 3: Gee's (2010) tools for discourse analysis

Situated meanings	Social Languages	Discourse models	Situated identities
What are the key words or phrases in this text? What do particular words mean in this context? What do these words mean in this time or place?	What is the grammar and function of this language? What type of person speaks like this? Is this grammar appropriate for the setting?	What are the speaker's underlying assumptions and beliefs? What are the simplified storylines that one must assume for this to make sense? What cultural models does the speaker believe?	What discourses are produced here? Who is the speaker trying to be and what is he or she trying to do? What institutions maintain this type of Discourse? How does one think, act like, dress like?

Situated Meanings

Gee recommends examining the situated meanings, or the meaning of a word in a particular time or place. For example, teachers in this study used the word 'structure' a number of times, but it did not have the same meaning every time it was used and it was important to examine the meaning at the particular time it was used in the teachers' discussions.

Social Languages

The analysis of social languages focuses on how language is used in a particular social context, what kind of identity is constituted by using that kind of language and what work is done through assuming that identity at that moment in that context. Wertsch (1998) refers to social languages being associated with "particular groups of speakers" and the genres they develop in particular types of 'speech situations'. The language of a profession is an example of a social language. Gee extends the concept of social languages by connecting it to the enactment of identity. Thus, in a particular social setting, particular registers of language will be used to demonstrate identity in social settings. Thus, the participants in this study would speak the 'social language' of 'the teacher', and 'the

English teacher' more specifically and would use particular speech genres related to this social language.

Discourse models

It was necessary to examine what teachers said in order to try to ascertain what their underlying beliefs and assumptions might be. For example, in group B, it was evident that Zoe believed writing was a recursive process whilst her colleagues believed otherwise. There were clear ideological contradictions.

Situated identities

Social languages are neither fixed nor permanent. They change with use over time and in relation to contexts of use. Individuals position themselves relative to others by using a particular social language. This results in the enactment of a socially situated identity. It was thus important for me to try to uncover 'who speakers were trying to be and what they were trying to do?' (Vetter, Myers and Hester, 2014). In several instances, teachers situated identities were more broadly 'English teacher' identities than they were 'Teachers of writing' identities,

3.6 Ethics

I approached the Gauteng Department of Education for permission to conduct this research in their schools (Appendix A). Letters of permission were valid for one year only and thus I had to apply for renewed permission at the end of 2013 for 2014 and then at the end of 2014 for 2015. I submitted the required documentation to the Wits School of Education Ethics committee and received a clearance number. Once I had received the necessary permission, I approached the English Subject Advisor in the first selected district and the process unfolded from there. Teachers were asked to sign permission forms allowing me to record and transcribe the group meetings as well as their individual interviews. I assured them of both their own and their school's anonymity in the final report. I have used pseudonyms for all the teachers and their respective schools. All field notes, completed questionnaires, journal entries, copies of learners' writing and transcripts of audio recordings are filed and stored securely in my home.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintain that member checks are an important aspect of ethical procedures in order to "obtain confirmation that the report has captured the data as constructed by the informants, or to correct, amend or extend it, that is, to establish the

credibility of the report" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 236). Unfortunately, because the research process was quite fragmented rather than linear and cohesive, I was unable to conduct member checks. I offered participants of Group A the opportunity to read the transcripts of group meetings and individual interviews but all the teachers declined, stating they would not have the time to read these. By the time I had done the analysis of the transcripts, Anne, Beth, Carien, Dineo and Eric had all left the school at which the research had taken place. With group B, at the beginning of each session I offered the group a summary of the main issues raised in the previous session and asked them to confirm the accuracy of my understanding and interpretation of what I had transcribed. After brief discussion of this, the focus for the next session was then determined. Regrettably, various personal and professional demands prevented any further meetings and discussions of the analysis of data during the remainder of 2015 and into early 2016.

Chapter Four: The PLC that wasn't

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Context

4.3 Action Research Plan and Action

4.4 Reflection

4.4.1 Role of leadership

4.4.2 Intensification of teachers' work

4.4.3 Teacher Incentives

4.4.4 Teacher Agency

4.1 Introduction

As the chapter title indicates, this short chapter describes and reflects on a failed attempt to initiate a PLC. Understanding of and research into the effectiveness of PLCs as vehicles for teacher learning and development is at a relatively early stage of development in South Africa (Cereseto, 2015, Marchant, 2015, Feldman and Fataar, 2014, Brodie, 2013). However, there is evidence from international and national studies that indicates that PLCs can have a positive impact on teacher learning and development. The research also shows that the establishing of PLCs is by no means easy (Stoll et al., 2006). Stoll et al. (2006) state that "there are influences, both within and external to schools that can either facilitate or severely inhibit the process" (p.247).

It is perhaps in recognition of the challenges that are linked to the establishment of PLCs that the DBE enlisted the support and participation of teacher unions in this process. The ISPFTED, where PLCs are first referred to as one of the models of teacher development endorsed by the DBE, states that teacher unions have a responsibility to "promote teacher professionalism through *advocating and supporting the establishment* of PLCs and encouraging teachers to participate actively and meaningfully in these" (DBE and DHET, 2011, P.3 my emphasis).

There is very little detail as to what supporting the establishment of PLCs will entail and Bertram, in her critique of the ISPFTED, aptly states that "The responsibility to understand and engage with teacher learning in its complexity *will lie with the professional development practitioners who will implement the Plan"* (Bertram, 2014, p.90 my emphasis).

The above is true with regard to a number of initiatives outlined in the ISPFTED, but particularly with regard to PLCs as teachers in South Africa are not familiar with this approach to teacher development. I thus designed an action research project in order to extend my own understanding of the process of inception, development and sustainability of a PLC. I needed to explore whether a PLC was yet another of what Dufour and Eaker (2005) refer to as a 'theoretical fad' or whether it could be useful in promoting teacher learning and development within the possibilities and constraints of school realities.

Chappuis et al. (2009) maintain that PLCs work best when teachers participate voluntarily. The first hurdle I thus needed to overcome was securing the commitment of a group of senior phase English Home Language teachers to participate in regular meetings with me over the course of a year. Initially, I had thought to invite the participation of 'interested senior phase English home language teachers' through a weekly newsletter sent by the teachers' organisation for whom I work but was advised that it would be wiser to approach schools and teachers directly.

4.2 Context

In view of the claims made by McLaughlin and Talbert (2010), who state that at least one third of the members of a PLC should have teaching experience and strong instructional skills, I decided to approach the best performing schools in one of the most poorly performing districts. I surmised that teachers at these schools were producing acceptable results in spite of being in an underperforming district and would quite possibly be good at not only identifying problems and articulating concerns but also at proposing ways to address the problems. I selected a district after doing research on the performance of the fifteen Gauteng districts in the previous year's matriculation results, and then selected four schools within the district.

4.3 Action Research Plan and Action

I consulted the English Home Language subject advisor in the selected district before approaching the schools. The English Home Language senior phase subject advisor expressed her support for the project, but was not willing to be involved in any further capacity (4.4.1). She urged me to include 'underperforming' schools, which I agreed to

consider but only once I had a better understanding of PLCs. I proceeded to approach the schools I had selected. I approached four schools.

I met with the principals at each school, and in addition to give them a letter explaining the purpose of my research (Appendix H) explained why I wanted permission to approach the English heads of department to meet with me and gave them the GDE letter of permission for me to do research in Gauteng schools. Each step in my plan flowed smoothly into the next until the time came for me to speak to the teachers. The first significant challenge arose when I met with the teachers at their respective schools.

The HOD at the first school agreed to arrange a meeting for me with the grade 8 English teachers. The scheduled meeting with the HOD and her team took place during a break in a very large, busy, noisy staffroom and it took a while for her to find the relevant staff members even though we had made an arrangement in advance. She introduced me to the grade 8 and 9 language teachers at this meeting and they asked questions after I had presented an outline of my proposal. I indicated that I was planning to approach a few schools in their district and that I hoped to be able to rotate the meeting venues. I also indicated that I would ask to meet with the teachers concerned every two to three weeks. One of the teachers asked how long each meeting would be and I said that these would ideally be an hour to ninety minutes long. Another teacher asked if their participation would count towards their record of professional development activities for their Integrated Quality Management teacher appraisal system (IQMS). I promised to investigate the possibility of this and in fact, after the meeting, contacted the English subject advisor at the Gauteng provincial office who told me she would 'look into it'. Before I left the school, the grade 8 head of English gave me her name and contact details and agreed to have me contact her two weeks later to ascertain what decision had been made by the group of teachers concerned. There were three grade 8 English teachers at this school and I gave each teacher as well as the grade head a copy of a letter that explained the purpose and focus of my research (Appendix F).

In the interim, I contacted the HODs at the other three schools. The fourth school on my list politely refused my request, saying that at that stage they had no idea who would be teaching what and could not make any promises regarding their involvement in such a project in the following year.

Teachers at the second school agreed to meet with me and my first meeting with them was held at the end of what appeared to have been a very busy day. It took time for all the teachers concerned to arrive at the classroom where I was waiting to speak to them. Teachers listened courteously, indicated they had no questions to ask, and agreed that I could contact them within two weeks to find out what their decision was. I left them with copies of my proposal as well as my contact details should they wish to ask any questions. There were 5 teachers at this school but the only one who appeared to be interested in participating was a first year teacher.

Much the same process was followed at the third school. At this school, four teachers met with me. I gave them copies of my proposal, explained what I would be asking of them and grade 8 teachers from two or three other schools in their district, and asked them to give my request some consideration. I once again indicated that I would contact them in two weeks' time to find out what they had decided. One teacher, a fairly experienced teacher this time, indicated that she was quite willing to commit to participating. Another stayed behind to chat to me about the possibility of becoming a workshop facilitator for professional development programmes offered by the union.

Only the teacher/ grade head from the first school came back with a positive response. I met with her at school a second time and we discussed possible afternoons that would be suitable as the school has a very busy extra mural timetable and teachers are required to participate at least two afternoons per week. She also asked if a friend from a school in another district might participate as her friend had expressed an interest in the project.

Teachers at the other schools seemed unwilling to tell me directly that their response to my request was "no". They simply ignored my messages until I eventually gave up trying to contact them. Whilst I considered communicating with them through the principals, I chose not to as I surmised that this might annoy the teachers and make them even more resistant.

I continued to pursue contact with the grade head at the first school. I had arranged to phone her to schedule a third meeting to finalise details with her. I phoned her several times, both on her cell phone and through the school landline and left messages but none of my calls were returned. I eventually phoned the school and spoke to the English HOD who told me that the grade head's son had taken seriously ill and she had not been at school. She was not prepared to offer me any further assistance, and did not feel her grade head would be able to do so either. Thus, after several months of meetings, e-mails and phone

calls, my first attempt to initiate a PLC ended. I had planned the process I would follow, acted upon my plan and met with resistance, albeit passive, from teachers. I needed to understand the reasons for my lack of success.

4.4 Reflection

The claim by Stoll et al. (2006) that 'there are influences, both within and external to schools that can either facilitate or severely inhibit the process of establishing a PLC' was supported by my experiences.

Lieberman and Miller (2011) assert that PLCs are difficult to establish and maintain. They describe the 'eloquence of the PLC model on paper' but express their concern about the lack of information around the 'messiness in practice' (2011, 70). I experienced something of this difficulty and 'messiness' with my first ineffective attempt to initiate a PLC.

Several issues emerged as possible reasons for the disappointing responses from teachers. Firstly, there was the lack of active, visible support from the district and school leadership. Secondly, I observed the effects of the 'intensification of teachers' work' (Kelchtermans, 2009) and the lack of time for additional responsibilities or activities and thirdly, there were no incentives to encourage teachers to participate.

4.4.1 The role of leadership

While both the district and the school leadership had expressed support for my research project, they had not gone beyond giving me permission to invite teachers to participate in the research. It seemed from this point on that the district official and the principals felt they had done their duty. However, the important role of the school leader is emphasised in a number of articles on the implementation of PLCs in various countries. For example, Hargreaves et al. (2013) in their research on PLCs in London and Hong Kong found that school leadership needed to actively support teachers' involvement in PLCs by, for example, making time available for them to participate. Hairon and Dimmock indicate that because there is some ambiguity regarding the role of school leaders in the implementation of PLCs in Singapore, this may lead to positive or negative scenarios. For example, one group of school leaders may simply instruct teachers to carry out PLC activities, using control and monitoring devices rather than winning genuine teacher commitment and consensus whilst another might endorse PLCs in name only, encouraging teachers to be involved in PLC activities but only with minimal resources and effort in order to reduce distractions from the primary task of students' academic achievement. Yet another group

may create the structures for PLCs but neglect the building of a genuine learning culture of shared values necessary for collective teacher learning (Hairon and Dimmock, 2012, p. 419). Teague and Anfara (2012) state that a principal must

- Clearly communicate the expectations that exist for teachers
- Build capacity
- Monitor and review the process (ibid, p. 61).

I suspect that because, at the time, PLCs were an unfamiliar model of teacher development in the South African context, and referred to in very few official documents, school leaders were unaware of what was required of them or their teachers to initiate and sustain a PLC. Hairon and Dimmock maintain that

> The degree to which the PLC initiative is successful in practice is likely to hinge on two aspects in particular*: first, teacher preparedness for the change* (Hairon 2004, 2006; Tripp 2004), and *second, the explicit onus on school leadership and organisation to oversee and support the development of PLCs* (Hairon and Dimmock, 2012, p.414 my emphasis).

Hairon and Dimmock (2012) report that even though the Singapore Ministry of Education's (MOE) introduction of policy on PLCs has been 'evolutionary rather than capricious' (Hairon and Dimmock, 2012, p.410), teachers have been slow to embrace it as a model of teacher development. Since 1997, Singapore's MOE has placed increased responsibility for professional development on teachers themselves. They have also begun to link curriculum development to student learning and attempted to integrate teacher professional development into their professional practice. Teachers form "Learning teams" with the purpose of improving their instructional practices through development in subject content knowledge and pedagogy. Increasing emphasis has also been placed on collaborative, community oriented forms of professional development, encouraging the use of reflection and professional enquiry. Nevertheless, teachers from schools piloting PLCs reported that their workloads and the hierarchical work structures to which they are accustomed have made the effective functioning of PLCs challenging. Teachers were not accustomed to, or it seems, comfortable with, initiating their own learning. Only one hour of time allocated per week for 'engagement in professional dialogue' has also proved to be inadequate.

South African teachers, much like teachers in Singapore, are accustomed to 'top-down' teacher development initiatives. Since 1994 there have been many programmes aimed at

teacher development (1.1.1). These have comprised long and short courses, workshops, meetings of clusters of schools and cascaded training, provided both by the national and provincial departments of education and by NGOs. Schools and teacher unions have also provided development opportunities. Cereseto maintains that the provision of teacher development has not been coherent, or targeted (2015, p.5).

Nevertheless, these are the types of teacher development initiatives to which teachers have become accustomed and they know what to expect. An initiative that proposes a 'bottom-up' process is unknown and largely untested in the South African context and it should be noted that such 'bottom up' innovations also do not have an impressive record (Hargreaves and Ainscow, 2015). They maintain that it is only 'innovative high tech schools' (p.43) that successfully implement 'bottom up' innovations and these do not necessarily spread to classrooms and schools in other contexts.

In 2012/ 2013, I had only the ISPFTED to give credence to this study and in order for the research process to move forward, it was evident that I needed to do more than just hand my proposal to school leadership and assume they would read and understand what I wished to investigate. In my initial meetings with them, I needed to provide as simple and as clear an explanation of PLCs as possible, outline what would be required of teachers and emphasise the need for school leadership's active, ongoing support for the teachers who agreed to participate in this study. Since then, there has been increased promotion of policy on the establishment of PLCs. This has included the official launch of PLCs and subject committees in August 2014 and the issuing of a guideline document in May 2015. At the time of writing, five years after the publication of the ISPFTED, the term 'PLC' is better known and more widely used. Many departmental officials have reported on the establishment of PLCs in their districts. However, an appropriate understanding of what a PLC should be is not evident. Fullan's (2005) warning that the term PLC has 'travelled easily' while the meaning of the underlying concept has not appears to be correct. From the accounts of some teachers, it would seem that 'PLC' is a renaming of what was previously referred to as 'cluster meetings'. Attendance is not voluntary and teachers receive notices instructing them to attend and a pre-determined agenda is provided by the relevant subject advisor.

4.4.2. Intensification of Teachers' work

Teachers' unwillingness to commit to participation in PLCs is well documented in the international research literature. Where it is mandated and not voluntary, Wells and Feun (2012) refer to the development of a 'resistant culture' which is evident in 'passive – aggressive' behaviours. For example, while having to be physically present at meetings, teachers are silent and take no active part in the discussions. One of the possible reasons for this is because, in many countries, including South Africa, 'the teaching job has intensified: more has to be achieved, in less time and with fewer facilities' (Kelchtermans, 2009:48, Hairon and Dimmock, 2012)). Priestley et al. (2011) state that worldwide, change has been imposed on schools and they support the claim that there has been an intensification of teachers' work. Increased bureaucracy has led to a proliferation of paperwork and South African teachers have reported feeling increasingly disempowered and professionally marginalised (Cereseto, 2009). Since 1997, with each 'new' or 'revised' national curriculum, teachers have reported growing administrative responsibilities. Curriculum 2005 brought with it inaccessible discourse (Chisholm et al., 2000) and curriculum and assessment policies that were not aligned. This resulted in the recording and reporting requirements for assessment being substantially increased. The introduction of the first version of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), instead of reducing the administrative workload for teachers, also resulted in unreasonable requirements for recording on every Assessment Standard in the curriculum documents in many instances. The most recent version of the NCS, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) has resulted in teachers not only having to record excessive numbers of assessment activities and tasks (DBE, 2011, English Home Language Foundation, Intermediate and Senior Phase), but also having to submit reports on the pacing of their coverage of the curriculum on a weekly basis in some districts.

Masterson's comments (1.2) about her own and her colleagues' feelings of resentment, which prevented them from engaging thoughtfully and productively with the materials or the new curriculum (2013), indicates a similar culture of resistance among South African teachers to that of the teachers in the Wells and Feun study. I thus felt it was best that the teachers I had approached had not been coerced into participating in the PLC. Brodie (2013) states that teachers need to be supported in order to encourage them to put in the

necessary work and time required to participate in effective professional learning activities which are time consuming and demanding. I needed to find practical ways of providing the kind of support that would encourage teachers to put in the necessary work and time. Past experience suggested that one of the ways to do this might be through incentives.

4.4.3. Teacher Incentives

I was unable to offer teachers any financial benefits (covering their travel costs or paying stipends), nor improved professional qualifications or professional development points for participating in my research (Owens, 2014; Poekert, 2012; Wells and Feun, 2012; Pella, 2011; Richmond and Manokore, 2010,). The Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) programme being phased in by the South African Council for Educators (SACE) stipulates that teachers will need to earn a number of CPTD points over a period of three years, but level one teachers (classroom teachers who are not heads of departments, deputy principals or principals) will only be registered to start earning points from 2017. I thus did not have even CPTD points to use as an incentive for participation. Nor was I able to arrange time out of their school day instead of them having to stay at the end of a tiring school day to participate in this study. As I have already indicated, teachers in the schools I approached seemed hard pressed to find the time and energy to commit to on-going involvement in a PLC. A strong incentive may have provided some motivation to do so.

4.4.4. Teacher Agency

Batra contends that, in India, teachers are viewed as implementing agencies of

> larger interests: national interest as defined by the State; a channel of reproduction of the officially approved curriculum often via rote learning. The teacher is seen as an empty repository which will be moulded and filled by an ‘enlightened' and highly ‘competent' teacher education system (Batra, 2009, p.132).

A similar positioning of teachers is evident in South Africa. The ISPFTED, whilst acknowledging that teachers are central to their own development, mandates that teachers will ‘test themselves’ on ‘what they need to know and do’ (ISPFTED, 2011, p. 6). The ‘knowing’ and ‘doing’ is generally directly linked to teachers knowing how to better prepare their learners for various external assessments such as the Annual National Assessments (ANAs) and National Senior Certificate (NSC) (DBE, Action Plan to 2019). However, as Bertram indicates, the ISPFTED “does not engage with the school context in

which teachers work and sets out a linear system for identifying and addressing teachers' needs" (Bertram, 2014, p.90).

The assumption that learners perform poorly in external assessments such as the ANAs and the NSC exams only because teachers do not know what they need to know or do what they need to do is oversimplifying the challenges in the education system. Research by Shalem and Hoadley (2007) and Soudien (2007) has shown that too often the weight of responsibility for bringing about change and improvement in teaching and learning is placed on teachers when in fact there are other major contributing factors.

The teachers I approached at the selected schools refused to participate in my research project for a number of reasons already outlined but perhaps what they also demonstrated by their actions was that they have some sense of 'agency'. I think South African teachers are feeling less and less able to say 'no' in the context of their teaching, their schools and their districts but it is evident that they still have a belief that in some instances they can choose what they wish to prioritise for their own professional development. PLCs have not as yet gained strong 'currency' among South African teachers perhaps because little is known and understood about them as a model of teacher development and possibly because the model is very different to that which many teachers are accustomed. Most teachers have experienced professional development that Little describes as 'episodic, superficial, and disconnected from their own teaching interests or recurring problems of practice' (2006, p. 1), and while many of these experiences may have been unsatisfactory, they are at least familiar.

"The PLC that wasn't" delivered important albeit difficult insights for me and I grasped anew the need to understand the complexity of teacher learning, especially through a model so different to those to which teachers have become accustomed. Consistent with the process of action research, I now had to explore another way of doing things and to think differently about how to go about establishing a PLC with a focus on the teaching of writing. My second attempt is described in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: The PLC that wouldn't: teacher identities, facilitation style and other factors that prevented change to writing pedagogies

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Teachers

5.2.1 Anne -…in the old days

5.2.1.1 History as a learner

5.2.1.2 Initial Teacher Education and early teaching experience

5.2.1.3 Present practice and perception of learners

5.2.2 Beth….you never stop learning

5.2.2.1 History as a learner

5.2.2.2 Initial Teacher Education and early teaching experience

5.2.2.3 Present practice and perception of learners

5.2.3 Carien…that's how I was taught

5.2.3.1 History as a learner

5.2.3.2 Initial Teacher Education and early teaching experience

5.2.3.3 Present practice and perception of learners

5.2.4 Dineo….the what and the how

5.2.4.1 History as a learner

5.2.4.2 Initial Teacher Education and early teaching experience

5.2.4.3 Present practice and perception of learners

5.2.5 Eric….we get sidetracked with so many things

5.2.5.1 History as a learner

5.2.5.2 Initial Teacher Education and early teaching experience

5.2.5.3 Present practice and perception of learners

5.3 Reflection

5.3.1 Teachers' beliefs about how they have developed as teachers' of writing

5.3.2 Effective ways to continue to learn and develop as teachers of writing.

5.4 Group meetings

5.4.1 Analysis of meetings

5.4.1.1 Teachers' beliefs about teaching writing

5.4.1.2 Teachers' beliefs about teaching English

5.4.1.3 Teachers' beliefs about learners

5.4.1.4 Teachers' beliefs about learning

5.4.1.5 The Learning Activity

5.4.1.6 Structure and support provided by school

5.5 Reflection

5.1. Introduction

The main sources of data drawn on in this chapter are interviews with five teachers and transcripts of six audio recorded group meetings held over three school terms in 2013 during which a second attempt was made to establish a PLC.

I begin with providing an overview of each teacher interview and then consider the possible influence of teachers' histories on the ways in which they participated in the group sessions, either enabling or constraining the group's development towards a PLC. The relevant research literature suggests that teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes impact on how they learn and what they learn from professional development activities. For example, Spillane and Thompson contend that much of teacher learning consists

> …not merely of acquiring more information and skills, but of transforming or reconstructing a great deal of what most teachers now know, believe, and habitually do. Most teachers will have to unlearn much of what they already know as well as learn new things. For most teachers (indeed, most people), such reconstructive learning requires sustained, honest, substantive interaction about the new ideas with other people who understand these new ideas at least a little better than they do (Spillane and Thompson, 1997, p. 186).

In the above quote, Spillane and Thompson (1997) express a view closely aligned to Timperley et al.'s (2007) proposed theory of professional learning which contends that professional development activities should challenge teachers' existing assumptions so that these can be adapted and, if necessary, changed. My involvement with teacher development initiatives over the past fifteen years has provided me with many opportunities to observe and to interact with teachers. There appear to be some strongly entrenched practices, and whilst I have noted that teachers are often eager to 'acquire new information and skills', the time and opportunity to review what they 'habitually do' and to engage in 'reconstructive learning' is rarely available. This study enabled me to gauge the potential of an organic, 'bottom up' model of teacher learning and development such as a PLC, to encourage teachers to evaluate what they 'habitually do' and potentially to engage in reconstructive learning.

There is also a growing body of literature, linked to the need to engage teachers' 'initial understandings', that foregrounds teachers' biographies, dispositions and identities as key factors that influence both their teaching practice and their own ways of learning. Samuel (2008), argues that professional development initiatives can succeed when designed and implemented with a deep understanding of the 'biographical, contextual, institutional and programmatic forces that impinge on teacher identity' (p 3). This resonates with Timperley et al.'s (2007) contention that teachers' need to be able to cue and retrieve their initial understandings of how the world works. For this study, it was the 'world of the Senior Phase English Home Language classroom'. 'Cueing and retrieving' initial understandings of how the 'world works' in teachers' classrooms would be an important stage of the professional development activity if I hoped to introduce teachers to new ideas and concepts.

In the first part of this chapter, I present and analyse the data from individual interviews with teachers who participated in group meetings during 2013 in order to understand factors that may have influenced what they chose to learn and how they chose to learn it. I discuss what these reveal about their understanding of how writing should be taught. The following questions, linked to the aim of this study, which is to investigate what factors enable and / or constrain the development of a PLC which has as its focus the teaching of writing, frame the discussion:

- What do teachers' comments reveal about their beliefs about how they have developed as teachers of writing?
- What do they believe is the most effective way to continue to learn and develop as teachers of writing?
- Do their beliefs about how they as teachers should engage in ongoing teacher development activities promote or constrain their participation in a PLC?

5.2 Teachers

At the time of the group meetings the teachers taught at least one grade eight class English Home Language. The following table summarises their qualifications and teaching experience:

Table 4: Summary of Goup A teachers' qualifications and teaching experience

Teachers	Qualifications	Teaching experience
Anne	B.A (l980) HDE Majors- English/ Art German Afrikaans	Has been teaching mainly grade 11 and 12 for over 30 years. Presently teaching grade 8 and 9.
Beth	B.A (mid 1964) TTHD Majors – Afrikaans/ Psychology	Has taught for over 40 years. Retired teacher presently in a governing body post. Also teaches grade 12 Afrikaans.
Carien	B.Ed. (FET) (2003) Major- English	Is in her tenth year of teaching. Teaches grade 9 and 10 as well.
Dineo	BA Languages (2011) PGCE	Is in her second year of teaching. Also teaches grade 10 English.
Eric	BA (1992) HDE Majors- English/ Psychology	Has taught for 22 years. Head of Department (English) and grade 8 English subject head. Teaches grade 10 and grade 12 English as well.

The group was demographically diverse, with one black teacher, one coloured teacher and three white teachers[9]

5.2.1 Anne ….in the old days……

Anne has taught English for more than thirty years. Most of her experience has been in teaching grade 11 and 12 English in secondary schools in Kwa-Zulu Natal. She also spent some time teaching business English at a Further Education and Training College.

[9] In this study I refer to the social construct of "race" (black, coloured, Indian and white) according to historical practices in South Africa. The practices persisted officially until 1994 (even later because the new curriculum and restructuring of education departments happened after 1996) but their impact continues to this day. In South Africa "race" is still use as a classifier ostensibly in order to gauge levels of redress.

Anne came to the group highly recommended by the principal of the school who described her as an exceptionally skilled and knowledgeable English teacher. Her colleagues also referred to her as one of the people they would go to for 'help' when there was something they did not understand in the curriculum. She was one of the two teachers who attended every session although she had to leave a few minutes early on two occasions. She was always a lively, articulate and outspoken participant in the group discussions. She was the only teacher in this group who allowed me to observe in her classroom, indicative perhaps of her confidence as a teacher.

5.2.1.1 Anne's history as a learner

Although Anne was generally vague in her responses to questions about her own experiences of writing as a learner and in her preservice education because 'it was a very long time ago', she often contrasted what school and learners were like 'then' with what they are like 'now'. "Then" (when she was at school)

- *We all read in those days so you knew how introductions and stories and conclusions went*
- *Because we read we had an innate feel of how to write*
- *Teachers didn't take you through step by step, they assumed you knew what you were doing by the time you got to high school. That doesn't happen anymore*
- *When we had to write you were given your title and you ran with it*
- *You sort of knew about paragraphing and introductions and what have you*

Firstly, what Samuel (2008) refers to as one of the most powerful influences on teacher learning, their 'personal lived experiences and history of teaching and learning' (p. 12), is evident in many of the statements made by Anne. Samuels contends that teachers will often retreat into the 'safe world' of their background and biography, restricting movement 'since it encompasses looking over one's shoulders to see where one came from' (2008, p.12).

Secondly, given that Pennycook (1994) maintains that all pronouns are political. Anne's use of 'we' is, in this context, perhaps more exclusive than it is inclusive. "We" being the learners who read and knew and could write well, whilst the learners she taught were often referred to as 'they'. They (the other) cannot write, they cannot spell. What was not clear, or not made explicit, was whether 'we' and 'they' encompassed a class, a race group or home and first additional speakers of English.

There are also traces of Anne's beliefs about writing in these statements. She believes there is a strong connection between reading and writing. Whilst Cremin and Myhill (2012)

confirm that reading repertoires enrich writing repertoires, they explain that it is not just reading widely that enables learners to write well, but " Fine grained opportunities to study texts in context, to discuss their forms and features and to imitate them" (p.58).

While Cremin and Myhill (2012) maintain that reading not only extends 'young people's ear for language' but also widens their vocabularies and helps them to create an 'inner treasure chest packed with words on which writers can draw' (p. 60), they caution that words in themselves are not enough and cite the example of "packing sentences with adjectives and "wow" words' explaining that this 'does nothing to enrich writing'. Teachers need to 'recruit reading to the task of writing and recruit writing to the task of thinking and meaning making" (Cremin and Myhill, 2012, p.62). These statements indicate a need for a far more purposeful and explicit linking of reading and writing by the teacher rather than just a belief that reading impacts on learners' ability to write well. In similar vein, Dornbrack and Dixon (2014) assert that 'reading for writing is essential' and argue that writing pedagogy needs "to include careful, sustained planning that integrates reading and discussion in order to develop thinking and reasoning" (p.5).

For Anne, being able to write well was not just about rich resources of background knowledge and experience or strong foundations in reading (and her words imply that, in part, this foundation was established in primary school), but also something 'innate', a gift one possessed or failed to possess (Street, 2003). A study by Norman and Spencer (2005) also revealed the widely held belief that being able to write was a fixed talent and not a craft that can be improved with instruction and feedback. Anne does not appear to acknowledge the impact of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991) or any other issues that impact on learners' language development. She does not appear to recognise the very privileged upbringing and education she has enjoyed, being able to attend well-resourced schools with appropriately qualified teachers (2.3).

5.2.1.2 Initial teacher education and early teaching experience

Anne was also very vague about her initial teacher education, asserting that because she graduated in 1980 ('a very long time ago'), she could not remember much of what she had studied. She completed a Bachelor of Arts degree and then a Higher Diploma in Education, which included an "English method" component but she could not recall details of it. When I asked her to share how her current approach to the teaching of writing had evolved, her responses were once again characterised by 'then' and 'now'. When she first qualified as a teacher, the 'level was so different'. "In the old days" (a phrase she used

several times), learners were able to write longer texts (two to two and a half pages). “The old days’” this time referred to the early days of her teaching career, over thirty years ago. She maintained that ‘kids didn’t need babying through all those steps, they seemed to know the structure of an essay’. ‘Now’ she struggled to get one to one a half pages from learners, and often those were ‘rambling and repetitive’. Anne’s comment is supported to some extent by research. In South Africa, recent research on the quality of learners’ writing suggests generally inadequate levels of writing proficiency (Kerfoot and Van Heerden, 2014; Dornbrack and Dixon, 2014; Mendelowitz, 2010; de Chaisemartin, 2010; Hendriks, 2005). In a study of the classroom writing of learners in their additional languages at differently resourced schools in the Eastern Cape, Hendricks (2005) described classroom writing as ‘routinised and dull’. However, the research indicates that teachers’ weak content and pedagogic knowledge is largely responsible for learners’ poor performance. Kerfoot and Van Heerden (2015) maintain that in South Africa, generally, after grade 3, writing ‘for the vast majority of South African learners is both narrowly conceived and poorly developed’ (p. 237).

The use of the word ‘babying’ indicates her perception of her learners as being at very basic levels of development. This is supported by her description of how she has had to become more explicit in her teaching, using ‘simpler topics’. She also reinforces the ‘baby’ image by describing her learners as having ‘short attention spans’. And, as to arguably the case with a small child, she said “Nowadays teaching is more about ‘disciplining’ than it is about teaching’. Anne’s comments indicate a deficit view of learners (1.2.2.1). According to Mendelowitz (2014), such a view is likely to influence teachers’ choices of unproductive writing pedagogies and they resort to low level drill and skill instruction (2.5.1.4). This is evident in Anne’s linear approach to the teaching of writing consistent with the ‘plan-draft-revise’ version‘(Cremin and Myhill (2012) of the process approach presented in the curriculum document (2.5.1.3).

Anne also described much of what was required in the curriculum as being ‘very fiddly’. “They’re” (the Department of Education) worried about putting the cherry on top when the kids haven’t baked the cake yet ’. She considered the ‘ingredients’ that were needed to bake the cake to be broader world views, greater background knowledge, basic reading, writing and spelling skills and richer vocabularies. Rather than being asked to write the more challenging genres in the curriculum such as argumentative essays, she believed her learners should be mastering the skills to write correct, basic sentences and paragraphs.

Mendelowitz, whilst acknowledging that 'learners' limited linguistic resources pose another layer of challenge to the existing challenges', argues that it is exactly this 'narrow, back-to-basics conceptualisation of literacy that limits learners' literacy development.' (2010, p. 325).

5.2.1.3 Present practice and perceptions of learners

As mentioned, Anne perceived her current teaching practice to be more about 'disciplining' than about teaching. She also spoke in terms of 'bright' learners and the 'not so bright learners'. She expressed sympathy for the small number of 'bright' learners who, she believed, were disadvantaged by being in the same classes as the 'not so bright' learners. She said she often felt that she wanted 'to take the bright kids and say: listen, let's get out of this box, let's think differently, because you see, they can'. Bright learners, she contended, 'want to do more in-depth, more thinking about what they're writing', whereas the rest of the class 'don't even know they're in a box, don't know what's out there'. These learners, who are by far the majority, are 'afro-centric, even Jo'burgcentric if there is such a word'. Bright learners, she argued, could be inspired whilst 'unbright' (a word she used) ones 'can't listen and appreciate, you know, the 'taste' for language-they (not so bright learners) should be learning spelling, sentence structure.

These comments are further evidence of her view that one either has an ability to write or one does not. If you are 'bright', intelligent, capable, clever then you would almost automatically be able to write well. In Anne's view, success as a writer is not dependent on the skill or knowledge of the teacher to facilitate the intellectual and cognitive development of learners to enable them to develop as writers.

I wondered if the diversity of learners at the school perhaps had something to do with her perceptions even though she never referred to their socio-economic or socio-cultural backgrounds. She never specified who 'they' ('Afrocentric', 'Jo'burgcentric' learners, 'unbright' learners) were in terms of where they came from or their socioeconomic status. There were learners at the school who came from homes in the area where the school was located and these were generally middle class families, some who spoke English as their home language and others who did not. An increasing number came from nearby townships even though there were high schools in the townships. Were the 'bright' learners those from the middle class homes in the area? Were they the learners who spoke English as their home language? Learners she deemed to be 'bright' learners may have been those with "cultural capital"- learners with the knowledge, skills, and behaviors that are

transmitted to an individual within their sociocultural context through the way that schools are structured and, in particular by the family. Bourdieu (1991) maintains that those who enter the classroom with sufficient cultural capital of the appropriate, dominant type—capital that fits well with the discourse and values of schools—are well positioned to increase such cultural capital further.

Anne's assertions that there are learners who 'can' and those who 'cannot' write and it is not dependent on the teacher to facilitate their development as writers are challenged by the findings in a longitudinal study conducted by Heath (1983). Her ethnographic study, described in her book "Ways with Words: Language Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms" spanned ten years. The study highlighted the differences between the home and school literacy practices of three different communities of people in Carolina, USA. Heath showed how the culture of the communities shaped the 'language' learnt by the children. The children from the community who learnt language in a way that was most closely related to the language required at school coped better at school than those from the communities who did not. It was only when teachers became aware of the differences and made specific efforts to provide relevant activities for learners from 'disadvantaged' communities, activities that linked their reading and writing skills to what they knew from participating in family and community life that they discovered that these learners could learn and produce good work. Heath's study thus demonstrated the significant impact teachers can have if they are willing to create 'instructional bridges' (Jesson et al., 2013, p. 217) that enable learners to move from expressing themselves in their home dialects to expressing themselves in the standard English that is required for success in the educational system.

In describing how she teaches writing, Anne listed the following 'steps'

- Brainstorming ideas and learning format of genre
- Writing first draft
- Final draft
- Marking
- Feedback based on common errors identified through marking

In elaborating on her implementation of the above approach, she stated that, while learners did 'brainstorming', she did not 'spoon feed [learners]; [they] do not brainstorm to the point where they're all going to write the same essay' (spoon-feeding raising the 'baby' image again). Brainstorming, she maintained, has got to be limited because 'if you give them ideas, they will rewrite your ideas and there's no originality'. Anne's comments were

not significantly different to those made by teachers in a study conducted by Mendelowitz (2010) in which she noted the dilemma many teachers of writing confront in deciding how much scaffolding to provide. Mendelowitz maintains that a certain level of imitation is part of learning as long as imitation is only a step in the process (2010). "Creative reworking" (p.73) is, ideally, the next step and teachers need to provide stimuli to generate ideas and triggers for the 'creative reworking' of texts. This 'step' appears to be missing in Anne's account. However, some support was provided because learners' vocabulary was so limited. Anne stated that she 'often [threw] a few words to them or [she] asked them what words would help with the topic'.

What I saw when I observed one of her lessons reinforced what she said about not 'spoon feeding' learners. After a very brief introduction to the collaborative writing exercise learners were to do (literally 'throwing' or 'tossing' a few details at learners with reference to which learners had to work together in groups and what they had to do), she gave them the pictures they needed and left them to get on with their task while she went to the staffroom to get a cup of coffee. There were twenty four learners in the class and except for one lively boy, they were very quiet, courteous and focused. They were, apparently, the 'bright' class. The school took the top performers in each grade and put them in one class. The rest of the classes were made up of learners with varying abilities and, according to all the teachers, were very diverse with some very good at English and others extremely weak. When Anne returned, she responded to one group's query, explained to the class the meaning of 'protagonist' and 'antagonist', and then once again expected them to continue on their own while she spoke to me.

Anne had a strong writing identity even though she no longer did a lot of personal writing. She used to do personal writing 'when she had the energy'. Again, her discourse featured 'then' and 'now'. She had 'tried, but not completed, three novels', written a variety of poems and song lyrics and two plays. She confessed to 'not having the confidence to show (her writing) to anybody'. Now, she maintained, teaching the 'juniors' was so physically exhausting, she did not have the energy to do any personal writing. She described the scene at the school as 'screaming and shouting and the kids are all talking …….there's no academic focus'. Arguably, her admission that she did not have the energy to do any personal writing anymore is indicative of her awareness of the 'cognitive load' that writing requires of a writer. This awareness has, to some extent, influenced her teaching strategies in that she described one or two activities during group discussions that she had developed

to help learners generate ideas during the initial stages of writing. For example, when 'getting their ideas out', she encouraged them to turn their pages sideways and to ignore lines and 'just write'.

Anne was a confident, articulate member of Group A. She voiced strong opinions, based on her own history and experiences, a history that revealed that she had taught successfully ('success' defined in terms of the good matriculation results of the learners she had taught) at prestigious schools in Kwa Zulu Natal. Her apparent resistance to change can, perhaps, be explained by Spillane, Reiser and Reimer (2002) who suggest Anne's responses might be part of a strategy to preserve her self-esteem. They argue that professionals want to believe that they have performed well in the past and are hesitant to concede that their efforts may have been misdirected.

5.2.2 Beth ……you never stop learning

Beth graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1964. She majored in Afrikaans. She then completed the Transvaal Teachers Higher Diploma at a teachers' college. Beth missed two of the group meetings, one due to the death of a close family friend and the other because she was called out of the meeting by the deputy principal who wanted her to rectify certain errors in her administrative files.

Beth's interview was shorter than the others because she was anxious to leave school "before the traffic was too heavy". This had, in fact, been her concern at every meeting.

5.2.2.1 Beth's history as a learner

Like Anne, Beth noted that her formal education was a long time ago. She attended an all-girls primary and high school and continues to be a strong proponent of single sex schools. She was a successful learner and came from a family where education was highly valued. She recalls having very good teachers and being particularly good at languages. She was an avid reader and enjoyed writing.

5.2.2.2 Initial teacher education and early teaching experiences

Beth studied for a Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in Afrikaans and English over forty years ago. This was followed by a teaching diploma from a teachers' college. She did not recall receiving any instruction on the teaching of writing. The focus of her courses was largely on language and literature. She then taught at a school in the north east of Johannesburg. During her early teaching career, she continued to study and completed Psychology I and II.

Her second teaching post was at the Johannesburg Hospital School, where she became a head of department. During her time in this post, she earned three merit awards[10]. She then accepted a post at a prestigious independent school where she was appointed as a senior Afrikaans teacher. When it became necessary for the school to retrench senior staff, she went back to the Hospital School where she eventually became the principal.

She described her career as having been "varied and exciting". She was a member of the Independent Examination Board (IEB) for 15 years. Educational development projects in underprivileged areas have also been of great importance to her and she did extensive work in schools in areas like Alexandra, a township area north east of Johannesburg, with many learners coming from underprivileged backgrounds. She has written and presented conference papers on the long term effects of hospitalisation on children and adolescents. She has also conducted numerous workshops on whole school evaluation. Her own expressed attitude towards continuing professional teacher development was that 'you never stop learning'.

In addition to her teaching experience, Beth has had other 'rich and varied' experiences in the broader education sector. She described travelling extensively and being able to observe many education models in both North and South America. She described being particularly impressed by ORT[11] schools in Argentina. She was a studies coordinator for the South African Board for Jewish Education (SABJE) and worked with a professor from the University of the Witwatersrand on integrating the immigrant learner into South African classrooms. She also participated in the establishment of the Education Sector for Education and Training Authority (ETDP-SETA). In 2015 Beth celebrated fifty years in the teaching profession.

5.2.2.3 Present practices and perceptions of learners

After retiring as a principal, Beth explained that she decided that she wanted to go back to 'plain old teaching'. I understood this to mean that she wanted to come to school to teach without having to be involved in other aspects of school such as extra-murals and additional administrative responsibilities. She had been appointed to teach Afrikaans and English at a variety of government schools over the past ten years and she participated in

[10] Transvaal Education Department teacher appraisal system awarded merits to teachers who achieved above a certain score on the appraisal forms. Teachers could earn up to three merits.
[11] coined from the acronym of the Russian words 'Obshestvo Remeslennogo zemledelcheskogo Truda', meaning 'The Society for Trades and Agricultural Labour'.

my study whilst at one of these schools. She said , "*There is so much I could teach them if they would let me"*

Beth, whilst believing that there was a great deal she wanted and needed to teach her learners at her current school, described being unable to do so mainly because there were such severe discipline problems. Perhaps this was why she chose not to invite me to do classroom observation.

She believed learners needed a great deal of explicit teaching of English, but that they needed to see the various skills as 'integrated'. She admits that since being at the school, she had seen things she had never thought that she would see at a school, but was unwilling to specify what these were. Her exposure to vocational schools and education in other countries made her a strong proponent of vocational education for learners such as those at the school who she believed, like Anne, Carien and Eric, did not have the aptitude to master high level knowledge and skills.

Despite the depth of experiences evident in Beth's history and her range of experiences in the education sector, the interview turned out to be superficial. It might be that the level of success and recognition she had enjoyed in the range of contexts in which she had worked were not necessarily valued in the context in which she was presently teaching. A large part of her teaching career was in senior school management positions even though she started out as a language teacher. She admitted that the current administrative requirements at the school were challenging and that her forgetfulness often got her into 'trouble'. Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) pinpoint the significance of the 'stage of life' teachers are in. They maintain that this has an influence on the amount of energy and openness that teachers can sustain. Beth's story suggested there was a time when she had a great deal of 'energy and openness' as a teacher and school manager, but that appears to have diminished and she seems to have found it demanding adjusting to a school that is evidently different to most of the schools she has worked in during her extensive career.

5.2.3 Carien ….. that's how I was taught!

Carien graduated with a Bachelor of Education degree in 2003. She specialised in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase of schooling (Grade 10-12) and majored in English. Carien has taught for nine years. She taught in Thailand, the United Kingdom and then at 'a very conservative Christian school on the West Rand' before being appointed in the post at her present school.

She shared with me her own love for writing and indicated that she had registered for a distance learning degree in Creative Writing at the beginning of 2013. She attended three of the six meetings held. She missed the second meeting because she had a meeting with her speech and drama learners (Speech and Drama was offered as an extra mural activity at the school). The next meeting she missed because her grandmother had passed away. She resigned from her post at the school early in the third term.

5.2.3.1 Carien's history as a learner

Carien spoke with enthusiasm about her own experiences as a learner in Afrikaans medium schools. She made two particularly interesting comments:

> *I was very fortunate to have very excellent teachers in my life, especially English ….that inspired me to become a teacher*
> *I did well in school because I was blessed with a combination of personal love, lots of encouragement from home and an innate sense of all things linguistic*

Carien expresses an awareness of the privilege she enjoyed when she says, "I was very fortunate", an awareness that Anne did not express. Furthermore, these two statements suggest that Carien believes there are three things that contribute to successful language learning. On the one hand, it is evident that she believes that good teaching enables a learner to be successful, and on the other, she indicates that a loving and supportive home environment is also important. However, like Anne, she believes that one needs to have an 'innate sense of all things linguistic' if one is to do well. I noted this with interest as it reinforced many of the things she said in the group meetings. She was the teacher who said things like:

> *These kids come from parents who from the onset do not know anything.*

> *Generally the students who are excellent we inherit in this way- we don't mould them that way …They come to us excellent due to their circumstances, due to your involved parents there'll be this uncle there'll be this and this person will have taken an incredible interest in the child's development…we can develop that .*

While Carien's perception is similar to Anne's that there is an element of 'innateness' to language learning, unlike Anne, she also acknowledges the role of 'cultural capital' in promoting successful learning. She believes that families provide learners with important foundations which teachers can then 'build' on or 'develop. The word 'mould' is also used by Carien, hinting at behaviourist views of teaching and learning.

5.2.3.2 Initial teacher education and early teaching experience

> *I will fairly state that my four years at university was an absolute waste of time and money.*

These negative words were spoken by Carien more than once during her interview and during group discussions, and she elaborated on why she believed this. She maintained that teaching is 'a practical occupation' and that 'no book' could prepare teachers for the realities of the classroom. She felt that even the weeks of teaching experience where students spent time in classrooms and had opportunities to observe teaching and to practice presenting lessons themselves were a waste of time. She believed that a teaching qualification should be made up of two years 'theoretical training' and two years of 'apprenticeship'. She asserted that whilst she 'had found her academic pursuits very stimulating', it was a 'waste to have a person who had visited a high school last when he or she was in matric tell you how to discipline an adolescent'.

Teachers' widely held perceptions of the 'gap' between the 'theory' learned during initial teacher education programmes and the realities of classroom practice were strongly voiced by Carien. Villanueva (2007), in the forward to the collection of essays entitled "Closing the Gap" describes how he first encountered this perception when he addressed a group of secondary school teachers. He discovered that they did not want to know about 'the conventions of editing' or the 'stuff of grammar' but rather how to deal with 'the reality of two hundred students a day, of multiple requirements to teach each day, of curricula imposed from above, of student resistance' (p. xx). However, Jackson and Vavra (2007) maintain that both student teachers coming in to initial teacher education programmes and teachers participating in continuing professional development initiatives need to be challenged to examine or reexamine their beliefs so that the cycle of inadequate teaching instruction can be broken. The challenge for me was to persuade Carien that she could use theory in a positive way to inform her practice rather than dismissing it so decisively.

Carien's approach to the teaching of writing was similar in many ways to those of Anne and Beth: a brainstorming session, time to write a first draft, edit it and then submit the second and final version. She believed that she was taught in that way by her teachers and it was the way colleagues she respected taught writing. She said

> *I was very fortunate to have very excellent teachers, in my life. Especially when it came to English, so maybe that inspired me to become a teacher. She [the English teacher] actually recommended me for my first job and everything, and she still teaches-her methods are fantastic. All of the good teachers employ, more or less,*

> *the same techniques whether they've met each other or not. It's quite remarkable. My teaching is absolutely based on what I experienced at school and my peers.*

Her description of the 'techniques' she used and which were learned through her experiences as a learner and as a young teacher mentored by more experienced teachers, reveal a very static idea of writing pedagogy, tightly structured without allowing for any kind of experimentation. Nevertheless, she asserted the value of these methods because of their longevity and because they are used by 'all of the good teachers' no matter who they are or where they teach. Her words support Kennedy's contention that much of the teaching of writing stays the same because of the organisational constraints placed on teachers but also because of teachers own beliefs about teaching and learning. Carien experienced 'the steps' she described in her own approach as a learner and in her opinion, this was how all 'good teachers' taught writing, years ago, presently and probably in the future too.

5.2.3.3 Present practice and perceptions of learners

Carien stated that she used her English lessons as a vehicle for teaching 'psychological development'. Building background knowledge, especially in terms of historical background, also constituted a large part of the content of her lessons. She believed her learners' knowledge, evident in their use of 'catch words', was very fragmented. She said:

> *Essentially I teach psychological development; a kid can't write a cycle essay about the democratic process if they know nothing about the democratic process! All they know-they have these "catch words"…they have a limited understanding of everything in the world, so they'll confuse it-they'll say "Apartheid is the same thing as the struggle" and "Nelson Mandela was released in 1994!" It's very fractured-their understanding of what they are-so you can't expect them to write an essay and display insight when they have none. So first, especially with senior classes-though essentially beginning with junior classes-but first you tell them "Right, this is the historical background that you need in order to formulate an argument on this particular subject." Always they're writing something narrative. I always tell them to "Write what you know, don't write about abortion and drugs and all these controversial topics they love writing about if you don't know anything about it."*

Carien's ideas appear a little confused too, shifting between argumentative writing and narrative writing. What she seems to be identifying is the importance of building learners' background knowledge of a topic. In doing so, she identifies a similar issue to one pinpointed by Dornbrack and Dixon (2014). However, rather than advocating that 'learners write what they know', or have the teacher simply tell learners 'right, this is the historical background', Dornbrack and Dixon (2014) advocate that in order to assist learners to

develop their ideas, they should do reading in conjunction with the writing they are required to do, especially in high stakes genres such as argumentative essays. In their discussion of an essay by a grade ten learner from a township school in Cape Town, Dornbrack and Dixon (2014) show how a writing pedagogy that includes sustained planning and that integrates reading and discussion would have enabled the learner to develop her thinking and reasoning for a better structured argumentative essay.

Carien also described a strongly 'skills based' approach to writing (Ivanič, 2004) when she explained how she 'drilled them every Friday'. This entailed 'just basic language development for the juniors'. Learners received 'lists of idioms to learn, lots of diminutives, male/ female……I mean, you just make them study it'. She also saw the need to correct the technical aspects of writing as critically important because

> *They get away with spelling errors in all of the other subjects…a lot of the teachers that teach these subjects can't spell themselves so the time they actually get to have contact with proper language is very little.*

There is a hint of a suggestion in the above statement that 'correct' spelling and possibly 'proper language/ correct English' should be a requirement in all subjects, but because it was not, it was especially important to emphasise it in English. Her emphasis on spelling errors also supports the claim made by Parr and Timperley (2010) that 'teachers' comments (on writing) tend to focus on low level technical concerns rather than on meaning making' (p. 69). Carien implied that 'proper language' is the English spoken and written by the English teachers at school and not teachers in general.

Extensive feedback after a writing task had been completed and marked was identified as yet another important teaching strategy for Carien. Once again, however, this entailed indicating to learners what "they're doing wrong". They would then have to do 'lots of exercises, basic exercises in tense, for example and also the things they mess up like "they are" and "there" and possession, we do lots and lots of that, lists and lists of it.' Once again, Carien's apparently strongly entrenched 'beliefs about teaching and learning' (Kennedy, 1998:20) influenced her approach to providing feedback to her learners.

Bertram (2011) states that teachers' "value orientations" to their subject matter influence their choice of content, resources and their pedagogical strategies. She also asserts that

> These value orientations, or ontological beliefs about the world and about the nature of knowledge are deeply ingrained in all of us, and are very difficult to change. Certainly they will not be changed through one workshop, and may

> possibly start to *shift if teachers can see colleagues teaching in different ways* (Bertram, 2011, p.16 my emphasis).

Carien and her colleagues have deep rooted views about the importance of accurate spelling and the use of 'proper English' and it would have required more time than was available in the PLC meetings to 'shift' these. However, because Carien expressed such strong opinions about how she developed her 'writing pedagogy', I wondered if she would have been open to re-examining her views if she had been able to see 'colleagues teaching (and teaching effectively) in different ways'? As described in chapter two, Pella (2011) conducted a study of teacher learning in a PLC that was based on the 'lesson study' model for teacher professional development (2.4.1.6). Carien's conviction that teaching is 'a practical occupation' and that it cannot be taught by people not actively involved in classroom practice themselves indicates that learning from a more practical process like that of the teachers in Pella's study might influence Carien's thinking and her practice.

Whilst many of Carien's comments about her learners indicate a strongly deficit view of them and their families, she, in contrast to Anne, who never spoke of learners in terms of 'my learners' or 'our' learners, referred several times to 'our kids' or 'our children'. Her use of an inclusive pronoun (Pennycook, 1994) suggests a stronger connection to the learners than that of Anne or Beth who talk of 'them', 'they', 'these kids' or as 'second language speakers'. She expressed a lot of enthusiasm for and enjoyment of her job and of the learners she was teaching despite many of the negative challenges that she identified in teaching them.

Perhaps because she is much younger than Anne and Beth, Carien considers using ICTs in her teaching and contemporary South African music in her classroom whilst learners are writing as worthwhile innovations. She described how she used the interactive whiteboard in her classroom to model for learners how to write a letter because 'our kids grow up in a visual world'. She claimed to have seen a marked improvement in learners' understanding of the poems they were required to study because she had this resource with which to make unfamiliar content more easily accessible and understandable. She cited the example of the poem by Wordsworth entitled "I wandered lonely as a cloud" and explained that without the visuals, learners would have had no idea as to what 'a host, of golden daffodils' looked like. However, she did not mention the impact the use of the whiteboard had had on the quality of learners' writing. What was interesting to note about this group of teachers is that when they spoke about their teaching, they more spontaneously cited examples of

language or literature teaching. This reinforced my impression that the teaching of language and literature was prioritised. What was also evident was that the literature / reading component of the curriculum was generally linked to writing only in that learners were required to write answers in reading comprehension exercises and responses to literature texts. Otherwise, there was very little evidence of texts being used to build learners understanding of linguistic devices in their writing.

Regrettably I did not have an opportunity to see Carien demonstrate how she might use drama and /or technology to facilitate a writing lesson as the school was burgled twice in quick succession early in the second term when I was supposed to visit her classroom. Her classroom, one of the few with an interactive whiteboard, was vandalised.

Carien also expressed the belief that drama can play an important role in developing the quality of learners' writing. She believed that if learners learn and recite the speeches of the characters they portray, this activity can have a positive impact on their writing. This view is supported by Cremin and Myhill (2012) who refer to writers who have, through 'listening to and voicing oral texts' had their 'ears tuned' and their 'voices shaped' (p. 53). What was interesting to note was that Carien did not mention these valuable insights into the teaching of writing in the group sessions and this omission raised questions for me. It seemed that deficit discourses were so dominant in the group it left little space or opportunity for participants to introduce more enabling discourses. As a facilitator I needed to consider the implications of teachers expressing worthwhile insights during individual interviews but not during the group discussions where they could be used to encourage debate and promote learning.

Carien used playing golf as an analogy for describing how she saw being a competent writer. She said

> *It's like playing golf: you have to be mentally acute, physically in shape, everything in your life has to be balanced in order to do it well…you can't produce an excellent piece of writing if your head isn't in the right place.*

With my somewhat limited understanding of golf, it seems that this comparison indicates that Carien perceives writing skills as skills that can be learned but, like golf, these writing skills need to be practised over and over again. It also, from this analogy, requires both good physical health and a positive mental attitude. With this analogy, Carien is, like Cremin and Myhill, acknowledging that writing is a highly complex activity, although Cremin and Myhill (2012) compare it to being as demanding as playing chess.

Carien did not find teaching the learners at the school as challenging as Anne and Beth. She professed to have solved many of the discipline problems that Anne and Beth were having. She admitted that she had initially found learners to be 'large and loud' but that she had since figured out the 'psychology of the kids'. She maintained that 'if the kids like you they will do anything for you'.

Carien displayed an enthusiasm and enjoyment of her teaching not evident in Anne's and Beth's interviews. This was possibly because she appeared to have found ways to deal with the discipline problems mentioned by the first two teachers. Playing popular music in her classroom seemed to be one way of gaining learners' cooperation and using technology in her teaching seemed to be another. However, in spite of her willingness to try new and unconventional methods in some aspects of her teaching she seemed confident that the 'old, tested and tried' ways of teaching writing were still the best.

5.2.4 Dineo …….the what and the how

Dineo was the youngest teacher in the group. She was in her second year of teaching. She has a BA (Languages) as well as a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) from the same university. She attended only three of the six sessions because she was very ill during the second term and was booked off school for the whole term. A new teacher was not appointed in her post. The rest of the English department had to take on her teaching load while she was in hospital.

5.2.4.1 Dineo's history as a learner

Dineo grew up in Johannesburg and completed her primary and high school education at a private school. She believes that she received a very high standard of education. When I asked about the types of writing that she did at school, she described doing a lot of dictation, summary writing, interpretive pieces and 'comprehensions'. She also stated that she did a lot of 'creative writing'- writing based on a topic given by the teacher and which was usually linked to one of the literature set works learners were reading. Learners were required to write responses to statements about the text. This was an interesting account in that it describes a writing practice which Vavra and Spencer (2007) criticise because they argue that "What should dominate classroom time is the practice of writing in general, not the production of one type of writing in the service of assessing a student or candidate's understanding of literature" (p. 8).

Elbow (2004) argues that writing should not always be made to "serve" reading with learners being asked only to 'summarize, interpret, explain, integrate or make comparisons' (p. 10). The perception that 'creative writing' was writing in response to statements about books being studied featured quite strongly in Dineo's responses. This perception was evidently not challenged or re-examined during her initial teacher education.

She stated that the more she read, the better she became at writing. The link between reading and writing expressed by Anne and Beth is also evident in Dineo's comments.

5.2.4.2 Initial teacher education and early teaching experience

Dineo, predictably, had clear recollections of her initial teacher education. She had no specific training in the teaching of writing but remembers attending a writing seminar during the course of her studies. She indicated that the focus of the three year degree was on literature and linguistics. She ascribes her confidence in writing to the fact that she read a lot and was required to do a lot of writing at school and then at university. She was also grateful for the fact that lecturers constantly urged her to develop her 'voice' in her writing. This, she said, has given her the confidence to become the editor of the social section of an online magazine. The audience is young adults 'who want to change the world'. Dineo was the only teacher who talked of writing as a powerful means of influencing others, echoing the ideas of Cremin and Myhill (2012) quoted in 2.5 as stating that writing is a gateway to empowerment and to bringing about change in the world.

5.2.4.3 Present practices and perception of learners

As a young and inexperienced teacher, Dineo acknowledged that she had a lot to learn. She felt fairly confident about 'what' to teach but admitted that there was more that she needed to know, particularly about the literature and the grammar she had to teach. Once again, the perception of the teaching of grammar as separate from processes of making meaning is evident. Her foregrounding of the need to understand the teaching of literature and grammar made me consider again whether this was an indication of what is prioritised in the school. She also expressed a desire to know more about the 'how' of teaching the content of the curriculum. This desire was driven by her belief that she was '[there] for the kids to empower them'. Her words resonated with what de Clercq and Shalem (2014) identify as necessary 'teacher knowledge':

> …teachers need specialised knowledge of what they teach, a broad sense of *diverse methods of teaching and most specifically ways of explaining and representing the specific content they teach,* with the view to imparting it to learners of a specific age and cognitive level of development (de Clercq and Shalem, 2014, p. 138 my emphasis).

Whilst she had acquired some of the specialised knowledge she needed during her initial teacher education, she recognised that there was more that she needed to learn. Her most persistent question however pertained to 'ways of explaining and representing the content' she had to teach. She felt she needed to know whether there are better ways of 'conveying the content'. She reported being unable to relate to the teaching methodologies that were demonstrated at university and wanted to know what the alternatives might be. She feared that she might be 'short changing learners' because she did not fully understand the 'how' of teaching writing. She showed some insight, some intuitive understanding of how to stimulate interest and discussion when she described how she would use social media issues and topics that interested her learners as a springboard for the writing task learners would be required to do. Jesson et al. (2013) advocate that teachers make connections between their learners' backgrounds and the writing they need to do, especially if, as in the case of Dineo, learners come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Cremin and Oliver (2016) note that often teachers neglect to make use of the diversity of learners' 'funds of knowledge' (p.23).

She enjoyed quite a lot of 'autonomy' but there was also a senior teacher at the school who had made himself available as a mentor if ever she felt in need of one. In addition to discussing content with him, he had invited her to sit in his classroom and watch him teaching should she wish to do so. She admitted that she liked to 'check every so often that she is on the right track' because sometimes she 'felt like [we're] just going through the motions'. Her use of 'going through the motions' suggested an important 'unease' about the way writing was taught. She reported going through the same 'steps' outlined by her colleagues, and yet her words convey her sense that their approach is a mechanistic one.

Despite the fact that she writes and edits for an online magazine, Dineo said that she did not feel confident enough to do writing tasks 'alongside' her learners. She had in fact never considered doing so because she had access to excellent models of writing. Why should she, she questioned, when she had access to the writing of people like Roald Dahl and Barry Ronge[12] It was evident that she understood 'modelling' writing in terms of exposing

[12] Barry Ronge is a South African journalist, columnist, writer, broadcaster, movie reviewer and raconteur.

learners to ‘excellent’ or ‘correct’ examples of the type of writing they had to do, and not modelling the ‘process’ of ‘how writing develops’ herself. Nevertheless, she agreed to consider writing ‘alongside’ her learners.

It was regrettable that Dineo’s participation in the group was cut short by her hospitalisation. She expressed some valuable insights and might have become a voice in the group that challenged some of the more experienced teachers’ perceptions. Watson, however, warns that quite often ‘novices’ become ‘socialized within an organization and adapt to organisational norms’ (Watson, 2014, p. 25) which raises the question of whether Dineo would lose the valuable teaching instincts that she had shared during her interview.

5.2.5 Eric-……we get sidetracked with so many things

Eric was the head of the English Department at the school and he was also the grade eight ‘grade head’. Both jobs entail doing additional administrative tasks as well as teaching English in several grades. Nevertheless, he, like Anne, attended all six of the group meetings.

Eric has a BA degree, with majors in English and Psychology, and an HDE from the same university. He has taught for twenty years.

5.2.5.1 Eric’s history as a learner

Eric recalled attending a school which was administered by the old “Coloured Affairs” Department. He did not recall ever being specifically taught how to write but remembers having to be able to identify the characteristics of the different types of essays. Teachers also gave learners topics to write about and

> *…as long as you remembered the basics of paragraphing, a good introduction and conclusion, you were left to create your own essay. We were not given good examples or models to help us.*

He enjoyed writing and remembers keeping a journal in which he wrote about anything that interested him. He described his journal writing as follows:

> *I would sit and write a sentence and then I’d feel ok and then change my mind and scratch it out and write another sentence and in that way my ideas would develop and I would come to create some sort of picture or story that I want to somehow put down there.*

He, like Carien, had an English teacher who inspired him to become an English teacher. This teacher particularly inspired a love of English literature in Eric.

5.2.5.2 Initial Teacher Education and early teaching experience

After completing his degree in which he majored in English and Psychology, Eric completed the teaching diploma course at his university. He recalled doing a course in the methodology of language teaching but there was no particular focus on the teaching of writing. He said that they were trained to teach English in themes and during the days of 'the struggle', these were usually around topical issues and it was easy to find resources in newspapers and magazines. One particular theme he remembers is "Oppression". He says themes were chosen to promote 'social consciousness'. I thought this was interesting in relation to Cochran-Smith's assertion that "the most important goals of teaching…are social responsibility, social change and social justice" (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p.64).

I surmised that social consciousness, social responsibility, social (and political) change and social justice were all present in the themes that he chose to use during the early stages of his teaching career in the 1990s. What puzzled me was that Eric did not appear to see a continued need to promote 'social consciousness' in view of the continued inequities which he witnessed first-hand in the learners coming into the school from 'township' primary schools and the so-called 'ex model C schools' (Spaull, 2013).

He spent his first nine years as a teacher teaching at a school in an area in the Cape Flats which he describes as 'gang infested and riddled with all kinds of social ills'. He taught both Guidance and English and remembers particularly enjoying the Guidance teaching because '[he] felt like [he] was helping the kids'. He taught English at the school at a second language level because learners spoke Afrikaans as their home language. He said that as a young teacher he was left largely 'to his own devices'. He described how he tended to simply outline the rules for the type of writing learners were required to do and then he would expect them to complete their task. He remembered that they often struggled because of inadequate vocabulary and poor knowledge of the grammar of English. Nevertheless, he believes expectations of learners were 'more realistic' at that time because unlike the learners he now teaches, they were not required to 'function at a home language level in English'.

Eric's own experiences as a learner are evident in the way he initially taught writing. For example, he 'outlined the rules for the type of writing' that learners had to write. It was difficult to place what he described within one specific writing discourse. He appears to have learned a 'text type' (the essay) and then learned about different types of essays. He, as a learner, had to be able to 'identify the characteristics of different types of essays' (for

example, narrative essays), and he too was then left to create his own essay. Eric appeared to be teaching writing much the way that he had been taught, thus supporting Lortie's contention that the apprenticeship of observation influences teachers' practices. Lortie argued that the endurance of traditional teaching practice derived in part from the fact that teachers were likely to teach in the way they themselves were taught (Lortie, 1975).

5.2.5.3 Present practice and perception of learners

Eric has taught English in all the secondary school grades. When he arrived at his present school ten years ago, he described it as still 'very much an ex-model C school and still populated by white learners'. Over the years, he observed the demographics of the school changing significantly and he is now faced with a much more diverse group of learners. He describes many of the learners as

> *...kids who live in townships- kids bussed in from townships to get a better education – they come from primary schools where very little has been done- you have to pick up the pieces.*

His use of the words 'pick up the pieces' indicates his perception of learners' education in township schools as 'broken' or 'fragmented'. A key finding of research conducted by Taylor, Muller and Vinjevold (2003) supports Eric's perspective. It shows that by grade 3, children in the poorest 60% of schools are already three years' worth of learning behind their wealthier peers and that this gap grows as they progress through school to the extent that, by grade 9, they are five years' worth of learning behind their wealthier peers. Eric states that the way he has adapted to the need to 'pick up the pieces', is to provide learners with more explicit teaching and exemplars, or models, of the type of writing they are required to do. Mendelowitz (2010) believes that the way a model text is used depends on the values, beliefs and purposes of the teacher. She states that

> ...[model texts] can be used in a mechanistic way that elicits imitation, setting up the model texts as objects of admiration or idealization, ideals that can be copied as closely as possible …….Alternatively, model texts can be used as an integral part of a dynamic process, in which learners are encouraged to engage with texts on their own terms as springboards for their own creative imaginations (p. 87).

I was, regrettably, unable to observe Eric teaching in order to gain some sense of which of the above two possible uses of model texts might be evident in his approach. When I tried to arrange times with him for observation, he was usually unable to accommodate me because of other activities being scheduled at the requested times, and eventually, "teaching the ANAs (Annual National Assessment)" took precedence over everything. In

view of his regular advocacy of the use of dictation in the group meetings, using models in 'a mechanistic way that elicits imitation' would seem consistent with his expressed views.

Eric did not allow as much time for writing in class as the other teachers did ('there is too little time'), but he did 'model' the writing of the introductory paragraph with his learners, and give them guidance on how to write their concluding paragraph. Occasionally, he allowed learners to read what they had written to the class for comment and critique.

Eric carried a great deal of responsibility in addition to his teaching. He coached a hockey team and organised school excursions for the various grades (the week of his interview he had a drama group coming to the school to perform the next day and he was taking the matric class to see a production of Shakespeare the day after that.) He was also the liaison teacher for the university students who were to spend three weeks of teaching experience at the school. He had to deal with reorganising the teaching loads of the various teachers in his department when Dineo fell ill, and with finding a replacement for Carien when she resigned. I was not surprised when he started to show symptoms of ill health and had to go for extensive medical tests and examinations towards the end of the third term. He had little energy to spare or to invest in exploring different ways to teach writing.

Whilst Eric's views of his learners were not as strongly deficit as Anne or Carien's, he did believe that there was a need to acknowledge that there were learners who had the ability to excel at language and those who did not. He believed that if most learners 'can have a competent discussion, if [they] can write a plain, good sentence then I think you've done a good job'.

Eric believed that teachers needed to be inspired and motivated and this was best done by other teachers in specific areas. He asserted that they benefitted from hearing other teachers who, although they may not have high levels of expertise or knowledge, were enthusiastic and passionate about what they taught. He thus hoped to get teachers who were passionate about teaching poetry to share that passion, and those who were passionate about teaching Shakespeare, to share their passion. I found it interesting to note that the examples he listed included the teaching of aspects of the literature curriculum and not writing. I think it was reasonable to deduce that, unfortunately, it was not common to find a teacher who was passionate about the teaching of writing.

5.3 Reflection
This reflection focuses on what teachers' individual interviews revealed about

- their beliefs about how they have developed as teachers of writing;
- what they believe is the most effective way to continue to learn and develop as teachers of writing;
- how their beliefs about how they as teachers should engage in ongoing teacher development activities promote or constrain their participation in a PLC.

5.3.1 Teachers beliefs about how they have developed as teachers' of writing

Lortie's (1975) contention that teachers' apprenticeship of observation influences how they teach is supported by the accounts of the five teachers. They all believed that their writing pedagogy had largely developed through their recollections of how they had been taught or what they learned from colleagues. Their beliefs also do not appear to have been challenged or changed through initial teacher education or continuing professional development experiences as none of them recalled ever learning how to teach writing. Whilst the increasingly poor quality of the language skills of learners played a role in 'changing' how they did what they did, the changes seemed to be in terms of introducing more tightly structured approaches to teaching with a strongly skills based approach to teaching writing. Kennedy (1998) suggests that there is a degree of intransigence when it comes to the teaching of writing, not only because of organisational constraints but also because of teachers' own beliefs about teaching and learning. Kennedy questions whether 'teachers who are trapped in traditional practices' (p.20) can learn different ways about teaching writing. This proved to be a key question for me during this cycle of the study.

5.3.2. Effective ways to continue to learn and develop as teachers of writing

Four of the five teachers did not convey any sense that they needed to continue to grow and develop as teachers of writing. Dineo was the only one who expressed the desire to learn more about the 'how' of teaching writing. Their deficit discourses about learners revealed their belief that a 'back to basics' approach to their teaching was the solution to all the perceived problems with writing. The teachers' views reflected their valuing of what Ball and Ellis refer to as 'low level drill instruction' (2008, p. 507) and these views appear to have been vindicated by the continuing good results of their matric learners who have benefitted from this approach. Whilst I had learnt from the six meetings with these teachers that I needed to adopt a more directive facilitation style, I also realised that there perhaps needed to be 'preparatory work' done on challenging some of the entrenched beliefs and

practices of the teachers before asking them to identify their learning needs as well as the learning needs of their learners.

5.3.3. How did their beliefs promote or constrain their participation in a PLC?

Brodie (2013) maintains

> The term ‘professional learning community’ suggests that the focus is not only on individual teachers’ learning but on collective professional learning within the context of a cohesive group that works with an ethic of interpersonal care, which permeates the life of teachers, students and school leaders (ibid, p. 6).

Did these teachers perceive a need for ‘collective professional learning’? My sense was that they did not. All five teachers had university degrees and were largely confident of their subject knowledge. At the school where they taught matriculation pass rates in English over the past four years had been one hundred percent, and the general matriculation pass rate was between ninety five and ninety nine percent. Thus, the school was deemed to be an “Achieving” school in a district where there were a large number of ‘underperforming’ schools (schools with a matriculation pass rate of under eighty percent). In terms of these statistics, teachers were doing a 'good’ job.

A ‘culture of collaboration’ did not appear to exist at the school. There was no evidence of collaborating with regard to planning and preparation, or the sharing of planning and preparation. All that was required was that they cover the same content by the end of each term. Each teacher was free to choose the order in which they wished to teach the content. If Anne wanted to start with poetry lessons, she was free to do so, whilst Dineo might choose to start with the writing of comprehension exercises. Subject meetings focused on issues of administration and were squeezed into the school ‘break’ time for approximately twenty minutes once a week.

Teachers were also at different stages of their careers. Anne was counting down to her retirement even though it was still a few years away. Learning for her was limited to knowing exactly what was in the curriculum and teaching as she had always taught. Beth was already retired and just wanted to do ‘plain old teaching’. She had had what she described as a ‘varied and exciting’ career and was ready to ‘just teach’. Whilst she believed she could always learn more, as was the case for Anne, ‘learning’ was always linked to curriculum content and could usually be acquired from books or informal conversations with colleagues. Carien believed that she could learn from her “apprenticeship of observation’ and her colleagues, not in a collaborative situation but on a

‘one to one’ basis. Dineo was the one teacher who was open to the possibility of collaborative learning but was so ill during the second term that she could no longer participate in the group. She would probably not have been able to influence the other teachers either. Eric was at a crossroads in his career and eventually took the decision to leave Gauteng and return to the Western Cape.

None of the teachers appeared to be strongly invested in their current school or positions. Since the meetings and interviews, Anne has resigned and accepted a teaching post in the United Kingdom. Beth has accepted a School Governing Body (SGB) post at an all-girls school. Carien resigned during the year of my research and has pursued her interest in teaching the Cambridge curriculum. Dineo is teaching at an independent girls’ school and is continuing to work towards being employed by a Media house. Eric has taken up a post teaching at an independent school in the Western Cape. Teachers never demonstrated any of the key characteristics required to establish an effective PLC. For example, they did not share the same ‘values and vision’ for the learners and the school community and pursued career paths that took them out of that community. They also did not appear willing to take collective responsibility for their learners’ learning. Responsibility for learners’ success or failure was always shifted to the learners themselves, the school, the parents or the Department of Education.

5.4 Group meetings

Six group meetings were held during the course of the year, three during the first term, two during the second term, and one during the third term. Each meeting was audio recorded with the permission of the teachers and transcribed afterwards.

I had initially requested that meetings be scheduled for every second week but as the year progressed, this frequency became less and less viable. Meetings during term one progressed smoothly from the first to the second meeting even though meeting two had to be postponed by a week because teachers received a notice on the scheduled day that they were required to attend a district meeting. All teachers were present at both meetings. There was also a three week gap between the second and third meeting and two teachers were unable to attend meeting three due to deaths in their families. Term two, on the other hand, was a severely disrupted term in that it started with two burglaries in quick succession at the school and Carien’s classroom being one of those vandalised. Dineo also took ill and was hospitalised for much of the second term. This meant that the other teachers’ timetables had to be changed in order for them to teach Dineo’s classes as well as

their own. Term 3 brought additional challenges for the English department because Carien was required to resign at the beginning of the term. Fortunately, a replacement was appointed quite early in the term and she participated in one of the meetings. Teachers teaching grade nine as well as grade eight also began to prioritise preparing their grade nines to write the ANAs in September 2013 for the first time.

DuFour et al. (2006) suggest four developmental stages that a group of teachers will experience during the process of becoming a PLC: the pre-initial stage; the initial stage; the development stage and finally the sustaining stage. These authors maintain that during the pre-initial stage, teachers have not as yet established a core purpose or attempted to formulate specific goals connected to learner improvement. It is in the next stage, the initial stage, that teachers make attempts to become a professional learning community and to create collaborative teams. By the third stage teachers become willing to review their existing practices and begin to change these based on their learners' learning needs. It is during the sustaining stage that teachers are invested in the professional learning community and use it as a vehicle for making instructional changes in order to improve learner achievement. I planned to use 'The Professional Development Cycle for Continuous Improvement' outlined by Timperley et al. (2.4.1.7) to guide group discussions and hopefully to move teachers through the various stages of becoming a PLC. The cycle includes the following steps:

1. Identify student learning needs
    - what do they know?
    - what sources of evidence have we used?
    - what do they need to learn?
    - how can we build on what they know?

2. Identify related teacher learning needs
    - how have we contributed to existing student outcomes?
    - what do we already know that we can use to produce valued outcomes?
    - what do we need to learn to do to promote valued outcomes?
    - what sources of knowledge can we use?
3. Learn or review concepts
4. Apply concepts to lessons
5. Critique and reflect on lesson
    - what impact has changed actions had on the quality of student learning?
    - how effective have we been?

The plan was that issues raised in meetings would be used to determine what to foreground in the next meeting. Once teachers had identified learners' learning needs and prioritised these, the particular learning focus of the group was to be decided in order to determine the next stage of the process of collaborative learning. Teachers would then be encouraged to develop ideas for collaborative action to address the learning needs identified. At this stage, teachers would need to start working as a team to come up with plans and strategies to address the learning needs of the learners in their classes as well as their own possible learning needs.

Regrettably, the participants in the group did not get to even the second stage of the PLC professional development learning cycle (DuFour et al., 2006). Data collected during the six group meetings in 2013 is presented and analysed in the remainder of this chapter and used to understand why the group failed to become a PLC.

5.4.1 Analysis of meetings

Opfer and Pedder in a paper entitled "The lost promise of Teacher Development in England" explore three influences on the effectiveness of teacher professional development for improving schools. These are the individual teacher, the learning activities in which teachers participate and the structures and support provided by schools for teacher learning. They suggest that each of these influences could have a 'determining impact on whether professional development fulfils its promise as a mechanism for improving teaching and learning' (2011, p. 3).

I use these three influences as a framework for discussing the six group meetings conducted. In considering the 'individual teacher' I explore what teachers' discourses revealed about their beliefs: beliefs about the teaching of writing, about the teaching of English, their beliefs about the learners that they teach and their beliefs about learning.

5.4.1.1 Teachers' beliefs about teaching of writing

> When we teach children to write, we teach them what is valued by our culture (Cremin and Myhill, 2012, p. 11).

The focus of this section of the chapter is on what teachers in this group believed was important and valuable in the teaching of writing. I also discuss the dominant discourse or discourses on the teaching of writing (Ivanič, 2004) evident in the teachers' comments.

It's a nightmarish morass of nothing

Anne spoke the above words in the first meeting when describing learners' work. According to her, what made the piece of writing a 'nightmarish morass of nothing' was the omission of appropriate punctuation and very poor spelling. She and all the other teachers in the group constantly foregrounded the importance of correct spelling, grammar and punctuation in the teaching of writing. Teachers reported writing 'language tests' every Friday, justifying these in view of the relevance of language, or grammar, to the work being done both in their literature lessons and the teaching of writing. All the teachers expressed the belief that they had no choice with regard to the types of texts learners had to write or when they had to write them. They maintained that the 'department' (GDE) had very specific requirements that had to be met. Carien, during the first meeting, referred to the 'NCS assessment guidelines for creative writing or transactional writing or whatever' as the document with which they had to comply. The content of their teaching was determined by what was in the rubrics that they were required to use to assess learners' writing. On more than one occasion teachers expressed resentment about the way the writing rubrics were structured because grammatical correctness was not prioritised and learners were therefore able to 'pass' despite having very poor grammatical skills. Carien said

> *The rubrics make it very very simple but 3 is a fail 4 is a pass - it's forty percent but the gap between those two is enormous. So unless the kid actually drooled on the paper you can't ever give him a 3 even if he can barely construct a sentence. The 4 justifies passing him*
>
> *If the kids wrote bad grammar, they would fail…. . Now…get 40% (Anne).*

These teachers raised an issue that has been contentious for many years. Myhill and Watson (2014) maintain that the history of grammar teaching over the past fifty years is one of contestation, debate and dissent with differing perspectives on the value of grammar for the language learner at the heart of the debate and dissent as to what the educational benefits of learning grammar may or may not be. Whilst there is a 'substantial body of research that points conclusively to the ineffectiveness of decontextualized grammar in helping students improve their writing' (Myhill and Watson, 2014, p. 44), there are signs of an emerging consensus that grammar may be important in developing learners' understanding of how language works and, specifically, how grammatical choices are significant in shaping and constructing meaning. However, it is the descriptive view of grammar, which promotes students' explicit metalinguistic understanding of how grammatical choices shape meaning in texts and of the writing choices available to them,

rather than prescriptive grammar, focused on form and accuracy, on what is correct or incorrect, which is deemed to be valuable in the development of both reading and writing skills in the classroom. The teachers' discourse throughout the six sessions revealed their alignment with the value of a prescriptive grammar in their classroom practice. Teachers' focus on technical aspects of writing was evident in many of their comments:

> *… for me, my priority is teaching them to structure a sentence correctly (Anne)*

This statement emphasises the choice that Anne (for me, my priority) has made regarding what she believes is important for her learners -'correct structure', as opposed to other aspects of writing prioritised in the GDE rubrics.

> *… their ideas are there, they communicate this vague stream of thought but if you have to mark them properly…on the grammar side of it, we're sunk (Anne)*

Once again, Anne reveals what she believes is important in writing. Even though learners have ideas, it does not appear to be their ideas that matter, or assisting them to develop those ideas, but expressing those ideas using correct grammar. "Proper" marking would penalise them for poor grammar, and they would fail. Other teachers also emphasised the importance of the technical aspects of writing.

> *… there should be shorter paragraphs…there should be stress laid on a main idea and ideas coming off it because many of them have no idea of paragraph at all so that the first step should be to get that right (Beth**).***
>
> *…teach the skills (Dineo**).***
>
> *..leave out the creativity for now and just get them down to writing good sentences of other people - other people's creative ideas let them put that down. Maybe they will latch on to that then and later on we can work on creativity. The level I'm talking about just give them basic sentences, good sentences so that they can use it as a pattern (Eric).*

Eric is suggesting that learners will learn by imitating (essentially, copying, reproducing) someone else's 'correct examples', and he seems to be advocating a behaviourist approach to language learning. Beth revealed a similar approach when she described how she teaches learners, when reading aloud, to 'pause for a count three at a full stop'. She described how 'you just keep *pounding* at that until they begin to get it'. There is a sense that repetition will eventually 'hammer' or 'pound' the 'knowledge' or 'skill' into learners' heads. There is evidence of a strongly 'teacher driven' process where the teacher 'just' (meaning 'only' or 'simply' in this instance) 'gets' learners 'down' and 'lets them put down' 'good sentences of other people' in the hope that 'maybe' they will 'latch' (catch

on/ lay hold of?) on to how to write 'basic sentences' which can be 'other people's creative ideas', as long as they are grammatically correct and properly punctuated. The words teachers use are consistent with the ideas they express about doing 'rote exercises' and repetitive work discussed later in this section. Teachers' behaviourist views of teaching and learning are strongly reflected in their choice of words and images. It seemed that whilst the rubrics developed for teachers by the GDE officials might be trying to shift the emphasis to a more meaning focused assessment of learner's writing, it did not change or influence teachers' deeply entrenched views in the importance of correct spelling and grammar.

What Ivanič (2004) describes as a 'skills based discourse' is thus evident as the dominant discourse of these teachers. Ivanič suggests that this discourse focuses on

> … the autonomous linguistic 'skills' of correct handwriting, spelling, punctuation and sentence structure. A great deal of the teaching in this approach is explicit: children are taught spelling patterns and rules for grammatically correct and correctly punctuated written sentences. They undertake exercises which draw their attention to linguistic patterns and distinctions in written language, and their writing is assessed according to how accurately these patterns have been reproduced. The explicit teaching of grammar is part of a skills approach to the teaching of writing….(p.227).

This discourse was not only evident in the teachers' statements about what they believe, but it was also evident in the descriptions of their practice:

> *…when you're marking I always keep a list of <u>the common errors</u> (Anne)*

Anne then described how she used the 'errors' in her feedback to ensure that learners did not repeat their mistakes. Another 'remedial' exercise she developed for learners was a booklet she described as

> *…about 3 or 4 pages going back to short 'a's and long 'a's and all that kind of stuff but they are so bored after half a page. What do I have to do?*

She explained that if she had a choice

> *Well [I]would have more rote exercises, just plain fill in the bloody gaps (oops, sorry) fill in the gaps…uumm short sentences, fix what's wrong, but page after page so that they have a book full of short pieces of writing ,not paragraphs, not answers about set work books that are where you have to worry about facts and not the way that you put them… um you should worry about both you know what I mean **(**Anne**)***

Other teachers also described doing more 'rote exercises' focused on grammar to 'fix what was wrong' and improve the quality of learners' writing.

I hijacked a 1984 English exercise book off (Eric's) shelf. I have been making them do exercises to the death (Carien).

You know I do it- that's where I get my preposition exercises. So every morning if I've got a double that's what we do. We all stand we have a little competition as last man standing of the week we'll go round and they love that. It's those old fashioned grammar books…(Eric)

Good old fashioned grammar books (Anne)

And you mentioned an old record that was lovely for punctuation? (Researcher)

Yes…….You can get it on the internet-I wouldn't play the whole thing but I would certainly play a section. I actually listened to it again that's why I decided I wouldn't play the whole thing because instead of a comma he makes a certain noise for it (Beth)

The above quotations reveal that teachers evaluate teaching resources as 'good' or 'worthwhile' if they can be used for reinforcing correct grammatical usage and punctuation.

Anne's emphasis on correct grammar is evident even in lessons where reading comprehension is the focus of the lesson. Even though learners' oral responses indicate an understanding of the text, for her, expressing such understanding using correct grammar is what matters.

When you do a comprehension…afterwards- they've done it. Now you're asking them for their answers they never read you their answers…some will give you brilliant answers but I'll say' now read me your answer' because I want us to concentrate on the grammar and very often what they've said has nothing to do with… (Anne)

Beth provided a reason as to why she believed the emphasis on grammar is an important aspect of their teaching. She said

That's why I think there's more of a concentration on grammar it's because a lot of the learners ……are basically second language it's not a first language

Beth is not alone in her perception that because someone is not a home language speaker of English, more focus on grammar is necessary. 'Nhamo', a Zimbabwean teacher teaching in Gauteng, South Africa, reported "we were also handicapped with the language because we're not first-language learners. But because of [this] they drilled language structures, how to build languages, so our sentence construction was not all that bad"(Mendelowitz, 2010, p. 171).

Canagarajah (2009) challenges the conception of the 'first language' or 'native speaker' of a 'homogenous speech community' and refers to the Chomskyan notion as an 'idealized construction' (Canagarajah, 2009, p.79). Canagarajah argues that many speakers of 'indigenised variants of English' which have developed in post-colonial communities would consider themselves native speakers (home language) of these Englishes, even if they have simultaneously acquired other local languages and developed what Canagarajah refers to as 'fascinating multilingual competence'. Many of the learners in multilingual, multicultural South African classrooms display this 'fascinating multilingual competence' which can be used as a resource for language learning rather than being perceived as a 'barrier'.

Teachers spoke very confidently about their beliefs about the teaching of writing and how these influenced their classroom practice. However, they also asserted that the way they taught writing was largely determined by departmental requirements and they believed they had limited choices. Their words brought to mind the claims of several writers who state that teachers are often positioned as technicians who simply implement policy (Batra, 2009, Comber and Nixon, 2009, Tarnoczi, 2006). Carien said

> *Ultimately we're preparing them for a single set of tests that they're writing in matric so all of this comes down to their ability to be able to respond to something that they've read or studied*

Beth admitted that she taught 'with grade 9 in mind'. Teachers thus indicated that their teaching of writing was not influenced by what learners needed to learn, but by what they would have to do to achieve according to departmental requirements. Anne stated that she

> [*gave] them the rubric and you can work through the rubrics with them and this is what the government requires*

Anne, like many South African teachers, felt that assessment requirements had left teachers with little time for teaching.

> *Everything is so assessment driven actually you can't escape it. (Anne).*

Jesson et al. (2013) acknowledge that it is necessary and important to provide access for learners to the 'Standard English' that is required for success in the educational system. However, they argue that in order to establish 'instructional bridges' that will enable learners in multilingual and multicultural contexts to access Standard English, it is important to start out by allowing them to express their home experiences, including their home dialects, in the writing classroom. However, with the teachers' limited sense of

agency, and their strong belief in the value of grammatical correctness, this was an approach that would prove very challenging to introduce.

Teachers constantly referred to the gap between learners' spoken and written proficiency. I thus gave them a copy of an excerpt from Cremin and Myhill's (2012) book entitled, *Writing Voices: Creating Communities of Writers* which focuses on bridging the gap between talk and writing. In the excerpt, the authors acknowledge that making the transition from talking to writing can be very challenging for writers and being encouraged to talk and collaborate throughout the process can support the developing and shaping of their writing. When I raised questions around the value of talk and collaboration during the writing process, teachers had several reasons for rejecting this idea. Anne at first rejected it on the basis of the unpredictability of the school day and the unexpected disruptions that can occur. It seemed that if she did something with one of her classes, she felt she needed to do it with all her classes. If it was not possible to do it with all the classes, then it should not be done. She said

> *…but then how long do the others have to wait before they can collaborate? It's wonderful if that's all you're doing all day in a private place…it's very difficult to do stuff like that …like that lady on Saturday was talking about incorporating the drama stuff I was thinking 'yes, lovely, but on Friday, or was it Thursday, my lessons ground to a halt for the first four periods because they were having the production in the hall…. couldn't hear a thing in my classroom music was loud, kids were enjoying'. Look, it was obviously fabulous but it wrecked my classes so I don't know what to do then?*

Eric tried to suggest introducing collaborative activities little by little, but Anne then continued to challenge the feasibility of the idea in her context by saying

> *They collaborate almost all day in almost all their subjects ….doing group work and whatever else….I also think that a lot of life is your own decisions your own, your own thinking when you get a chance to practice that in the modern syllabus everything is group work . When do you get a chance to grow inside your own head and produce what you are thinking? I think that's very important because when they get in to matric and they've got to write their creative writing there's no collaboration. That's a dead quiet thing that you've got to do on your own so I don't quite know….*

It is evident that Anne was not willing to change her stance on collaborative work. Her choice of the pronoun "I" decisively separates her from 'they' or them (i.e. those who advocate collaborative writing). Learners, she maintains, need to develop their own thinking (grow inside their own heads) because 'in matric they've got to write their own

creative writing'. What Anne seems unwilling to consider is the cognitive development and substantive learning that can and does happen through collaborative learning.

When I asked Anne what she thought of Vygotsky's ideas about the role of social interaction in the development of language and cognition she responded by saying

> *…the not so bright kid will gain but the brightest kids in your class-only at their level, there's nobody to pull them up so we're tending to pull everyone down to a mediocre level. That's the problem with group work - bright kids are pulling everybody else up but there's nothing for them*

Her third objection to collaborative writing was based, once again, on the premise that only some will benefit – the less capable will be 'pulled up', the more capable will be 'pulled down'. This contrasted with the view expressed by Zoe in Group B (6.5.1.4) which will be discussed in the next chapter in relation to the impact of teachers' attitudes and their beliefs on learners' participation in a collaborative learning process.

Eric then pinpointed an issue that many teachers have raised with regard to implementing collaborative or cooperative learning in the writing lesson

> *…….I think just practically with the grade 8s and 9s getting them in to groups or working collaboratively it's just I know you're worried about the noise level…it gets to you it really does..*

with Anne adding

> *They're this far away from each other and they speak at a volume that I cannot produce*

I reminded teachers of a collaborative writing lesson that Beth had described and what an enjoyable and successful exercise that had been, but Anne still felt there were reasons why collaborative, oral work to "bridge" the gap between talk and writing was not a workable idea. Her reason is once again linked to it working sometimes and not at others.

> *…There are lessons where that has blossomed into something but to teach say 3 grade 8 classes it will work magnificently with one and the other you'll walk out crying, so you can't actually predict this is going to work this is going to be a good lesson- you can't*

There are, of course, questions relating to what Anne believes' works' and what is a 'good lesson' and whether one can ever reliably predict that any lesson is going to be 'good' on more than one occasion. Her words were also reminiscent of what Cochran-Smith (2004) describes as teachers 'settling for what works in the classroom', or, perhaps what is perceived to 'work' rather than "what could be" (p. 38).

Teachers expressed beliefs about the teaching of writing that reflected a lack of awareness or regard for the shifts in thinking about the teaching of writing. Whilst the process approach to the teaching of writing is specified, both in the first version of the NCS and NCS – CAPS, teachers' discourse did not reflect an understanding of this approach. Teachers taught writing in three or four 'steps' which did not allow for the thinking through of ideas and / or revising or revisiting them. The misunderstanding is reinforced with the way in which the process approach is presented in the national curriculum statement.

When teachers were asked to propose ways in which the cognitive load (Cremin and Myhill, 2012) of writing could be reduced other than through collaboration and oral rehearsal, which they had rejected, Anne said

> *…in the planning and doing the key words and then the rough draft…..I always say to my kids turn your page sideways so you're not restricted by lines now just jot down any words or ideas that come-no sentences*

It was evident that Anne was comfortable with children working individually and quietly to relieve the cognitive load of writing, even though the excerpt from "Writing voices" (Cremin and Myhill, 2012) stated that children need to be able to experiment with their ideas by writing aloud. Anne disagreed with this proposal, maintaining that her approach

> *…work[ed]….they do much better-you have no idea how much they think differently there's no lines restricting they just write words anywhere, upside down anywhere you like- they actually like that freedom*

Anne indicated that this idea had resulted from her own observations of how children struggled to get ideas down quickly for a writing task. This 'anecdote' indicated that Anne was able to identify learners' learning needs and to come up with a strategy to address these but she consistently rejected ideas different from what she believed 'worked'. She also did not seem to be comfortable with working collaboratively to address challenges that learners experienced in writing despite evidence of the effectiveness of doing so.

Teachers also indicated that they supported learners by showing them examples or models of the writing they were required to produce. It seems the models were used to show learners essentially how to structure their writing, if, for example, they were to write a narrative piece. However, Anne cautioned that examples should be limited otherwise learners

will write exactly what you said -there'll be no new thoughts they will regurgitate what you said

However, Cremin and Myhill (2012) argue that it is to be expected that learners will 'borrow' from the texts they have been exposed to. This is one of the ways in which 'reading enriches writing'. Writers come to 'lean on the voice strewn landscape' and they borrow from and adapt the voices of others (p. 50). Cremin and Myhill state that "We can discern echoes of [these-the voices of others] in the texts they produce, in the verbal, visual and sound devices they employ, their repertoires of experience" (2012, p.51).

I was interested to note that in the personal interview, Anne described 'babying' learners, but in the group discussions she described providing limited support in regard to stimulating learners' thinking in case they 'regurgitate what you said'. 'Babies' do imitate or repeat what 'adults' say and do, but in this instance it seemed unacceptable to allow learners to copy or imitate the work of an adult.

Although I only managed to get samples of writing from learners taught by Anne and Beth, the 'feedback' evident on these pieces of writing also reflected teachers' emphasis on skills. Learners' portfolios included written copies of learners' speeches, their tests and a range of writing tasks. These included a letter of complaint, a summary of a magazine article interview, answers to a passage for comprehension, an 'investigation essay', the mid year exam, a creative writing piece ('Night time in the City'), a second summary and a 'response to literature' task. "Feedback" on these tasks amounted to mainly ticks and crosses and any incorrect grammar, spelling and punctuation was underlined in red. Comments were limited to things like "Underline!", "Disappointing", "Lacking in logic" and "Wake up [learner's name]".

This action research project attempted to introduce two significant changes to teachers: Firstly, in the way that a professional learning opportunity was presented to them and secondly, in the way they taught writing. It became evident to me that more work on teachers' beliefs about the teaching of writing should have been done before asking them to explore changing the way that they teach. There seemed to be deep seated, enduring convictions in the teachers' discourse regarding the teaching of writing. Granville argues that "Teacher educators may be powerful agents for change but the conservative and reproductive forces in society and more particularly in schools are often hostile to change" (Granville, 1996, p.4).

The ‘skills discourse’ appears to be an integral part of what Gee (1990) refers to as the identity kit of these teachers of English at this school. Whilst a skills discourse has its place in the teaching of writing, it needs to be considered in relation to other writing discourses and possibly integrated with these (Ivanič, 2004). Gee maintains that introducing new discourses can produce conflict and anxiety. It would seem that a significant challenge for me as the facilitator of the work of a professional learning community would be to find a way to encourage teachers to ‘recast’ (Freeman 1996) not only what they did in their classrooms but also how they thought about what they did.

5.4.1.2 Teachers’ beliefs about teaching of English

What they do is not English, it’s communication

Teachers did not believe that what they were teaching was “English” but rather ‘communication’. This was generally the view expressed by the teachers in Group A. Anne, in the following statement, reveals the perceived distinction between ‘English’ and ‘Communication’.

> *I’ve got a question…are we teaching English or are we teaching communication? It’s something that really worries me because if I’m teaching English there’s a completely different approach… Ja, because when you teach French, you teach the language in its pureness and you teach the culture with it …Where do you teach English culture?*

It is evident that in Anne’s view, the learning of a language has to be accompanied by learning about the culture that is associated with that language. One of the many problems with this perception, which she acknowledged, is that there is not ‘one’ English or even ‘one’ English culture.

Other comments made by her during several discussions indicate that she perceives learners as having a very different culture to “English” culture and that this ‘difference’ is perceived as a lack or a deficit. She described a ‘degression’ (a word she created) in learners ‘nowadays’. Evidence of the ‘degression’ was learners’ lack of ‘general knowledge’ and their extremely narrow ‘world view’. Carien supported this view and said

They cannot perceive a world beyond themselves

Anne reinforced this perception by saying

> *Kids have no clue of the <u>real</u> world. If you give them an advert that shows a poor person or mentions a poor person automatically black is African there are no poor people anywhere else*

What appears to be an unexamined and unchallenged assumption in the words of these teachers is that if learners learned 'English", accompanied by the appropriate learning of English 'culture', they would develop better background knowledge and broader world views. That they only learned 'Communication' meant that their 'world view' was 'Afrocentric' and more specifically 'South Afrocentric' and the language syllabus which, in their opinion, was also narrow and restrictive, reinforced this perspective. Both Beth and Eric expressed a belief that through their language lessons, they could 'impart life skills, morals and values'. However, Anne and Carien described how learners' exposure to American films and television showed in the ways they spoke and the views they expressed. This seemed something of a contradiction of their previous statements as "American views" are not necessarily 'afrocentric'.

Teachers in the group also drew a distinction between 'good' or 'correct standard' English and 'terrible' or 'poor' English. Beth asserted that, if learners were to acquire 'good' English, they had to be 'immersed' in 'good language'. Eric added to Beth's belief in 'complete immersion' by saying that there should be no translation from other languages in the English classroom

> … *when you're trying to teach proper English…translation is not acceptable*…..(Eric)

Dineo expressed a different reason as to why 'translation' was not a viable option when she explained

> *I've had lessons where I've had to explain concepts in vernacular because some of the kids don't understand and then it was like Oh, OK. I mean then ok now put it in English but you can't do that all the time*

Dineo identified the many hours learners spent 'writing and reading terrible English' while 'chatting' on social media for hours and hours as one reason why they did not acquire the 'correct standard'. She said

> *They chat a lot and they use a lot of social networks and clearly what they're reading there as well is incorrect English so if that reading could go back to old school proper books and get that sorted…*

It was evident that even as the youngest teacher in the group, Dineo had adopted the mantra of 'old' (which I understood to mean 'traditional') is 'good' and will promote 'proper' English. Samuel and Stephens (2000) maintain that very often, young teachers are swayed by the dominant hegemonic forces that co-opt them to become part of an existing

school culture. In this instance, adopting the mantra that 'old' or traditional' was good was not ideal in promoting Dineo's growth and development as a teacher of writing. Teachers also believed that their battle to promote 'good' English was hampered by the 'poor' English that was acceptable in other subjects. Anne and Carien said the following

> *And um sort of hooking up with what you're saying if as in the OLD days-you didn't get marks in your other subjects if you weren't writing good English. It would also help because they think that good English only applies to ENGLISH … It is not a universal thing-read some of the answers in the other exams that they're getting full marks for they're virtually incomprehensible!* (Anne).
>
> *They can't spell Accounting in Accounting!* (Carien).
>
> *Or they're repeating word for word* (Anne).

The emphasis on 'good' English links to a concept developed by McKinney (2017). Research cited in '*Language and Power in post – colonial schooling: Ideologies in Practice'* (McKinney, 2017) shows how mastery of English, and in some cases particular uses of English aligned with white middle class speakers, is continually privileged as the goal of schooling. McKinney's (2017) observations and conversations with teachers and parents revealed 'dominant views of language that value monolingualism in English, and in some cases particular racialized varieties of English aligned with whiteness above any other form of language use' (ibid, p. xvi). McKinney offers 'anglonormativity' as a concept to describe the expectation that learners have to develop monolingual fluency in a prestige variety of English, and that those who do not are viewed as deviant or deficient.

Teachers' comments also revealed that they 'preclude students' knowledge and ways of participating' (Jesson, Parr and McNaughton, 2013, p. 216). Instead of validating, and using learners' knowledge (for example, teachers asserted that learners knew that there are many poor black people in South Africa and, more broadly, in Africa) as a resource and a means to create what Jesson et al. refer to as an instructional bridge, they were disparaging about it. Only Dineo described using learners' interest and participation in social media as a springboard into writing tasks or activities.

Teachers concerns about the 'English' at school also extended to the quality of some of the texts they were using. Most teachers in the group were extremely critical of one of the setwork books because it 'was so badly written'. Anne said

> *..the English is disgusting but we teach them because they are politically correct*

After some discussion on whether learners were all capable of learning "English" or whether the majority could only master 'Communication' Eric expressed what appeared to be, in his view, a 'reasonable' summing up of the issues by saying

> *My take on this is the majority you are going to turn them in to good communicators. You will have the ones that will study further. They will refine that whole concept of constructing good sentences, having punctuation marks in the right places…… Those are the kids though very few that become the professionals go on to university and I don't think we're doing such a bad job, we're not on the wrong track or…. The kids who can't make it will go and work in a factory some sort of manual- the others who have got the concept of language these are the ones who will go and study further. Somehow the system sorts itself out*

In this excerpt, Eric seems to take up a view on what the world is like (Gee, 1999) or how the world works (Timperley et al., 2007). There is 'a system' that 'sorts itself out'. 'Kids who can't make it will go and work in a factory' and 'kids who can will go and study further'. Eric uses an authoritative type of 'teacher talk' and indicates his belief that language is an enabler and that being able to write well is empowering (Cremin and Myhill, 2012). However, his perception, like that of the rest of the group, is that being able to write well means using good sentence construction and correct punctuation. "The system" sorts everything out and participants in the system who cannot write good sentences and punctuate them correctly have limited power and choices. That Eric is comfortable with a 'system' that sorts out the kids into 'the ones' who can become professionals (a minority) from those who 'will' become manual labourers and factory workers (the majority) puzzled me as in his interview he spoke of how, in his first teaching post, he valued being able to 'help' the learners who came from disadvantaged communities. In this instance, he did not appear to feel it necessary to help those who could not gain 'access' to higher level skills and further education because their language skills were deemed to be inferior. Like Carien, he seemed to take on the 'group perspective' rather than challenging it or choosing to introduce a different perspective. It seemed that rather than developing a culture of collaboration, teachers in this group developed a 'groupthink' (Fullan and Hargreaves, 2012), that prevented critical thinking.

During the third and fourth meetings teachers began to propose an answer to the question as to whether to teach "English" or "Communication". They believed it was unfair to 'first language kids' who were 'excelling' and had to be 'held back' by having to learn 'communication' rather than 'English', which teachers appeared to perceive as a higher level competency. Therefore, a higher grade and standard grade curriculum needed to be

reintroduced. Implicit in their recommendation was that higher grade learners would learn 'English" and standard grade[13] learners would learn "Communication". A "communication" curriculum would allow for learners to excel at oral communication:

> *They're very good at speaking (Anne)*
>
> *Will I be a failure in life- can I get through life in the corporate world without having writing skills? No I won't (Eric)*

They did not believe all learners could acquire 'good' writing knowledge and skills. Nor did they appear to believe that it was necessary to do so. It would seem that the 'solutions' to the problems teachers identified lay in reintroducing practices and policies that might actually reinforce and perpetuate educational inequities. Teachers learning new and different ways to do things that might reduce educational inequities was not, it seemed, a viable option. This belief was in strong contrast to Cochran-Smith's argument that teachers need to embrace a 'pedagogy for social justice' which means 'providing opportunities for all students to engage *in significant intellectual work'* (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 68 my emphasis). Social justice is also a key principle underpinning the South African curriculum (DBE, 2011), but it is evident that changed policies and curricula are not enough to bring about changes to teachers' beliefs or their teaching practices.

Teachers revealed a somewhat elitist view of what it meant to learn 'English'. This view did not allow for critical reflection on their existing pedagogy. Earl (2007) argues that teachers' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions have direct and serious implications for the success of the students they teach. Whilst these teachers were well qualified in that they all had degrees and teaching qualifications, their 'attitudes and dispositions' worked against them adopting or developing a mindset that allowed them to question their attitudes and practices. This could prove to be a significant challenge in promoting the effective functioning of a PLC.

5.4.1.3 Teachers' beliefs about learners

Learners in the classes at the school were racially, culturally, socially, religiously and linguistically diverse. Some learners came from two nearby townships, others lived in the middle class suburbs close to the school. There were families who practised the Hindu

[13] In 2008 the South African National Senior Certificate (NSC) replaced the Senior Certificate (SC) as the school leaving exit qualification. For the NSC, all subjects are offered on the same level whereas learners were able to choose to do subjects on a lower grade (LG), standard grade (SG) or higher grade (HG) for the SC.

faith, many were Muslims and some belonged to various Christian denominations. Understanding, or the need for understanding teaching in a multicultural, multilingual classroom was not foregrounded in any of the group discussions even though 'diversity' was mentioned a few times.

The following comments reveal the ways in which learners were perceived by teachers.

> *[there is a] theory that no child is an empty slate…he or she comes in to the class with certain experiences and I accept that ……but not these children…they have no frame of reference..they know things that pertain to social things, but no even really…they're not as technologically inclined as we think they are…they can't use Word processors correctly, they can't use Excel worksheets…they can use it very well for social media and things like that but they can't even draw properly off an article of Wikipedia and present it in such a way that doesn't look as if they cheated (Carien)*

Carien aligns herself with many teachers who position their learners within a broader deficit discourse that claims they are inherently lacking the requisite knowledge and skills to engage with school curricula (Alford, 2014). Her comments raise a number of questions. Firstly, she was talking about learners who are thirteen or fourteen years of age. I question her expectation that learners should be skilled at using Word processors and Excel worksheets. Many came from township schools where Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has only recently been introduced on a large scale. Furthermore, even in the more advantaged schools in the area, the curriculum does not allow much time for computer studies. She also claimed that they had 'no frame of reference'. Finally, Carien also criticised learners for not being able to take information from a Wikipedia article and present it in their own words. As a teacher who taught English to both learners who did and those who did not speak English as their home language, my experience is that all learners need to be explicitly taught how to use information from a source without resorting to plagiarising or 'cutting and pasting'. It was evident that Carien's expectations of her grade 8 learners needed to be reconsidered, and also her conception of her role as the teacher at this level reviewed.

Whilst Carien did not perceive learners' knowledge of 'social media' as a resource for learning, Dineo, only in her second year of teaching, described in her interview how she used learners' knowledge of social media as a springboard for discussion of the writing task they were asked to do. She showed an intuitive understanding of the need to build on what learners bring to school and do know and what Cochran –Smith refers as 'the linguistic resources, interests and knowledge of students' (2004, p. 69).

Teachers also expressed deficit views of learners' families. Firstly, they indicated that many parents and families were not, themselves, knowledgeable. Carien articulated these views but the rest of the group supported her. She said

> *We've had this conversation-it's about a lack of parental influence, as teachers we can't possibly bridge all of the gaps that they have –at some point another set of adults have to step up and go "This is my child I want you to know things" But these kids come from parents who from the onset do not know anything-which is why you listen to Jacaranda in the morning and the question is 'What is wine made from' and the person says 'Apples'. What is the biggest continent in the world? Angola. This is an adult person and these are the people that parent these children (my emphasis).*

There is a strong positioning of 'we' (us) and 'they' (them). Teachers created a sense of 'them' and 'us' when they talked about their own families and their histories.

> *…whereas we constantly have magazines lying around and you'll read whereas these kids the only time they'll read is if they have to research a topic (Eric)*
>
> *I think of my own example now, when my kids were little, we used to get in to bed with them every night and read them a story every night…(Eric).*
>
> *Absolutely, yes, we all did, ja (Beth)*

Exchanges like these made it evident that the teachers believed that they inhabited different worlds to those of their learners. What was of concern, though, was that, except for Dineo, none of them seemed to see the need to know the 'world' of their learners. Nieto (2004) maintains that teachers need to reflect on their own cultural frames of reference and worldviews, and be willing to learn about the cultures and worldviews represented in their classrooms. It is these qualities, she asserts, that will enable teachers to acknowledge their need to learn more about teaching and to identify opportunities for additional learning. Yet again I realised that a 'Professional Development Cycle for Continuous Improvement' could only be effective after stereotypical views such as those expressed by this group of teachers had been examined through preliminary discussions and constructive dialogue.

The teachers also asserted that many learners' mothers were prepared to do the work for their children should the opportunity arise. This is the reason why Anne, Beth, Carien and Dineo allowed learners to do the planning of their writing tasks at home, but the actual writing had to be done in class under their supervision. This was the exchange in one of the earliest meetings:

> *If you send it out the room then the mother will write it* (Anne)

Yes (Carien)

Yes (Dineo)

It's so true (Beth)

Or a friend or someone else (Carien)

It happens in front of you. In fact even the rough doesn't leave the classroom it stays in my cupboard (Anne)

Absolutely! Locked away! (Beth)

You cannot imagine how good they are at cheating (Carien)

It's unbelievable (Carien)

Teachers also agreed that learners had a poor work ethic. Anne said

There's no learning for learning sake only learning for exams' sake

Teachers maintained again and again that 'learners know nothing'. Carien said their inability to write well also stemmed from their general lack of background knowledge and their reluctance to read and learn more. I noted with concern that teachers were unable to answer two important questions in the inquiry cycle. Firstly, when they were asked to identify their own learning needs they generally avoided directly answering the question until they were pressed to do so in the final session. Secondly, when asked what their learners do know as opposed to what they do not know teachers struggled to respond and eventually Anne admitted

Um…I don't know what they do know….

Dineo was the only teacher who answered with an apparent knowledge of the learners. She said

…they're more familiar with contemporary poetry so your more your modern writers so you know like your Maya Angelou structure type poems but maybe not as heavy content as hers. And then that would link to the music being the rap and the hip hop that's really just quite the fad….I think it …. Context of writing…because currently modern age contemporary poetry-that's really in…a lot of the hip hop and the rap…so <u>that's when they like writing if it's channeled in those things</u>

Dineo's observation is quite consistent with the work done by Jackson (2007) in a middle school in Detroit, Michigan, where she used hip hop as a means to bridge the gap between the 'home literacies' of the African American learners at the school and the writing

expectations of the school. This may have been because Dineo was the youngest teacher in the group and perhaps closer to the 'youth culture' of the learners at the school. It was regrettable that she became very ill and was not able to participate in discussions at all during the second term because she contributed valuable comments such as this to the discussion.

In a paper on deficit views of learners in the 'middle years' in Australian schools (equivalent of the Senior Phase learners in South African classrooms), Hattam and Prosser (2008) stress the importance of teachers responding to the changing demographics of their classrooms and to youth identities. They emphasise the significance of identity in the 'middle years' and maintain that identity construction is a key element of adolescence. While they acknowledge that learners' 'funds of knowledge' (2008, p. 99) do not contain the cultural capital needed for school success, they advise teachers to get to know students' communities and get to understand more about popular culture in order to promote more socially just middle schooling. While it was evident in some of the comments made by teachers that there was some awareness of the developmental stages of their learners, their views generally indicated a lack of knowledge and understanding of learners' communities. For example, Carien stated that

> [we*'re] fixing them because the grade 8s and 9s are physically off the charts with their insane behaviour*

and she went on to indicate that they *'calm down'* in grade 10, partly because there is a *'more interesting'* language curriculum from grade 10 onwards.

McIntyre et al. (2010) also discuss the impact of teachers' deficit views of learners on their instructional practices and interactions in the language classroom. They maintain that teachers hold misguided views as to why poor students in the United States do not achieve as well as their middle class counterparts. These views extend to children who do not speak English as a home language, too. McIntyre et al. quote research by Ferguson (1998) that shows that teachers who hold these views "alter their classroom interactions in subtle ways that communicate to the students <u>that they are not expected to achieve</u>*"* (p. 19 my emphasis).

Timperley et al. (2007) put it another way. They state

> …if we think that certain other people have deficiencies, our actions will tend to follow from this thinking and our interactions with them will tend to be negative and unproductive (p. xxvii).

Teachers in the group seemed to interpret the 'diversity' of the classes they taught in terms of 'the bright and the unbright' (Anne) or those who spoke English as a home language and those who did not (Beth). This oversimplification of the diversity that was evident in their classrooms is revealed in things they said:

> *Inability to express ideas because they have no ideas-because they have no ideas on anything because they have no general knowledge (Carien)*
>
> *Ja 'O' levels and 'A' levels…..I feel like in our education system there needs to be that differentiation where you actually know that these kids are meant for university they're going to study further so you'll impart all these skills to ensure that they have it. I know you don't like the elitist take I feel like we're always we down to mediocrity we figure all children are alike (Anne)*
>
> *The kids who can't make will go and work in a factory some sort of manual- the others who have got the concept of language these are the ones who will go and study further (Eric)*
>
> *Well, it's not a case of is it fair they don't have the ability (Beth)*
>
> *Life is not fair- we all don't have the same ability (Eric)*
>
> *Ja- what do car mechanics need as far as English sentence construction goes REALLY? So maybe you need two streams- academic English and…….. (Anne)*
>
> *You know there were kids I've taught and they were dunces damn stupid and they're doing well and they're earning more money they've got…who am I to say you didn't learn your Shakespeare because they managed to find jobs they managed to move on with their lives (Eric)*
>
> *…have two separate streams perhaps at the same school but you've got a second language group and a first language group (Anne)*

Teachers revealed deeply entrenched views about 'how the world works'. They essentially maintained that inequality is a fact of life (some have ability, some do not), that 'dunces', manual labourers, car mechanics are not necessarily disadvantaged as they can still earn a good income. A question that occurred to me was to what extent teachers' own histories of learning and teaching in South Africa influenced them to think and believe in terms of 'the haves' and the 'have nots' and that the way to solve the problems of diversity in their classrooms was to separate those who 'can' do English from those who 'cannot' do English, to separate the 'bright' from the 'unbright' learner. Separation seemed to be a far more comfortable solution than integration because with the latter the 'better' group is disadvantaged.

In hindsight, I believe that these exchanges revealed an important area of learning that needed to be pursued with this particular group. Had I had more experience as the

facilitator of a PLC, I might have pursued the many lines of discussion that were misleading and unproductive. However, while I had experience of facilitating conventional workshops and seminars for teachers, I was inexperienced as a facilitator of a group I hoped would become a PLC and I did not recognise or capitalise on the opportunity to promote the important discussion that was needed in order to challenge these constructions of the learners in their classrooms. I tried to introduce a different perspective during the fifth session having realised by this time that there would be no moving forward if this perception of their learners was not questioned or challenged. I suggested to teachers that writing needed to be about empowering learners to express their ideas and impact their 'world'. I cited the example of the mother in Eldorado Park who had written a letter to President Zuma about the youth drug problem in her community. The letter sparked a huge police crackdown in the community for a period of time. Teachers, while applauding the actions of the mother concerned, said

> *You know what? The kind of people who would do that kind of thing are going to be your kids doing well at school anyway, those skills will be inbuilt by the time they get to matric so …(Anne)*

Teachers used mainly authoritative discourse in their comments about learners. They made statements like 'life is not fair' in relation to learners who can or cannot write as though it is inevitable or a predetermined matter. Beth's comment quoted earlier in this section reinforces this sentiment – you are able or you are not able. It is about an ability, or an aptitude, or a talent (Cremin and Oliver, 2016), which is something not everyone has. To envisage a world, which I was trying to encourage them to do, where more mothers in disadvantaged communities wrote letters to the authorities, believing that it could make a difference, or where more individuals saw writing as a means to influence or impact their world in small but meaningful ways, was, for them, unrealistic.

Furthermore, at that stage, I had a narrow understanding of the kind of learning opportunities that needed to be pursued in a PLC. When teachers had talked about the value and importance of feedback to learners on their written work, I gave them the article by Beach and Friedrich (2006) entitled "Responses to Writing" at the next meeting. When they talked extensively about the gap between learners' oral proficiency and their written proficiency, I gave them an extract from a book by Cremin and Myhill that focused on the gap between talk and writing. These topics fitted my preconceptions of the learning required to come out of a PLC focused on the teaching of writing. I was to learn the truth of Easton's claim that 'real learning organisations in all areas are messy*'. S*he quotes

Wheatley and Kellner Rogers(1996) who stated that "People like to pretend that [they] are in control every step of the way. [They] prefer to talk about 'executing plan' rather than reveling in surprises" *(*Easton, 2012, p. 50).

It might have been appropriate at this stage to draw teachers' attention to the work of Cochran – Smith (2004) who maintains that continuing professional teacher development should be conceptualized as a learning problem and a political problem related to issues of equity and social justice. As mentioned earlier, she argues that a pedagogy for social justice means providing opportunities for all students to engage in 'significant intellectual work' (p. 68). Mendelowitz (2010) too, recommends a challenge to the response to the 'literacy crisis' in South African schools (Swart, 2009; Yeld, 2009; PIRLS, 2008) which dictates that a 'low-level, unchallenging, unimaginative pedagogy' be delivered to learners. Whilst some of the teachers' comments indicated an awareness of issues of equity and social justice, they had not apparently ever been challenged to question their views on these issues. In my view, teachers needed to believe all learners could do better, and that they could play a significant role in facilitating that learning.

5.4.1.4 Teachers' beliefs about learning

At various times over the course of the six meetings, teachers made comments that revealed something about their beliefs about learning. I will start this discussion of those beliefs by quoting something Beth said which seems to encapsulate the views expressed

You cannot mould an unacademic child into an academic curriculum

Eric's words '*we're trying to create this well rounded child that can read..write…listen .....speak properly'* add to a recurring image of how teachers perceived learners. Beth's choice of the word 'mould' and Eric's use of 'trying to create' is somewhat reminiscent of an underlying assumption of Fundamental Pedagogics (discussed in 2.2). Teachers are like a 'potter' or a 'creator' with the learners who are the 'clay' in his or her hands. Teachers 'mould' learners, but they cannot mould them into something that they are not (the type of clay in this instance may limit what can or cannot be 'moulded'). Many other comments by teachers reaffirmed this belief that if you were not 'bright', you could not learn 'high level skills' and were basically destined (In Christian National Education terms, predestined?) to be a plumber, an electrician or a motor mechanic. According to the teachers, these were all worthy pursuits which enabled you to earn a living and support a family, but they were not on the intellectual level of a professional person. 'Unacademic'

learners, according to teachers, could earn a living and live responsible lives without acquiring high level literacy skills.

The following exchange also reinforces teachers' belief that learning is determined by what you are 'born with':

> *I feel like we're always, we down to mediocrity we figure all children are alike (Eric)*
>
> *They're not, they're not alike (Anne)*
>
> *They're not all alike they have different brains so we cannot all be the same. We try and teach everyone the same thing it's never going to work , in an ideal world it will work(Eric)*
>
> *I think this country's also overly sensitive about being equal and I understand why but move on it's not real it's not real (Anne)*

At another meeting, Eric reiterated

> *As a teacher I am teaching them all the concepts, I am trying my best. I'm giving them all the theory. I'm giving them all those things but I cannot control the outcome*

Eric talked of 'teaching', 'trying' and 'giving' the same to everyone. He asserts, however, that he cannot determine the uptake. He teaches, but cannot guarantee learning. He gives, but cannot be sure 'they' will take. '*I*' determine what '*I*' do, but not what '*they*' do. Compare this to what 'Lauren', a student cited in Danielewiczs's (2001) *Teaching Selves*, who stated that writing would have a place in the lives of all of her students "whether they wish to be auto mechanics or analytical chemists. [My] job is to send them off with life skills that will be relevant to any occupation" (p. 32).

Cochran-Smith suggests that a remedy for the defeatist views teachers expressed is for teachers to "wrestle with their own doubts, fend off the fatigue of reform and depend on the strength of their individual and collaborative convictions that their work ultimately makes a difference in the fabric of social responsibility" (2004, p.28).

As the facilitator of the group, my challenge was to find ways to motivate, or even provoke teachers to 'wrestle with their own doubts' and 'fend off the fatigue of reform'.

Teachers' discourse revealed outdated theories about learners and learning. For example, their statements about the rote nature of learning, strongly underpinned by behaviourist views on learning, were questioned as long ago as the 1960s. It was of growing concern to

me that professional development opportunities at the school and elsewhere did not appear to have required of teachers that they reflect on and be prepared to review and revise their beliefs about teaching writing.

5.4.1.5 The Learning Activity

Opfer and Pedder (2011) maintain that certain professional development learning activities have greater impact on teachers than others. Teachers also have differing beliefs about and practices in regard to their own learning. Teachers in Group A had established beliefs about what their professional learning should entail. They never embraced the idea of a PLC as a forum that required them to do more than express their beliefs and opinions. When I asked them in the last meeting to evaluate the potential of a PLC for teacher learning and development, they maintained that it was not feasible. Eric said

> *…if you tell people, oh get a couple of schools together. You'll have one meeting and it will die after that*

Even when I tried to explore the feasibility of the staff English subject meeting becoming a PLC, teachers rejected it. They said

> *Yes but that's normally business. What have you done? What are you planning to do? Quick quick getting marks in deadlines (Anne)*
>
> *We can't sit around and discuss the merits of a poem and how we're going to analyse it (Eric)*
>
> *No there's no time (Anne)*
>
> *You're doing two extra murals a week minimum and we have a staff meeting (Beth)*
>
> *We've got three staff meetings per week. Monday afternoon, Tuesday break, Thursday break. (Anne)*
>
> *Yes (Beth)*

Collaboration was not a way of working that appealed to these teachers. They appeared to co-operate very comfortably with one another, but the closest they seemed to be able to come to the idea of collaboration was Anne's pronouncement

> *I think practically if we could sit every Tuesday for an English meeting if you got all your business over and done with and each grade has a turn with doing a poem or whatever it is to make some people really understand what they're teaching and*

> *the ones that already do know just need to be quiet and go with it for the moment or chip in and give advice but I think that's as practical as we can get*

Anne, perhaps unknowingly, expressed much the same perception of "PLCs" as was being promoted by the Gauteng Department of Education- a forum for the sharing of 'best practice'. The idea of 'collaborative learning' had never taken root in the minds of teachers, perhaps because collaboration was not something they believed in or valued. However, Owen (2014) argues that

> The key is building a culture which goes beyond the work group *and is open to new ideas and guarding against insularity.* Challenge and debate regarding various educational perspectives are an important part of the learning process (p. 59 my emphasis).

The teachers in Group A maintained that, for them, the ideal way to learn would be to be able to select from a list of workshops that addressed very specific topics in the curriculum. They would only attend the sessions that dealt with what they believed they needed to know. Anne argued that she would easily be able to identify her learning needs if she had a very clear, specific and 'finite' list of what it is she has to teach. However, she did not believe that young, inexperienced teachers would be able to identify their learning needs or 'to know what they don't know'. And so, again, teachers went on to discuss what professional development opportunities should be provided for 'young teachers' and that

> *We need to spell it out to them also with CAPS we need to tell them this term we are doing this section in language and under language you need to know this section antonyms / synonyms whatever and they need to ask 'Have I covered that sort of thing?' . (Eric)*

Again, an 'us' (we) and 'them' dichotomy is established – 'we' (experienced teachers) know but 'they' (inexperienced teachers) do not. Eventually, the group concluded that, as experienced teachers they would have no problem identifying their learning needs and knowing what course of action they needed to take to address those needs. This included asking a colleague or doing research on the internet.

Because of the insistence of the teachers on professional development opportunities focusing on very narrow topics tightly linked to the curriculum and their belief that young teachers came ill-prepared for teaching, I asked them if they believed teaching could be scripted and whether they felt that to do so would be an acceptable for teacher development. They agreed that the scripting of teaching had a place. Beth explained it like this

I don't know how to put this without sounding really bad but there are teachers out there who through no fault of their own were not properly taught

And they need it (Eric)

And they need it (Beth)

There is a definite line between "them" and "us" in this short exchange. "They" are teachers 'out there' (a term used by Xena [6.3.2] in Group B to refer to township school teachers). "They" are teachers who 'were not properly taught' and who need 'scripted teaching'. 'We' know what we don't know and can address our own professional development needs by doing research or talking to knowledgeable colleagues.

The words of Little (2003), quoted in section 2.4.1.4, and also referred to by Watson, became increasingly pertinent as the meetings progressed. Little's warning that there is a danger in that local norms of practice become reified through consensus in PLCs thus replacing the 'isolated classroom teacher with the isolated teacher group and balkanized workplace' (Little, 2003, p.939; Watson, 2014, p.25).

Teachers may well have benefitted from exposure to the ideas, knowledge and experience of teachers with different histories from other schools and contexts. However, Anne, Beth, Carien and Eric needed to engage in critical reflection on their assumptions, beliefs and attitudes before being receptive to different ideas and experiences.

5.4.1.6 Structures and supports provided by schools for teacher learning

As indicated at the beginning of the chapter, the principal who invited me to work with teachers at the school retired at the end of 2012. The new principal, after meeting with me briefly at the beginning of my first visit (Eric introduced me at my request) made no further effort to communicate with me. The deputy principal, on two occasions, briefly visited the group. We met in an office shared by the two language HODs, close to the staffroom and not ideal in terms of quiet uninterrupted time for discussions. Beyond that, there was no visible support for or interest in the group and what 'we' were trying to do.

5.5 Reflection

Sociocognitive theorists (Baktin, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978) have successfully argued the point that we teach what we know, that the twelve years of educational experience preservice teachers bring with them to their teacher preparation programmes have already predisposed them to *value certain ways of teaching and learning***.** (Jackson and Vavra, 2007, p. viii my emphasis).

Although not ‘preservice teachers’ like those referred to in the quote above, teachers confidently expressed what they believed were valued ways of teaching writing. They acknowledged that grade eight learners’ writing skills were generally poor, but shifted the blame for this to the primary schools and poor parental support and influence. They believed that after two or three years at secondary school, they did what they could to ‘fix’ the damage done by poor teaching in primary schools and the lack of stimulation and encouragement from their families. Learners at their school performed significantly better than many of the learners at other schools in the same district. Teachers were satisfied that learners learned what they needed to know in order to earn the National Senior Certificate (NSC) and some were even able to go and study at university whilst the rest became manual labourers or artisans. There was no perceived need to ‘do better’.

Whilst teachers did attend the meetings with me voluntarily, they did not do so because of a perceived need to learn and to improve their practice. They attended the meetings because they considered it the ‘lesser of two evils’. They would be required to attend staff development on Monday afternoons anyway, so attending a meeting that focused on the subject they taught seemed like a better option than attending the general staff development meetings. Whilst Cereseto (2015) maintains that voluntary participation in a PLC is ‘enabling’, she also asserts that teachers must “have a mindset that believes in TPD (Teacher Professional Development) and values continuous learning. These teachers see “teachers as learners” and gaining new knowledge and skills as a ‘professional obligation’” (Chappuis et al., 2009, p. 57 in Cereseto, 2015, 39).

Teachers did not display the mindset described by Cereseto, largely because they believed they knew what they needed to know in order to teach writing.

Brodie (2013) also identifies some of the enabling conditions of PLCs. One of these is ‘immense skill and expertise on the part of the facilitator” (p.15). My lack of skill and experience in facilitating a PLC was evident upon reflection on the six meetings held with teachers in the first action research cycle. Even though I was ‘facilitating’ as an outsider, I needed to develop a much more directive facilitation style. Participating in a PLC was a new experience for everyone in the group and it therefore had to be more tightly structured and initially perhaps retain some of the elements of a ‘workshop’ in order to progressively introduce teachers to the idea of a PLC. Langer et al. (2003) state that the style of

facilitation may vary from directive when the facilitator teaches, models and provides feedback and is thus more dominant in discussions to non-directive when the facilitator listens, prompts and is less dominant in discussions. The more directive style could be used when the members lack the necessary skills or knowledge but as the members become more "autonomous" the non- directive style might be used (pp. 132-133).

Discussions and activities also needed to be structured in a way that would require teachers to question their assumptions, their views and beliefs about themselves, about their learners and about teaching. Teachers in Group A had a very narrow conception of the knowledge that teachers needed to teach writing. According to them, writing followed a specific series of steps. They were therefore unable to accurately identify their own learning needs because they believed they knew essentially what they needed to know. They identified learners' learning needs in terms of this view. The Group A teachers have a strongly deficit view of their learners largely influenced by many unsupported assumptions. What Jesson et al. (2013) refer to as students' existing expertise, was disregarded and teachers did not capitalize on making links between learners' every day knowledge and school-based knowledge. In my opinion, this made it unlikely for the teachers to be able to ask discerning and sensitive questions about the quality of their learners' learning or about how they could improve on the quality of that learning.

Whilst a second unsuccessful attempt to establish a PLC had been concluded, I had gained more important insights as to the factors that enable or constrain the development of a PLC. These would be important as I embarked on a third attempt to initiate a PLC with a focus on the teaching of writing.

Chapter Six: The PLC that almost could: teacher identities, facilitation style and other factors that enabled changes to writing pedagogies to begin

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Finding Research Participants

6.3 The Teachers

6.3.1 Warren – I was never very confident

6.3.1.1 Warren's history as a learner

6.3.1.2 Initial teacher education and early teaching experience

6.3.1.3 Present practice and perceptions of lessons

6.3.2 Xena – Schools out here… Schools out there

6.3.2.1 Xena's history as a learner

6.3.2.2 Initial Teacher Education and early teaching experience

6.3.2.3 Present Practice and perceptions of learners

6.3.3 Yasmine – I have learned along the way

6.3.3.1 Yasmine's history as a learner

6.3.3.2 Initial Teacher Education and early teaching experience

6.3.3.3 Present Practice and perception of learners

6.3.4 Zoe – Teaching opened up a new world

6.3.4.1 Zoe's history as a learner

6.3.4.2 Initial Teacher Education and early teaching experience

6.3.4.3 Present Practice and perceptions of learners

6.4 Discussion

6.5 Group meetings

6.5.1 Teachers' beliefs about the teaching of writing

6.5.2 Teachers' beliefs about teaching English

6.5.3 Teachers' beliefs about learners

6.5.4 Teachers' beliefs about learning

6.5.5 The Learning Activity

6.5.6 Structures and support provided by school for teacher learning

6.5.7 Reflection

6.1 Introduction

Ideally, a second cycle of meetings with the grade 8 teachers who were the focus of the previous chapter would have enabled me to build on the first six meetings held in 2013. These had essentially amounted to reconnaissance or fact finding about the context and the participants in the PLC. Implementation of an amended plan was unfortunately not possible because by the start of the next school year all of the teachers had resigned or moved on to other teaching posts. A new group thus had to be established to test insights gained into the facilitation of a PLC and to further explore the factors that may either promote or limit the development of a PLC with a focus on the teaching of writing.

After several months of yet another series of unsuccessful attempts to enlist the participation of grade 8 teachers in a PLC, I approached teachers in another senior phase grade, grade 7 as I believed grade 7 teachers might be more available and willing to participate. Although grade 7 is part of the senior phase in the General Education and Training band, this grade is usually still physically located in the primary school.

I sent e-mails to principals and heads of department of twelve schools requesting the participation of their grade 7 English teachers in a PLC to be hosted at the teacher union office. I proposed to have the second series of meetings 'off-site' for two main reasons. Firstly, I found the constant surrounding noise and interruptions of the school environment detracted to some extent from the ability of the teachers to give their undivided attention to the group discussion. Secondly, the noise also made the transcription of the recordings of the meetings significantly more challenging. I thus requested that the PLC meetings be incorporated into the union's professional development programme and that a budget for these meetings be set aside to cover teachers' travel costs and the cost of refreshments at each meeting.

I was surprised and disappointed to discover that recruiting grade 7 teachers to participate in the study was as challenging as persuading grade 8 teachers to participate. As with the grade 8 teachers I had approached, 'workload' was cited as the main reason why they would not have time to participate in a PLC. Many responded and stated that in addition to teaching grade 7 English, they were also heads of department and this added substantial administrative responsibilities to their load. It was also at the time of the year where staff changes were being planned or anticipated. Some principals indicated that as they would not be at the same school the following year, they were unwilling to make a commitment to support and participate in the project on behalf of their successors. Two heads of

department indicated they had been promoted and would be moving to new schools. One teacher indicated that while she would be happy to allow as much classroom observation as was needed, and would participate in an individual interview, she was not prepared to attend regular meetings as she had young children who needed her time and attention in the afternoons.

Two schools responded positively and assured me of the participation of their grade 7 English teachers. However, the first e-mail I received upon returning to work after the December break was from one of the teachers, stating that she would no longer be able to participate as she had agreed to teach afternoon classes in order to supplement her income. The second teacher ignored six e-mails sent to her requesting a meeting to discuss dates and times for meetings.

Reflection

With so many unsuccessful attempts to recruit a small number of teachers to participate in a PLC, I had questions as to what it was that was adding so significantly to teachers' 'workload'. A few teachers had been specific about the activities that prevented them from participating in a PLC: childcare responsibilities, extra-mural activities or extra lessons to earn additional income. But what else did the term 'workload' encompass?

A report commissioned by the South African Educator Labour Relations Council (ELRC) on teacher 'workload' was published by the Human Sciences Research Council (Chisholm et al., 2005). This report showed that more and more of teachers' time was spent on doing administrative and non-administrative activities such as extra-murals, and less on actual teaching. (In a 43 hour work week, on average 16 hours per week were spent on teaching while the remaining 25 hours were spent on administrative and non-administrative activities). The report shows, however, that there are significant differences in rural, semi-rural and urban areas. In rural areas, teachers spent on average 38.3 hours per week on their work while teachers in urban areas teachers spent on average 43.8 hours per week on their work. Teachers in rural areas also spent more time on professional development activities on average than their counterparts in urban areas. If teachers in urban areas were spending slightly more than the mandated 43 hours a week on their work but more than half of this time was focused on administrative and non-administrative activities, could this be one of the reasons why sustained and substantive teacher development activities were not high on their list of priorities?

Two revisions of the curriculum have occurred since the Educator Workload report. The first was the introduction of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and more recently, a 'repackaged' version of the NCS called the NCS-Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (NCS-CAPS). One of the reasons cited for these revisions was the need to reduce the administrative and reporting burden on teachers so that they could focus on teaching and learning (Curriculum News, January, 2010). With each revision of the school curriculum, however, there have been continuing reports of increased workloads, particularly with regard to the recording of assessment. In hindsight, I think it may have been useful if, with each refusal I received based on the teachers' 'workload', I had asked teachers to specify what duties and activities consumed their time and their energy. Were they spending more time on planning and preparation, staff meetings, district meetings, management and administrative tasks or remedial teaching for learners in their classes who were not coping? I believe having some answers to this question will be important for any future attempts to include PLCs in the union's professional development programmes. Theoretically, teachers are supposed to work an 8.6 hour day, 7 of which are deemed to be formal school hours. Over and above this time, they are supposed to spend up to 80 hours per year on professional development activities (DBE, Personnel Administrative Measures, 2016). In theory, this should have allowed time for participation in a professional development activity that required sustained involvement. It seems that, as with many policies, there is a disjuncture between policy and practice.

6. 2 Finding Research Participants

With two unsuccessful attempts behind me, and with time of the essence, I contacted a teacher who had worked with me on professional development activities over the years and asked her if she might be able to encourage teachers within her district cluster to participate in a PLC. She expressed her interest in participating, and assured me there would be no difficulty in getting six to eight teachers to join the group. When I spoke to her again after two weeks, she too reported having had great difficulty finding teachers but that she had eventually succeeded in getting a group of seven teachers to meet with me. The meeting was scheduled to allow for me to explain more fully what the study was about, what it would require of those who agreed to participate and to allow teachers to ask questions.

6.3 The teachers

The meeting was scheduled for the third week of the first term and all seven teachers were present. I chose to use Servage's (2008) three core beliefs of a PLC to explain PLCs as she effectively foregrounds the key requirements for those who choose to participate in a PLC. Firstly, she states that there needs to be a belief that in order to improve learners' learning, continuing professional development for teachers is critically important. Secondly, participants need to believe that collaborative and collegial learning is an effective way to continue to learn and to develop and thirdly, participants must believe that the collaborative work that takes place among teachers in a PLC should involve inquiry, problem posing and problem solving into their own contexts and day to day teaching. I also indicated that the focus of the PLC would be on investigating the challenges linked to the teaching of writing in their respective classrooms. I asked teachers if they would be willing to travel to the union office for meetings, or would prefer me to travel to a school in their area. They indicated that they would prefer to have me travel to the school. They also agreed to think about participating in the study and to let me know of their decision within a week. I took everyone's e-mail addresses and cell phone numbers and sent each person who had attended the meeting an e-mail the next day, thanking them for their interest and attendance at the meeting. I had two reasons for following up the meeting with an e-mail; the first because I appreciated their willingness to meet with me to find out more about the study but I also felt I needed to begin to establish a direct communication between myself and each of the potential group members, rather than communicating through a group member (Eric) as I had done with Group A.

One teacher decided that she would prefer not to participate in the meetings. The rest agreed to participate and I e-mailed a date for the first meeting to each of them. In preparation for the meeting, I created folders for each of the teachers which included a summary on discourses of writing based on Ivanič's article (2004), the consent forms that needed to be signed and the teacher questionnaire that needed to be completed. Although six of the seven teachers initially agreed to participate in the study, only four of the six eventually attended the meetings.

This group was also demographically diverse, with two white teachers, a coloured teacher and an Indian teacher. The most obvious difference between this group and the previous group is the fact that, except for Yasmine, the teachers in this group teach other subjects as well as other grades. Group A, except for Beth, taught only English in several grades. The

other significant difference is that the only teacher in the group with a degree with a major in English was Yasmine. Xena and Zoe had fairly general primary school diploma qualifications and Warren had a Bachelor of Education with Natural Sciences as his major teaching subject.

The teachers in Group B taught grade seven English Home Language. The following table summarises the qualifications and teaching experience of the teachers in the group at the time of the study:

Table 5: Summary of Group B teachers' qualifications and teaching experience

Teachers	Qualifications	Teaching experience
Warren	Bachelor of Education (2013)	Second year of teaching. He also taught Natural Science and Physical Education
Xena	Higher Diploma in Education (1991)	25 years teaching experience. She also taught Life Orientation and was the acting head of the Life Skills/ Life Orientation department
Yasmine	B. Ed (1997) majors in English and History B.Ed (Hons) (2004)	14 years teaching experience. She taught only grade 7 English at the time of the study and was the head of department.
Zoe	Higher Diploma in Education(1984) Further Diploma in Education (1999)	33 years teaching experience. She also taught Arts and Culture and a Physical Education class.

All four teachers attended every meeting during the first term. Warren was, unfortunately, informed at the end of the first term that he would no longer be teaching English and he thus withdrew from the group for the remainder of the seven meetings.

6.3.1. Warren- I was never very confident

6.3.1.1 Warren's history as a learner

Warren was a learner at the primary school hosting the group's meetings. He remembers struggling with English generally and especially with writing when he was at school. Teachers constantly reprimanded him for his poor spelling and incorrect grammar. He said

> *….from when I was young I always had issues with my spelling and grammar…I was creative but I always struggled with my spelling and sentence structure..*
>
> *I even preferred Afrikaans …teachers said 'You speak English as a home language'….so everybody always expected something from me…I felt that there was added pressure because I do speak English at home and there's a certain expectation- they expected things from you…*
>
> *…if you can't spell and your sentence structure is all mixed up I felt like the teachers were judging me…*
>
> *My ideas were overlooked. They would read something and then 'wow' this spelling mistake is so bad it takes away from the meaning of the passage…*

From these comments, it is evident that Warren came through school contexts where a skills approach (Ivanič, 2004) to writing was dominant, with correct spelling and grammar being highly valued. He was thus apparently required to work on his spelling and grammar and not necessarily the development of his ideas. Cremin and Myhill (2012) maintain that currently the dominant theoretical view of writing is that it is a social act and that when children are taught to write, they are taught what is valued in their culture. The importance of spelling, they argue, is an example of a culturally validated stance (Cremin and Myhill, 2012, p.11). Jackson and Vavra, the editors of "Closing the Gap", have a similar view and state that spelling and punctuation, the mechanics of writing, are prioritised because they can be measured on standardised tests and thus "lionized as key indicators of writing proficiency" (Jackson and Vavra, 2007, vii). Teachers with weak content knowledge about writing also find it easier to identify spelling and punctuation errors. The other aspects of writing such as stylistic devices, meaning and audience are often neglected.

Warren described how he went to high school 'hating English', but that meeting a friend at high school who wrote poetry influenced him to try to write poetry too. He said

> *I love writing poetry……. I'll write a poem and put it on the board so the learners can see even now I still love writing poetry*

Although Warren did not indicate what topics he wrote about, I surmised that his enjoyment of writing poetry may have derived from the freedom from having to adhere to strict grammatical rules and having the freedom to express himself.

6.3.1.2 Initial teacher education and early teaching experience

Warren completed a Bachelor of Education degree and he believes his writing improved at university. He identified two possible reasons for this: he was constantly in the university writing centre for support with various assignments that he had to submit and he had to do a lot more reading at university. He said he

> *started reading a lot more which helped. I didn't enjoy reading but since 'varsity, everything is reading and I started reading more and now I love reading and that helps a lot.*

Warren has an older brother who majored in English when he did his teaching degree and Warren constantly asked him to check and help him to correct his work. He recalls having done an English A and B course, but these were not courses that focused on the 'teaching or applying yourself to the teaching of the language. …..it was a lot of just grammar and reading'. His teaching subjects were Natural Science and Technology and Physical Education.

He usually had to teach grade 7 Natural Sciences during his school experiences. He spoke with enthusiasm about several school experiences spent at schools in Orlando, Soweto. He found that learners struggled with the 'language' or terminology of Science, but he nevertheless enjoyed the opportunity to teach them. He applied for a post at one of these schools but was disappointed not to be even short listed as a candidate for these posts. He found the learners in the township schools eager to learn and felt there was parental support. He said

> *I think the parents in the township they tell them if you don't get good marks you're gonna be in trouble. They're a lot more strict and they are more respectful.*

Warren's perceptions of learners in township schools and of their parents was markedly different to many others I had heard. Generally, teachers in this study who had been educated and who taught in schools outside of the townships expressed strongly deficit views of learners who came from township schools. Cochran-Smith (2004) explains that very often "Teachers tend not to have the same cultural frames of reference and points of view as their student" (p. 6).

Cochran-Smith(2004) goes on to say that the lack of shared cultural frames makes it difficult for 'white, middle class teachers' to understand how to effectively adapt and teach the curriculum for these learners and thus teachers begin to perceive diversity as a deficit to be overcome. Jesson et al. (2013) suggest that a way for teachers to overcome the lack of shared cultural frames is to gain a knowledge and understanding of the array of literacy knowledge that learners do have rather than focusing on what they do not have.

Whilst Warren acknowledged the difficulties learners had with the 'language' or terminology of Science, he did not seem to view this as a 'deficit' but would have liked to work with learners he perceived as motivated and eager to learn. He regarded their attitudes as more important than their proficiency in the language of learning and teaching.

6.3.1.3 Present practice and perceptions of learners

Warren admitted to feeling 'nervous and intimidated' when he arrived at his present school and was told that in addition to teaching Natural Science and Technology and Physical Education, he would be required to teach one class of English. There were two reasons for his anxiety. The first was that he had had no training in the teaching of English during his initial teacher education and had always struggled with English himself. The second was that he would be teaching alongside his primary school English teacher.

Each teacher is responsible for doing the planning and preparation for a subject and he described his dismay when he first received the lesson preparation for English from the responsible teacher. He said

> *…it was just stacks and stacks of prep. I think it was then that I had a realisation that now I have to tackle it alone. During the first two weeks I was up and down between the classes asking for help. I grew a lot. I think that's when I began to change. I became more confident standing up in front of the class.*

Warren ascribed his increased confidence to knowing what it was he had to teach each lesson, and to having some idea of how to teach it. Whilst he initially found it difficult to maintain the pace that was required of him and described how he would 'hide' because he had not completed all the lessons in a set of preparation given to him, he eventually improved and at the time of the interviews was doing better at 'keeping up'.

He also believed he was more confident because of the positive responses he had had from learners. He chooses to write for and with his learners who are, he says, 'very creative and they ask a lot of questions'. He has written poetry with learners as well as letters and short stories. He said that

> *…teaching [English] really helped me to embrace it and helped me understand it and helped me appreciate it*

According to Cremin and Baker (2014) a number of scholars suggest that as teachers develop their confidence as writers and model writing in class, their attitudes to teaching writing improve (Draper, Barksdale-Ladd, & Radencich, 2000; Murray, 1982). This would seem to have been Warren's experience.

Warren admitted that in the early days of his teaching, he would constantly 'second guess' himself when writing on the chalkboard and keep checking the correct spelling of words in the dictionary. He no longer does this even though he still struggles with words like 'necessary'.

> *..in the first months of my first year of teaching I would look at the class and if they looked at me strangely I would rub out the word I had written. It's a lot better now. I don't second guess myself as much..*

Warren hopes to study further and eventually teach in a high school either in Soweto or his previous high school attended by many learners coming from Soweto primary schools.

Warren demonstrated an openness and willingness to learn how to teach English even though he himself had struggled with English as a learner. The demographics of the school may have changed since he was there as a learner, but he nevertheless seemed to understand that learning English, and more especially learning to write well in English, can be a challenge even if it is your home language. This understanding may have influenced his desire to teach in township schools where all learners were learning English as an additional language. He understood how this might impact on their learning all subjects including Natural Sciences. He was fortunate to receive guidance and support from Zoe. His story reveals the value and importance of the nurturing and mentoring of newly qualified teachers.

6.3.2. Xena- Schools out here….schools out there

Xena, after teaching at a 'township' school for twenty two years, joined the staff at her present school in 2012.

6.3.2.1. Xena's history as a learner

Xena recalls attending school in the township where she had taught before being appointed in her present teaching post. Her memories of learning to write were vague but she recalled that 'topics were given and then you had to write'. She did not recall being explicitly taught how to write. Tasks were assigned and 'we had to get on with it'. When her writing

was returned to her ‘it was red all over’. She, like Warren, ‘struggled with English. I never attained a good mark for English. It was one of my weak subjects’. When I asked her why she thought she may have had such difficulty with English, she responded

> *I dunno, I think it’s just the way we were brought up. We weren’t brought up in a home where there was a lot of reading or parents reading it was done more on force you were forced to read. You have to read but it was never ….Our parents were…… it wasn’t something they did they never set an example there was never exposure*

Xena;s repetition of the word ‘force’ suggests something of the type of language teaching pedagogy she was exposed to at school and this possibly accounts for her ‘struggle’ with learning English. ‘Force’ suggests coercion or imposition rather than encouragement, motivation and inspiration.

The belief that home circumstances have a significant role to play in a learners’ literacy and language development is evident in Xena’s words, an intuitive sense of the advantage of Bourdieu’s (1991) notion of cultural capital. However, the question that occurred to me when transcribing this interview was: Why did Xena not hold her teachers in any way responsible for her continued poor performance in English? Some of the answer became apparent later in the interview when she indicated her belief that as a teacher she did the best she could but learners needed to have support, encouragement and ‘exposure from their families as well’. It was evident that she realised that the successful acquisition of language knowledge and skills is dependent on a range of factors: the language a child hears and speaks at home; community factors may play a role, the literacy practices in the home and then, of course, school factors (Masterson, 2013).

Xena admitted that she had never enjoyed reading and had, for the first time, completed reading a book for pleasure very recently. It was a book by South African author Chris van Wyk and she said she had ‘enjoyed it immensely because [she] could identify with everything he said in that book’. Van Wyk had grown up in a similar community to Xena in another part of Johannesburg and shared anecdotes about his childhood that resonated with Xena’s own childhood. Doherty (in Cremin and Myhill) observes that what “young people (and adults) want in a book *is to find themselves* (Doherty in Cremin and Myhill,” 2012, p. 52).

Xena’s stated enjoyment of the book seems to be closely linked to the fact that she could identify with the things the author wrote about. She grew up in a similar community and

understood and enjoyed the author's sense of humour. The fact that Xena enjoyed a book with which she could 'identify', whereas she had not enjoyed reading previously made me wonder about the types of texts she might have been exposed to as a learner and why they had no or little appeal for her. It may be because she could not identify with what was in the texts, or because they were not mediated in a way that made them appealing and accessible to learners. It points to the importance of the long term impact a teacher can have. Most of the teachers in this study agreed that cultivating an enjoyment of reading was an important part of their development as writers. It was evident that Xena felt the responsibility for encouraging an enjoyment of reading, both in her learners and her own children. She had several posters on display in her classroom that encouraged reading and there were several book reviews in learners' books.

6.3.2.2. Initial Teacher Education and early teaching experience

Xena completed her Higher Diploma in Education in 1991 at a teachers' training college. Like most of the teachers in this study, she did not recall receiving any specific instruction on the teaching of writing during her pre-service teacher education. After qualifying, she was appointed to teach at a school in the area where she grew up. The school was located very close to an informal settlement. She described the socio economic problems of the area, with children coming from homes where parents were unemployed and sometimes 'on drugs'. She, like Warren, was originally appointed to teach Natural Science but when the need arose for someone to teach English, she 'had to fill the post'. She was also the head of Life Orientation at her previous school, a subject she says she loves to teach. Her enjoyment of the 'guidance' aspect of Life Orientation was particularly evident when I observed her teaching a lesson. It was based on the book "Love, David", and Xena focused strongly on the 'life lessons' aspects of the novel such as making good choices and bad choices and the consequences of these. She appeared more comfortable and confident discussing these issues than in teaching the writing aspects of the lesson. For example, there was very little vocabulary enrichment to assist learners with the range of words needed for the character study they had to write. The discussion and also the planning sheet learners were given, was very narrowly focused on the two characters learners had to write about, and on the structuring of a five paragraph essay. Learners were also very specifically 'coached' as to which incidents in the book they should refer to and how to use these to support their 'character studies'. The samples of the writing from the lesson were predictably similar with very little of the learners' "voices" evident in their writing.

Learners who earned ‘pass’ marks for the work all set their work out in exactly the same way. Paragraphs were sequenced in exactly the same order and examples cited from the book were the same in each ‘essay’. Observing her lesson was difficult for me as I sensed her lack of confidence and her anxiety about being observed but I appreciated her willingness to allow it anyway. Xena possibly adopts such a tightly structured, formulaic approach to her teaching because she is not confident of her knowledge and ability to teach English.

She said that many of the families of the children that she taught at her previous school spoke Afrikaans as their home language, but English was the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) at the school. Her perception was that parents did not really care about the quality of the education their children were receiving as long as they were at school. Consequently, the children did not care either. She said she had found teaching at the school very stressful because she constantly worried about the lack of support her learners received from their families. Homework was never done and learners were not encouraged to improve. She said that she would lose her temper because work was

> *continuously not done but then [she] had to sit back and say to [herself] but there’s a reason why the work is not done home circumstances you know that’s unfortunately what <u>our</u> children are exposed to….*

Xena ‘s comments display the quality of ‘caring’ that Rychly and Graves (2012) refer to in their discussion of desirable characteristics for teachers teaching in culturally diverse contexts. Despite their circumstances Xena wanted her learners to ‘improve’ but felt limited in the extent of the influence she could have because of their backgrounds. Her use of ‘our’ is significant, too, in that it shows her continuing sense of alliance with ‘children out there’ even though she is no longer teaching or living in that community. It is the community in which she grew up, the community where she was educated and where she started her teaching career.

She described how she had ‘to find herself’ at her previous school because no one showed her what to do. It seems there were no formal or informal ‘mentoring’ or ‘induction’ practices for beginner teachers and she had to develop her own classroom practices and routines. The school was identified as a ‘priority’ school several years ago and became one of the many Gauteng schools participating in the Gauteng Provincial Literacy and Mathematics Strategy (1.1.1). She had to attend training every school holiday with one of the GPLMS service providers. She described the training as

> *very basic. It was actually boring. It was very basic and it was very boring because you were teaching the same thing over and over and the level was very low*

De Clercq and Shalem (2014) contend that the GPLMS programme may have provided teachers with what they refer to as Pedagogical Content Knowledge 1 (PCK 1), the knowledge of the sequencing and pacing of work, coherent lesson structure and establishing routines of work. However, the knowledge they refer to as PCK 2 is the knowledge they believe is most necessary for teachers teaching in the contexts in which GPLMS teachers taught. PCK 2 is a more specialised knowledge that teachers need to have in order to support learners with 'knowledge backlogs, lack of parental assistance and poor social contexts' (De Clercq and Shalem, 2014, p.142). From what Xena had to say about her learners, she would certainly have benefitted from gaining PCK 2 type learning in a professional development programme.

Xena did not find being 'coached' helpful either because, she said, she had 'to coach the coach.'

> *She actually asked me. At times she would ask me to give the lessons or come into my classroom and be amazed by all the things I had in the classroom.*

It was evident that Xena believed the coach should have been more knowledgeable and experienced than the people she coached. Xena felt her coach was too inexperienced given that she had only had two years of teaching experience and was therefore able to offer teachers very little of substance. Nevertheless, the impact of participating in the programme was evident in the way she taught the lesson I observed. To some extent it was 'scripted' because the Grade 7 English preparation was done by the school's head of department. Xena, as best she possibly could, 'delivered' the lesson but it was evident that she did not fully understand what she was trying to teach. She paced the lesson adequately, sequenced activities appropriately and demonstrated good classroom management skills, handing out worksheets and materials quickly and efficiently. However, even though she guided learners to complete various initial tasks and group discussions before doing their writing task, she did not provide effective and meaningful guidance to them on how to develop their writing independently. Instead, they were given very specific, step by step instructions on how to structure each paragraph and virtually told what to write as well. Xena made copies of only six samples of writing for me, but it was interesting to note her comments on three of these:

> *You have written your sentences for mind-map without any structure!*

Thank you (learner) it is evident that your planning and drafting followed the appropriate form and structure

Thank you (learner) a well-structured essay

"Structure' is a word Xena used several times during group discussions and her emphasis on the importance of 'structure' will be further discussed in 6.5.1.

Despite having been part of the intensive training and development opportunities provided through the GPLMS project, Xena cited the main reason for her decision to apply for a post at her present school as

My reason for the move is because I felt so much I was stagnant there wasn't development there people were doing their own thing and that is why I moved for growth for development-and um I don't regret it.

6.3.2.3 Present practice and perceptions of learners

When talking about her early teaching experiences and her current experiences, Xena constantly referred to 'out there' and 'out here' even though geographically the schools were a short distance apart (an average of about twelve kilometers).

I feel that if I'd been exposed to the schools out here

I'm learning so much more that I'm here

You know what…the schools out there

The teachers out here…the teachers out there

Xena's perceptions of 'schools out here' and 'teachers out here' in contrast to 'schools out there' and 'teachers out there' suggest that schools still bear the legacy of the very unequal quality of teacher and school education of the apartheid era. Teachers 'out there' taught in a 'township' whilst teachers 'out here' taught in an 'ex model C school'. The former schools served poor and underprivileged learners whereas the latter was located in a suburban area and was better resourced. Xena's remarks indicate a perception that teachers 'out here' are more knowledgeable and /or perhaps skilled than teachers 'out there'. The legislation designed to enforce the physical separation of the different population groups resulted in a proliferation of teacher training institutions, with highly variable standards (Sayed, 2004) and there is evidence of the effects of this in Xena's comments. There was no coherent national plan – except the plan of racially segregated and highly fragmented teacher education, with the least money being spent on the education of black teachers. Xena said

> *Where I come from they still following the GPLMS which is very basic. Take those children out of there and put them here they will not manage…..and the teachers are still teaching it because the lessons plans have been done, they are there why you gonna change that?*

On the other hand, schools 'out here' teach CAPS, the official Department of Basic Education curriculum. She admitted that it is only since being appointed to her current post that she has been required to teach the revised or repackaged curriculum because as part of the GPLMS programme she taught what was in the lesson plans teachers were given and she was quite sure that it was not "CAPS" but the Gauteng province's 'simplified' version of it for GPLMS schools.

She described how Zoe has had to provide a great deal of guidance and support in order for her to get to grips with the curriculum.

> *I feel that if I'd been exposed to school out here earlier my confidence would have been so much better 'cos I'm learning so much more that I'm here…here we're attending the union workshops we're attending the Saturday workshops that's new for me. The teachers out there have to pay for those things themselves obviously they don't have they not prepared to pay whereas at these schools the school pays for you to attend these things.*

Although Xena was very positive about her current school, she described the transition as 'terrible'. She believes part of the reason for this was because she came in with 'misconceptions'.

> *I cried every day because the kids were so nasty. They were rude. But I think that the group that year was one of the worst groups the school has had…they made my life hell. One of the kids even punched me and there was a hearing. [Zoe] was knocked around the field …..they were kids who would 'back chat' and if you reprimanded them they would throw the chair, they would bang the door …..that's not what I was exposed to where we come from we wouldn't dare do that*

Violence in schools is a national concern and at a conference facilitated by a teachers' union in KwaZulu-Natal early in August 2015, the vice president of the union reported alarming statistics from the National School Violence Study (2013) which showed that both teachers and learners had been the victims of school violence. Interestingly, one more distinction Xena drew between schools 'out there' and schools 'out here' was that where '[she] came from [they] would never do that'. Learners 'out there', it seemed, were more respectful at school even though they might never do their homework, or receive support from their parents to 'improve' at school.

Matters had improved considerably and Xena believed that she was 'much calmer'. She described the learners she now teaches as more independent, more able to work on their own. Nevertheless, she hopes to do a course in teaching learners with barriers to learning in the future. She expressed concern for learners who coped with classroom assessment tasks because she was able to help them and read with them, but when they had to write exams unassisted, could not manage because of their poor reading and writing skills.

> *My interest has always been to do remedial because it's something I can help children with. I look at school. We give support but from what we know…but we are not getting to the baseline…we're just taking what we know and working with that. The child's lost something inbetween and we are not going back to that…*

Xena, whilst acknowledging the limitations of her knowledge, is expressing her desire to be able to more effectively identify and address the difficulties her learners' experience. I think her positive participation in the PLC was linked to this desire to do better and the belief that if she knew more, she could.

Xena admits to feeling very tired at times and wishes she could teach smaller classes and carry a lesser administrative load. However, she believes that 'Teaching is where [she] wants to stay'. Ballet and Kelchtermans (2007) are among the scholars who have written about how the work of teachers has intensified and how they are essentially being asked to do more with less. Despite the many promises that the introduction of a 'repackaged' curriculum would result in a reduction of teachers' administrative workload (DBE, Curriculum News, January 2010), the outcome has in fact been the opposite with teachers' once again reporting unreasonable demands for paperwork and assessment requirements from both senior staff and district officials. Gauteng is also one of the three provinces with the highest learner/ teacher ratios in the country.

Xena has, in her words, emerged from being 'stagnant' to learning a great deal in the few years that she has been in her present position. Much of that learning has been through the personal mentoring she has received from Zoe. She also described her enjoyment of the opportunities she has had to attend other professional development activities funded by the school. Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) suggest that just by joining the staff of a different and better school, a teacher can become a better teacher. They argue that if a teacher who is low on human capital and has poor initial confidence or undeveloped skills enters a highly collaborative school, the chances are high that the teacher will be socialized into greater teamwork and receive the assistance, support, ideas and feedback to help him or her

improve. Xena's account of her how she has grown professionally after teaching at schools 'out there' and moving to schools 'out here' seems to support Fullan and Hargreaves' claim.

6.3.3 Yasmine … I have learned along the way

Yasmine grew up in KwaZulu-Natal. After qualifying as a teacher at a university there, she travelled to Johannesburg where she has been teaching for the past seventeen years, fourteen of them at her present school.

6.3.3.1. Yasmine's history as a learner

Yasmine believed that she had good teachers throughout her school years, but her English teachers were particularly good. One of her high school English teachers was especially memorable in that she was 'so creative'. The teacher used to spend time with learners, going over their writing with them and encouraging them to

> *…..add on, give [us] ideas and suggestions on how to improve our work. It wasn't just a once off thing where we just used to write. Then she used to make us read our work in front of the children so it was a matter of 'Ok, if I'm gonna be reading my work in front of the class I really have to think about… I'm so… in a way it helped with thinking and then putting pen to paper you know……*

Yasmine's teacher encouraged learners to think through their ideas and revisit them (Dornbrack and Dixon, 2014), promoting an understanding of writing, not as a linear process but rather as a recursive process. The teacher also, by asking learners to read to their peers, created a sense of 'audience' for learners. It appeared to be effective in motivating Yasmine to take additional pride and care with her writing. English was Yasmine's favourite subject. At high school, she especially enjoyed the literature and she continued to develop into a confident writer. When she went to university, she chose to major in English and History.

6.3.3.2. Initial Teacher Education and early teaching experience

Yasmine described her initial teacher education as 'strongly content driven'. Although she was studying for a teaching degree, her English courses focused on the study of literature. There was no component on the teaching of English. The pedagogical courses apparently focused on educational and learning theories but never on the practical application of these theories to the teaching of English or any other subject. She said

> *If I remember clearly, it was tons and tons of content*

There are continuing discussions and debates about the knowledge that teachers need to acquire in their initial teacher education programme. De Clercq and Shalem's (2014) argument that teachers require content and pedagogical content knowledge is questioned by Bertram (2011) who states that PCK is a contested term with no clarity as to what it means. She does, however, indicate that there is agreement that teachers need more than just a deep knowledge of their discipline. This subject knowledge, according to Adler, Slonimsky and Reed (2002), needs to be transformed into "sequenced, graded and developmental/progressive tasks for learners, learning and assessment" (p.139). Yasmine quite astutely commented that

> *…understanding the English language is important because you need to know the content and the rules and the skills <u>but I think it needs to work closely with application in the classroom</u> (my emphasis).*

Her words resonate to some degree with Adler et al.'s (2002) notion of 'conceptual knowledge-in-practice', which is similar to PCK but links teachers' knowledge of how learners come to know a specific subject to an awareness that the context will impact on how teachers teach in order to make learning possible. Numerous writers have also argued that knowledge, skills and disposition to work with children of *diverse cultural, social and linguistic backgrounds is crucial to developing effective teachers* (Alidou, 2000; Gay & Howard, 2000; my emphasis).

After qualifying, Yasmine was unable to secure a post in KwaZulu-Natal. Eventually, she was offered a post teaching English at a high school in Johannesburg when one of their teachers went on maternity leave. She then substituted for another teacher at the same school before she was offered another temporary post at a primary school. She admits that although she studied to be a high school English teacher, she had not enjoyed working with high school learners and has since chosen to teach grade 7. In her present post, she taught Mathematics for the first six years before being asked to teach grade 7 English. After several years in the post, she was appointed as the head of department grade 4 to grade 7.

Yasmine stated that when she first starting teaching English eight years ago, she simply assigned a writing task and expected learners to 'get on with it'. She believes learners coped because

> *…the level of children has changed. You could tell them "This is your topic, let's write on this", have a quick discussion and you'd get good work.*

She believes in the past three or four years learners have changed and a great deal more motivation and support are required in order for learners to write well.

6.3.3.3 Present practice and perception of learners

Yasmine believes that her approach to the teaching of writing has also changed because of the introduction of the NCS-CAPS. The content and the skills that have to be taught are specified and she believes that teachers are required to sequence and pace their lessons according to the curriculum statement.

> *The department they do give us with the CAPS curriculum we've got to follow the planning and the writing down of our ideas and then proof reading it and making sure that the spelling and the errors and things are sorted and then the actual writing itself. I like to spend time on the initial part, the introduction to the lesson especially for the children that have no idea or very little understanding of the topic …. …I think with the writing process you need to get them going. I use a lot more of introduction, I use a lot more of technology a lot more of um creativity in the ideas to get them going…you need to use different types of information*

I have underlined Yasmine's words in the first sentence because they reflect a perception of what is in the curriculum statement which presents the process approach to the teaching of writing as a linear process. I believe she was thus presenting her understanding that she was required to do:

- The planning
- The writing down of ideas
- Proof reading
- Making sure the spelling and the errors and things get sorted out

This outline looks very much like the process described by the teachers in the Group A, with, once again, a focus on error correction in the proof reading and editing 'stages'. Interestingly, Yasmine adds 'and then the actual writing itself', which I assume refers to the quality of the content. Her comments reveal her perception of the writing process as a linear rather than as a recursive (Cremin and Myhill, 2012) process and her prioritising of the technical aspects of the writing. However, she does realise the importance of the 'initial stages' of the writing process and believes learners need encouragement and motivation to write.

The perception of the writing process as a linear process is evident in the comments of all the teachers in this study, and of those of a group of secondary school English teachers, also South African, in the study by Cereseto (2015). The teachers in Cereseto's study

complained of "insufficient time to follow *the steps* involved in "process writing" thoroughly" (Cereseto, 2015, p.119 my emphasis).

Teachers believe that they are implementing the process approach to the teaching of writing because this is largely how this approach is presented in the Department of Education language curriculum documents (DBE, 2011, p.36). However, Cremin and Myhill (2012) stress that planning, generating and reviewing texts are not 'strictly sequential' even though curriculum documents in the United Kingdom also present them in this way. This approach, they argue, will inhibit and limit writers (p. 20).

Yasmine shows an understanding of the need to prioritise time for motivating and generating ideas for the writing task. She also seems to be moving instinctively towards using 'multimodal texts' to stimulate writing. For Cremin and Myhill (2012)

> …the engaging and energizing 'voices' in such texts are mediated through television, the Internet and cinema, as well as through advertising, comics, magazines, films and much related merchandise; whilst many are transitory in nature, they represent a rich resource for adaptation and manipulation due to their motivational nature (p. 58).

Yasmine used a Mimeo board in the lesson she invited me to observe and indicated that she often used it for her language teaching. She was also creating online teaching resources for the online course she was doing.

Yasmine appears to have a strong professional writing identity because she does a great deal of writing on a daily basis. This writing consists mainly of notices sent out regularly to teachers, reports on teachers' work, the preparation of her own tests and exams, letters to parents and reports for district officials. She is also studying so is writing assignments for submission on a weekly basis. She does not do personal writing such as poetry or journal/ diary writing.

She said that when she started teaching, she wrote poems which she shared with her learners, but never wrote 'alongside' her learners. Nowadays, the writing she does during class consists mainly of 'writing instructions on the board and responding to their writing'. She will generally 'search something' on the internet to use as a 'model' for the type of writing the learners in her classes have to do. In the lesson I observed, she showed learners examples of advertisements and asked them to suggest what did or did not make the advertisements attractive or effective. From the class discussion they were then required to list the characteristics of a good advertisement before designing their own advertisement

for a product of their own choice or creation. Learners worked within very tight time frames. They started working on their advertisements during the second part of the lesson I observed and had to complete these for homework and hand them in on the next school day which was a Monday. By the time I met with teachers on Wednesday, Yasmine had marked the advertisement and brought selected examples for me to copy.

Yasmine believes that her learners enjoy writing poetry specifically because it allows them to

> *put their thoughts down on paper…it gives them a chance to be creative..it comes from them …it's not something they are forced to follow like a language exercise or a comprehension. It's their own thoughts it's their own style of writing it's their own ideas.*

I have underlined her repetition of 'their' and 'them' to reinforce the emphasis she places on the freedom learners have in this instance to express 'their thoughts, their style and their ideas'. From her statement, it seems that her learners enjoy the opportunity to exercise their 'rights as writers'. Cremin and Myhill (2012) consider it important to 'offer freedom alongside of form, and space for exploration and innovation, as well as direct teaching and scaffolded activities' (p. 82). Mendelowitz (2014) maintains that it is possible to find a balance between unlimited freedom and excessive structure and this idea will be further discussed in the section on group meetings (6.5.1) as 'structure' was identified as an important issue in the teaching of writing by the teachers in Group B.

Yasmine believes that she has to be a lot more 'creative' than she was when she first started teaching and provide a lot more input in order to get good work from learners. She said she needs to make the writing 'relevant to them' and provide background knowledge as there are many things that learners 'do not know or have not been exposed to'. This perception appeared to be linked to the fact that she estimated that up to sixty percent of the learners came from a nearby township. She maintained that this meant that they heard, spoke, read and wrote English only when they were at school. She stated that she has appealed to parents to

> *At least choose certain days to speak English or have allocated times during the day to speak English for children to benefit from the language….allow them to read aloud from resources the school has provided….discuss what they have read with them….let them write what they have read in their own words….*

Yasmine was probably correct in her belief that there are many things that her learners 'do not know'. However, Jesson et al. (2013) argue that 'deficit theorizing about students'

needs to be overcome by teachers so that they can find ways to incorporate what their learners do know and use these to 'create instructional bridges from those practices and their associated funds of knowledge' (2013, p. 217). I think Yasmine was trying to create 'instructional bridges' by advising parents to encourage their children to speak English outside of school more often and to interact with them about their school work. However, what she recommended was actually the opposite. Rather than encouraging learners to bring more of their 'associated funds of knowledge' into the school, she was asking them to take their school practices into their homes. She tried to create a constructive role for parents which differs somewhat from the teachers in Group A who described the parents and caregivers of learners in deficit terms.

As a head of department, Yasmine monitored the language teachers in her department very closely, checking that their pacing and sequencing of the curriculum is consistent with what is in the CAPS document. She, like many other HODs, was constantly monitored by her principal and district officials to ensure that the curriculum was 'covered'. This places quite a burden of responsibility on her and this is, to some extent, then transferred to teachers in her department. In the group discussion where I proposed considering whether there was "wriggle room" (Ryan and Barton, 2013) within the curriculum, Yasmine was the one who expressed the strongest reservations because of what she believed the negative response would be from the district officials. Yasmine's misgivings point to an important issue with regard to the effective functioning of a PLC. Her comments reveal a lack of a sense of agency or autonomy. The issue of teacher agency (2.4.1.5) or teacher autonomy is significant with regard to the teaching of writing. In 2.5.2.1 Atwell (2002) is quoted as saying that programmed instruction takes away teachers' professionalism and turns them into mere technicians. If teachers are to direct their own learning in PLCs, they need to be able to question 'the rules of the game' (2.5.2.1) and to test whether such rules promote the best possible outcomes for the learners that they teach.

6.3.4. Zoe- Teaching opened up a new world

Zoe graduated with a Higher Diploma in Education in 1984 from a Teachers' College of Education and later completed a Further Diploma in Education.

6.3.4.1 Zoe's history as a learner

Zoe speaks Greek as a home language. She grew up in the area in which she now teaches and attended schools in the area. While she claimed to have never struggled with English,

she had a few unfortunate experiences during both her primary and high school years that have blighted her memories of learning English and more specifically of learning to write. She remembered as a small child in grade 4 being encouraged by her teacher to share stories with the class once a week. She believes the stories came from the Greek films she saw on Sunday evenings. She described how much she and her classmates enjoyed these times. Regrettably, when the class teacher had to be replaced, the new teacher asked the question 'Tell me who in this class tells tales?' Her classmates misunderstood the teacher's question and pointed to Zoe. Although the learners tried thereafter to clear up the misunderstanding, the damage apparently was done and Zoe described feeling disliked and rejected by her new teacher. She thus withdrew and no longer shared her "tales" or stories.

Grainger (2002) strongly advises teachers to find time and opportunities for learners to share, tell, retell, shape, polish and value storytelling. Zoe's first grade 4 teacher, by allowing her to share her stories, was providing her with opportunities to

> …voice and re-voice traditional tales as well as hear them, to rehearse the fluency and flow, feel the emotional temperature and position [herself] as [a] tale teller, (Cremin and Myhill ,2012, 54).

Cremin and Myhill go on to explain that having this opportunity 'can, over time, make a marked contribution to ….. writing' (ibid, p.54).

Despite the departure of her first grade 4 teacher and the unfortunate incident that followed, the origins of Zoe's enthusiasm for writing and for teaching writing may be in the pleasure and affirmation she enjoyed through these early experiences as a story teller.

Zoe lost both her parents within a year of each other soon after she started high school.

> *My high school years were very affected by the loss of my parents….we mourned for a very long time…we lost my mom and we should have mourned for a year and then we lost my dad and then we mourned for another year and then it became a way of life. I really struggled through high school. I'd gone back to school and very few people seemed to ask or want to know what had happened. And the whole world sort of moved on but we were still held back because of the mourning period. It was a very difficult time, a very sheltered time. I really struggled through high school.*

She further explained that 'mourning' in the Greek Orthodox faith meant not listening to music, wearing black at all times outside of school and not being allowed to attend any kind of social gathering. Her memories of writing and developing her writing skills in high school were thus overshadowed by her personal misfortunes.

6.3.4.2. Initial Teacher Education and early teaching experiences

Zoe described studying for her initial teaching qualification as

> *…something I really wanted to do…it opened up a new world and it was exciting and it was different …we got the opportunity to go on teaching prac , we taught in front of our peers and they would comment on what we should and shouldn't do…ja, I think I really enjoyed my teacher training and I can't imagine myself doing anything other than teaching.*

I noted with interest that Zoe enjoyed the opportunity to 'teach in front of her peers' and to get feedback from them. It suggested an openness and willingness to share her practice with other teachers and to learn from them. These qualities made her an ideal participant in a PLC. When I asked to do lesson observation, she immediately invited me to her classroom and was eager for me to observe several lessons. She wanted to discuss her lessons with me to get specific feedback because she wanted to know how she 'could do better'. She also spent a lot of time with me, talking to me about learners before deciding which samples of writing to copy for me. I was impressed with how much she seemed to know about her learners, not just in terms of their learning strengths and weaknesses but their personal challenges too.

Zoe had some recollections of the 'methodology courses' that formed part of her initial teacher qualification. She remembered doing Mathematics methodology and the teaching of reading and spelling, but not studying the teaching of writing.

Zoe was appointed to her first teaching post at her current school and she taught there for nineteen years before leaving to teach at an independent school for nine years. She admits that when she first started teaching

> *[she] was the kind of teacher that would say to children 'Write a story about a birthday party' or some fantasy story and [she] didn't realise there was actually much more to writing 'cos when [she] was at school that was the way [they] had been taught.*

She then attended South African Council for English Education (SACEE) meetings. When she heard 'what the children were producing' at the Creative Writing award ceremonies she decided she 'wanted her learners to do better'. She approached one of the convenors of the creative writing competition, who was also a lecturer in English pedagogy, to help her. This person became her mentor over a number of years. Zoe believes she gained a great deal of both content and pedagogical knowledge from this relationship.

> *I showed her what I was doing and she helped me to develop what I was doing with the children and she spoke about mind mapping and talking about things before the*

> *children actually had to write and um sort of scaffolding / pre-empting problems that the children would have in the writing process and how important the writing process is . I think from there my writing sort of developed and also my awareness of the different structures for the different types of writing…and time for them to relook at their work and rethink / reflect on their writing.*

Once again, Zoe demonstrated her willingness to expose her practice to scrutiny and her desire to learn more effective ways to teach. In this instance, we have an example of a teacher actively rejecting her apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975). She had initially taught the learners in the way that she had been taught, but when she had the opportunity to see that 'learners could do better', she made the choice to find out how rather than make excuses for why her learners had not produced the same quality of writing read out at the SACEE awards ceremonies. Her response is also consistent with the findings of Fecho et al. (2006), who, in their overview of teacher research in writing classrooms, indicate that teacher research into their own classrooms will often be motivated by the need to improve their practice (p.109).

Being mentored seems to have been the primary means through which Zoe has grown and developed in her teaching of writing. Research into teacher mentoring has been conducted in Australia (Ehrich, Hansford & Tennent, 2004); in the United States (Bartell, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2008; Joyce and Showers, 2002; Feiman-Nemser et al., 1990) in the United Kingdom (Hagger & McIntyre, 2006) and in Holland (Veenman, 1998). However there is little research into mentoring in the South African context. Bartell (2005) defines a mentor as 'a critical friend, buddy, coach, teacher-adviser, consultant, team-mate and support-provider' (p.73). Having observed the kind of person and teacher that Zoe was, it made sense that she had learned so much through a 'critical friend and support - provider'. Whilst she enjoyed attending presentations and workshops, relationships were important to her.

6.3.4.3 Present practice and perceptions of learners

Whilst Zoe believes in preparing well for lessons, she stated that she felt happiest when she was 'in the classroom helping children to be happier people'.

> *I think if a child feels loved and safe you can reach them more easily when you want to teach them about 'nouns' and 'verbs'. It's just as important to establish a connection with them*

Zoe's own history of unhappy times at school appear to have influenced her attitudes and approaches to her learners. I often observed learners and teachers asking her for help and

advice when I visited her classroom where the seven group meetings were held. She always showed a genuine interest and concern.

Furthermore, during the lesson I observed in her classroom, learners were learning about the writing of autobiographies. She shared some of her life story by writing her 'autobiography' and giving it to learners to read before she discussed why it had been structured in the way it had. Learners were then invited to ask her questions after reading it. In her 'autobiography' she wrote about the death of her baby brother, her mother and her father. One of the learners, a boy who had recently lost his mother in a car accident, asked about how she had felt. He then talked about his own loss and loneliness in that lesson and in several lessons afterwards. Zoe said that he had written several poems about his mother which he had asked to share with the class. In this way, Zoe showed learners that "They could use their life experiences as a resource for writing" (Cremin and Myhill, 2012, p. 57).

In describing how she teaches writing now, she said

> *..if you don't actually get them to brainstorm and talk about their ideas they don't know what to write. And if you don't give them examples of what could be done, they don't know where to start*

She explained that she quite often uses her own writing (as she did in the lesson I observed) as a model.

> *I show them all my rough work so they can see it's not something that just happens …I've shown them that you need to go away, think about it, come back, rework it look for better words or you might hear or feel something which might help you to make your work better…I encourage them to change….*

Two things are evident from the above statement. Firstly, Zoe seemed to be the first teacher in the group to have some sense of the recursive nature of the writing process when she said '*go away, think about it, come back, rework..look for better words.*.' Secondly, from this description it is evident that Zoe realises the importance of learners seeing her as a writer. However, Grainger et al. argue that

> While it is helpful for teachers to write texts in private and then share them with the learners, it is even more valuable when they model the writing process *in action*. Teachers frequently expect learners to produce texts on the spot, but are seldom prepared to subject themselves to the same pressure (Grainger et al., 2005: 166–167).

Whilst Zoe did not expect learners to produce texts 'on the spot', she did believe that writing 'texts in private' and sharing them with her learners saved time which she said was

limited because of the volume of work they had to cover. She thus had reservations about the suggestion that she might write 'alongside' her learners.

Zoe keeps a personal journal in addition to the writing she has to do every day in relation to her teaching. She also 'scribes' for her young nephew who narrates his own stories, showing once again perhaps an instinctive understanding of the role of storytelling in 'taking the first tentative steps as a writer' (Cremin and Myhill, 2012, p. 54).

Zoe stated that she expected to be in a classroom for a very long time but that she might consider teaching elsewhere in the future.

Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) state that teachers are more than performers, they are people, too. They discuss various groups of teachers, and maintain that many who have taught for more than thirty years suffer from declining motivation as teachers. Zoe, however, seems to be part of an interesting subgroup they identify, a group who renew their commitment to teaching by finding challenge and being challenged throughout their careers. Zoe's enthusiasm for continuing to find ways to make a difference to the learners that she teaches was evident not only in her interview, but also in the quality of her participation in the group discussions.

6.4 Discussion

Johnson indicates that research has found that

> …teacher narratives open up teachers' mental lives (Walberg, 1977) exposing "the fact that teachers' prior experiences, their interpretations of the activities they engage in, and most importantly, the context within which they work are extremely influential in shaping how and why teachers do what they do (Johnson, 2009, p.9).

As the stories of the teachers in Group B unfolded, it became evident that their 'prior experiences….and the context within which they work[ed]' is likely to have influenced how they chose to participate in a PLC.

Hipp et al. (2008) argue that, among other things, participants in PLCs need to have

- Shared values and vision
- Collective learning and application
- Shared personal practice
- Supportive conditions (2.4.1)

Warren, Xena and Zoe taught at the school where the group meetings were held. Each of them taught grade 6 English and grade 7 English. Perhaps because Warren and Xena had been closely mentored and supported by Zoe during their first years at the host school, they had already developed shared values and shared practice. Zoe did the planning and preparation for the grade 6 classes that they taught and the English Head of Department did the planning and preparation for the grade 7 classes that they taught. They thus used the same resources and similar content and approaches to their teaching. Whilst only one teacher did the initial lesson planning, teachers were free to offer additional input and resources. Thus, the idea of working collaboratively was not unfamiliar and they said they had wanted to do more of it but the time and opportunity had not presented itself. And whilst they did not know Yasmine before they met her at the first meeting, she taught at a school in the same district, just nine kilometers away, with very similar demographics. Warren, Xena and Zoe appeared very open to her and willing to learn from her and with her.

Furthermore, in contrast to the teachers in the Group A, the teachers in Group B had much closer links to the communities and contexts in which they taught. As a child Warren had attended the school hosting the group meetings and Xena lived in the area and her children attended the school. Whilst Yasmine had grown up in KwaZulu-Natal, she had only taught in Gauteng and lived close to the school at which she taught. Her son also attended the school. Zoe has lived in the area all her life and had attended primary and high schools nearby in addition to having taught at the host school for many years. All of them had long term goals for their teaching careers and plans to stay in teaching, if not at their current school, then certainly within the same area or community.

Teachers in Group B also appeared to believe that they could make a difference to the quality of learning in their classes. They believed they could learn something from each other, from me and from other teachers. Warren, Xena and Zoe in particular expressed a strong desire to learn. Warren and Xena may have felt this way because neither of them had been strong language learners at school and both had ended up teaching English almost by ‘default’. But they wanted to do it well, they wanted to do it better and believed that they could. Zoe retained the excitement and interest in continuing to learn and develop as a teacher that she had had when she first started her initial teacher education. Yasmine was eager to understand how theory translated into practice in her classroom, and to hear about the teaching practices of other teachers.

6.5 Group meetings

In addition to the introductory meeting, seven meetings were held between February and October 2015. Meetings were held at two to three week intervals. They were recorded and transcribed after each meeting. Meetings were approximately one hour long. Yasmine was unable to attend the last meeting as she was required to be at a staff meeting at her own school. Warren had to withdraw from the group during the second term because he was no longer teaching English.

The Professional Development Cycle for Continuous Improvement outlined by Timperley et al. (2007, p. 71) used for guiding discussions during Group A's sessions was adapted for the second series of meetings (3.3.4). In order to establish much firmer understandings of a PLC, and to provide a common core of knowledge about discourses of writing, I adopted a more directive facilitation approach especially in the first and fourth meeting. I also made the decisions regarding the focus for the first three sessions. During session one, I gave each teacher a copy of a summary of Ivanič's (2004) discourses of writing in order to establish at the outset that there were different ideas about the teaching of writing in addition to what is specifically mentioned in their curriculum statement. I explained these and then encouraged brief discussion of these in relation to the curriculum.

The next two sessions were spent using transcripts of the lessons of, "Debby" and "Fiona" (See Appendix I), two teachers who participated in the research on the teaching of imaginative writing done by Mendelowitz (2010). 'Debby' and 'Fiona' are two white, female, grade seven English teachers who participated in in-depth interviews about their conceptualisations of imaginative writing. Debbie taught at a state school whilst Fiona taught at an independent school. Interviews were followed by two week cycles of classroom observation in their grade seven English classes. The transcripts used in sessions two and three of this study are lessons on creative writing in the two teachers' classrooms. Debby's lessons were the culmination of a space theme. Learners had done comprehension activities on a number of texts about space, read and dramatised a science fiction play, and two poems. In addition learners had written their own horoscopes. Desks in the classroom were spread all over the class and learners were told they could sit anywhere they wanted to sit. After listening to atmospheric music and some discussion, they were then required to write a story about an encounter with a spaceship. Fiona's lesson is the fifth lesson in a two week lesson series that focused on the learners writing their own version of the myth of Theseus. Learners had read the opening of the myth and they were in the process of writing

their own versions from the perspective of Theseus. Fiona had also encouraged them to rewrite the myth in a more vivid style than the original. The focus of the transcribed lesson is on writing exciting story openings.

I believed that studying these transcripts would stimulate discussion about the teaching of writing and possibly encourage teachers to articulate their views about the teaching of writing spontaneously. I hoped these discussions would provide a vehicle for participants to express their questions or concerns about the teaching of writing. I intended to list the main issues, questions or concerns raised by the teachers after transcribing the discussions from the second and third sessions, and then invite teachers to choose which one should be the focus of our first inquiry cycle. I believed that this process might enable us to generate 'new ideas, tools and practices' for the specific learners and contexts of these teachers. Katz and Earl (2010) quote Hakkarainen et al. who state

> Knowledge is created through dialogue or conversations that make presuppositions, ideas, beliefs, and feelings explicit and available for exploration. It is in these conversations that new ideas, tools, and practices are created, and the initial knowledge is either substantially enriched or transformed during the process (Hakkarainen, Palonen, Paavola, & Lehtinen, 2004 in Katz and Earl, 2010: 28 my emphasis).

Opfer and Pedder's three influences on the effectiveness of teacher professional development for improving schools (5.4.1) once again provides the framework for the analysis of the group meetings.

6.5.1 Teachers' beliefs about the teaching of writing

It was evident from the discussion during the first meeting that teachers believed they were implementing what the NCS-CAPS curriculum referred to as 'The Process Approach" to the teaching of writing. The policy document outlines the approach as 'linear' and is set out in the following way:

The writing process consists of *the following steps (my emphasis)*:

- Planning/Pre-writing
- Drafting
- Revising
- Editing

• Proofreading

• Presenting

(DBE, 2011, p.36).

Peterson (2012) explains that cognitive models of recursive writing processes proposed by theorists like Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) and Flower and Hayes (1981) underpin the process approach to teaching writing. However, in curriculum documents there is often a linear, or chronological sequence (Cremin and Myhill, 2012) of the process approach to the teaching of writing which is misleading. Many teachers' discourses reveal a perception of the process approach as linear, possibly influenced both by the way it is presented in the NCS-CAPS document and the way in which it has been mediated by departmental officials and senior staff at schools.

Teachers expressed fairly rigid ideas as to how the 'planning' or 'pre-writing' stage was accomplished. This generally required 'brainstorming' or 'mind mapping' to generate ideas about the topic learners would have to write about. These views came strongly to the fore when teachers discussed the transcripts of both 'Debby's' and 'Fiona's' lessons. They were unhappy with 'Debby's' instruction to learners to 'just write' whereas they liked 'Fiona's' introductory activity. Yasmine and Zena in particular expressed concern about 'Debby's' instruction.

> *But there was no planning…there was no* (Yasmine)
>
> *There was no brain storming*..(Zoe)

However, Warren, in his second year of teaching at the time, did not have the same strongly entrenched views about the 'planning' stage of the writing process. He said

> *I just <u>maybe</u> think that the reason why she might have said she doesn't want to see anyone thinking is maybe because she might have wanted them to write: she didn't want them to think and process what they trying to say- just to get it all out on the page. I think she might have done it wanting ja (purposely) I think she might have done it wanting to promote their creativity wanting them just to…(my emphasis)*

Warren's repetition of words like "I think", "she might" and "maybe" convey a tentativeness that is perhaps to be expected from someone who is only in his second year of teaching but who is nevertheless confident enough to offer a different interpretation or perspective on "Debby's" actions. He is willing to explore possible reasons as to why she chose to teach the way she did. What was particularly interesting about this exchange was that it was the more experienced teachers who wanted to see the 'steps' in the writing

process adhered to quite rigidly. Xena, Yasmine and Zoe were all teachers with more than ten years of teaching experience. From this exchange it would seem that there may be a positive correlation between teachers' experience and their opinions: the more their experience, the more definite their opinions.

I also felt encouraged by the fact that Warren was not inhibited by his lack of experience and felt confident enough to express a different view. As early as the second session, he showed the willingness to move beyond "polite interactions to the kind of thinking, problem-posing, and problem solving authentic talk about real work" (Lambert et al., 1995, in Langer et al., 2003, p. 128).

Teachers also showed a readiness to hear different views with tolerance and respect, an important element for the effective evolution of a PLC. Warren's emphasis on the 'creativity' aspect of the exercise was also of interest to me because it appeared to suggest different 'writing discourses ' influencing teachers' thinking. Xena, Yasmine and Zoe were more focused on the need for the implementation of what they believed was the process approach to teaching writing, but which showed elements of a genre discourse. Zoe, because learners were required to write 'a story', maintained that the process needed to be more deliberately mediated. She asserted that more work needed to be done on equipping learners to 'write a story':

> *Zoe: What's the plot of the story (Yasmine: YES) how's the story going to end…the characters (Yasmine: Yes).*

She was supported in this by Yasmine who added

> *And the fact that they had to write a story, that's a long piece of writing you <u>have</u> to <u>have</u> some guidelines some you know uh plot and some characters and what's happening in paragraph one*

Yasmine's use of a 'have to have' amounts to 'must' in this statement and indicates the strength of her belief in the perceived requirement to include at least 'some' guidelines on how to 'correctly' structure a story.

On the other hand, Yasmine expressed approval of the way in which Fiona had structured the introduction to her lesson.

> *She's starting off with them using their imagination rather than taking a pen and start writing so they're starting with the ideas in their mind first ……*

Teachers in Group B endorsed an approach which promoted a time for 'thinking' before writing whilst they criticised an approach that required learners to 'just write, don't think'. Cremin and Myhill (2012) caution against too rigid an interpretation and implementation of the writing process. They maintain that this view limits writers because it does not acknowledge that some writers need to devote a lot of time to the planning stage whilst others need to write first in order to generate ideas.

A creativity discourse is also in evidence in the following exchange where teachers discussed the differences between the responses of boys and girls:

> *Xena: Ja, whereas yes the boys, the boys (Warren: The frog ate the princess)*
>
> *Xena: Some were, yes, they were even more creative*
>
> *Researcher: The frog ate the princess?*
>
> *Warren: Ja, I had a story the frog ate the princess*
>
> *Yasmine: Oh shame!*
>
> *Zoe: Or she also turned into a frog! Or he turned into a prince for one day and then he got sick of her and he turned back into a frog (Laughter) and there were more. Their stories (Warren: Ja, the boys) were more interesting*
>
> *Researcher: so…their humour?*
>
> *Zoe: Yes*
>
> *Warren: And testing the boundaries as well*
>
> *Researcher: The girls romanticise the boys bring in humour?*
>
> *Warren: Yes, ja*
>
> *Xena: Humour and destruction*

It was interesting to note teachers' awareness of the differences in the interests and aptitudes of boys and girls in grade seven. They acknowledged the difficulties of offering learners topics that were of equal interest and relevance to both groups. One such topic cited by Zoe was their theme on environmental issues which included discussion of the Kontiki Plastiki, an expedition from San Francisco across the Pacific Ocean led by David de Rothchild. Xena felt that it had been a challenging topic in that many of the learners had had very little experience of and exposure to the ocean and thus had difficulty visualising

what the journey was all about. Zoe countered by saying that one of the learners in her class had 'googled' the topic and brought pictures of David de Rothchild, the vortex and the Plastiki to share with his classmates.

> *I think that meant a lot to the rest of them. The boys all wanted to see and the girls also wanted to see it.I think that made quite an impression on them*

Cremin and Myhill's (2012) belief about the influence of 'popular cultural texts' on the knowledge and experience of young writers seems relevant to this exchange. In this instance, it is the internet that enables learners to access knowledge about the Kontiki Plastiki they may otherwise not have had. Furthermore, Dornbrack and Dixon's (2014) argument that writing pedagogy needs to include planning that integrates reading and discussion in order to develop thinking and reasoning needed for the writing task is also important in this instance. Learners read about the Kontiki Plastiki on the internet, looked at pictures, talked about it, asked questions and then eventually wrote about what they had learned.

Two more issues of particular interest to me emerged from this account. Firstly, Piazza, Rao and Protacio in an article on 'Culturally Responsive Literacy Practices' state that "Research documents that when learners of all ages and backgrounds *interact with real world information to make connections and raise critical questions,* they are motivated to inquire and learn about important topics and social issues" (Piazza et al., 2015, p. 12 my emphasis).

Piazza et al. (2015) suggest that a possible reason why teachers in diverse, multicultural classes may avoid challenging theme based curricula might be because of a deficit perspective of their learners. Xena and Yasmine seemed more inclined towards this deficit view of their learners than did Zoe in this instance.

This account, however, also suggests that, like some of the teachers in Mendelowitz's study (2010), activities that precede the drafting of texts do not appear to prioritise preparing learners to write in terms of 'linguistic and genre' preparation but rather in terms of promoting interest in the topic and developing vocabulary and background knowledge (p.255). In several of the texts I was able to look at in the grade seven exercise books at the host school, the narrative essay, the comparative essay and the letter were all structured as 'five paragraph essays' (Roskelly and Ryan, 2007). The planning sheets they were given required planning of an introduction followed by three paragraphs with each topic

specified and a final, concluding paragraph. It was evident that teachers believed writing had to be taught in a very controlled and structured way which is more consistent with the genre discourse of teaching writing rather than the process approach which they believed they implemented. Zoe maintained that if teachers did not structure writing activities very tightly, the quality of writing produced was much poorer. Mendelowitz (2014) maintains that in a writing classroom 'one needs to find the balance between unlimited freedom and excessive structure' (p. 168, and see 6.3.3.3). She refers to a concept of structured freedom that facilitates intellectual and affective engagement. This is a concept that teachers in this group and possibly many others might need to explore as an alternative to the very tight structure they believed was needed in order to ensure satisfactory results.

Xena also stated a very firm belief in the importance of structure and this was seen as important in the wider context of learning. I will therefore consider it in more detail in the section on 'Teachers beliefs about learning'.

Teachers also expressed a belief in the importance of scaffolding or mediating the writing process, but raised questions as to how much was required. Zoe was the first to question this. She said

> *I wish that I knew I had more ideas with regard to how to go about [scaffolding] because sometimes I feel I'm giving them too much*

Warren acknowledged her comment and supported it saying

> *Ja, we are we babying them definitely*

The image of 'babying' learners came up in the previous group as well, where Anne also claimed to 'baby' her learners. It would seem that the concern of how much structure is too much is a concern for many language teachers. Zoe's question was prompted by her desire to develop 'independent writers'.

Mendelowitz (2010), in her study on the teaching of imaginative writing encountered similar questions and concerns. She posed the questions

> *How much structure is too little or too much?*
>
> *At what point does an emphasis on structure deaden the learners' agency and imagination?*

She cites the example of a teacher in her study ('Fiona') who used good models of writing to challenge learners to think about what makes these texts work rather than simply asking

learners to reproduce them. Learners are thus equipped with an understanding of the linguistic devices that make texts more effective and how these work in particular genres. Ellis (2002) also provides practical teaching strategies that would work in 'large mixed ability classrooms' (p. 36). She recommends a range of ways to structure brainstorming sessions to stimulate thinking about writing and advocates an 'overnight thinking time' to remove the time pressure and stress to develop ideas on the spot. She also suggests, for example with story writing, that teachers do a direct teaching of 'story beginnings'. Re-drafting of only a part of the story, and very specifically focused redrafting, is also recommended. Ellis concludes by cautioning against too much teaching without opportunities for learners to think independently, to try things out and talk to their friends and family which will produce wonderful stories but superficial learning. She maintains that if learners are to become independent writers they need a balance. Creating independent writers requires "teachers to support children in thinking like writers but also, in equal measure, to give them responsibility for thinking like writers" (Ellis, 2002, p. 49).

Limited time for teaching everything in the curriculum influenced teachers' perceptions and beliefs about the teaching of writing. Xena felt it was important to put time limits on activities and she applauded 'Fiona' for putting a time limit on the time learners had to do their writing. She asserted that learners had to be given 'structure' and time limits because

> *sometimes children need that little bit of pressure*

This led to a discussion around the issue of time limits and learners writing over an extended period of time as opposed to completing work in a single session. A difference of opinion emerged once again, this time between Warren, Xena and Yasmine with one opinion and Zoe with another. Gee's (2010) tools for discourse analysis are used to analyse the following exchange (tabulated):

> *Warren- I don't like to allow them to do it over a couple of days because [Xena completes Warren's sentence] the mood might be different. Exactly and they tend to change their minds. Yesterday they were in a good mood….Now they're in a bad mood. It shows in their writing*
>
> *Yasmine -You can't allow them to go over for example I think it's an hour for their writing skills. So if you sit in a class…..A double period was supposed to be sufficient for them to do the actual writing…To me that's enough time. And if you take it over periods of time they may lose track of*

Zoe - And yet if you're teaching the writing process. I think you need to be giving them time to relook at it. Rework it. I mean if you think of a book published. The writer can rewrite his book (back and forth) many times. I'm quite torn with that

Warren - I don't think they have the skills to. If they come the next day. I think they gonna just start writing the next paragraph. Not even bothering to look back. I don't think they've been taught to

Table 6 – Discourse analysis of excerpt of Group B discussion

Situated meanings	Social Languages	Cultural models	Situated identities
'Don't allow' and 'can't allow' are among the key words or phrases in this exchange. 'Lose track of', 'change their minds', 'time to relook', 'rework it' also capture the contrasting ideas of the teachers.	The 'I' in this exchange is 'the teacher of writing' and the talk is 'teacher talk'. The exchange is characterised by internally persuasive discourse as three of the four teachers develop their argument for limiting the time allocated to learners for the composition of texts. Yasmine also introduces an authoritative discourse when she refers indirectly to policy requirements.	Three of the four teachers perceive writing as a 'standalone' lesson (Dornbrack and Dixon', 2014). Yasmine's use of 'can't' also indicates her belief in adherence to policy requirements. Zoe indicates a belief in writing as a recursive and not a linear process but she is 'torn' because of her sense of responsibility to adhere to policy.	Internally persuasive discourse is predominant as teachers use one another's ideas to build their reasons for why writing should be completed in a linear way within a limited time frame. Only once is an authoritative discourse used.

The exchange above indicates that the teachers in this group appeared compliant with the CAPS policy. Even Zoe, who reveals a sense of the writing process as a recursive process, 'is torn' because it seems contrary to what is evident in policy. I questioned the depth of their understanding of the document partly because of their comments but also because the policy document, although it explicitly states that the process approach to teaching writing must be implemented, outlines a range of text types that teachers are required to complete in each two week cycle which reflects more of a genre approach than a process approach. Dornbrack and Dixon (2014) note that by conflating the process and genre approaches in the CAPS documents, the specificity of each approach is lost, particularly if teachers have

had little access to these approaches in their own education and training. From the types of comments made by teachers, there was evidence of some understanding of the process approach, but they also spoke of activities more consistent with the genre approach without realising there was a difference. Their knowledge of writing pedagogies needed to be developed particularly in view of their rejection of Zoe's suggestion that the writing process be recursive rather than linear. The recommendations of Graven (2002), Maistry (2008) and Brodie (2013) that there be someone with outside expertise to participate in a PLC at least at the outset to ensure that a broader perspective is established once again was particularly pertinent in this instance (2.4.1.4).

Teachers' unquestioning acceptance and adoption of the two week cycle of teaching advocated in their curriculum document meant that many text types had to be completed during the course of the year, and teachers acknowledged that this led to superficial teaching of each text type. These included a narrative essay, a descriptive paragraph, a comparative essay, a friendly letter, poems (limerick, rhyming poems etc.), an interview, minutes of a meeting, notice of a meeting, agenda for a meeting, a diary entry, a book review, an advertisement, a newspaper article and a summary. The time to implement the recursive approach required to thoroughly implement a process approach or genre approach with the necessary focus on purpose, audience and register is not available. The increasingly prescriptive nature of the work required of teachers has important implications for the work that can or cannot be accomplished in a PLC. The question posed by Goodburn and Lambert (2007) referred to in Chapter 2 (2.5.2.1) as to how teachers of English can be assisted in 'imagining themselves as powerful advocates for rather than technicians of particular teaching approaches' (p.32) is a significant challenge when attempting to establish a PLC with a focus on the teaching of writing in a South African context.

Mendelowitz maintains that very often, teachers are 'caught between competing and contradictory discourses' (2010, p. 184). Teachers are encouraged to participate in PLCs with the purpose of improving practice, but what if improving practice requires making choices that conflict with departmental directives? Not only did I need to support teachers in the development of their understanding of writing pedagogies, but there was also a need to develop teachers' sense of agency (2.4.1.5) within the PLC or else their capacity for maximising their learning would be limited.

Assessment has become a prime topic in 'teacher talk' over the past fifteen years so it was not surprising that it featured in the discussion on 'Debby's' lessons. It was first raised in connection with the fact that in providing the writing task briefing, 'Debby' gave no assessment criteria to her learners. This was identified as a shortcoming. I believe this perception is a legacy of the outcomes based curriculum introduced in the late 1990s/ early 2000s even though it also appears to be part of the 'Authentic Assessment' theory outlined by Jackson and Vavra (2007). The authors list Foundational Theories about writing, Developmental Tasks theories, Process model theories, Portfolio work and Authentic Assessment (p.xii). 'Authentic assessment' theory appears to have impacted the thinking of teachers in group two. The assumption underlying this theory is that "Teachers must establish a clear connection between what is taught and what is being assessed, through clear rubrics which judge student outcomes" (Jackson and Vavra, 2007, p. xii).

Teacher training on the implementation of Curriculum 2005, the first South African outcomes based curriculum, promoted the practice of setting 'assessment tasks' accompanied by 'assessment criteria', usually in the form of assessment rubrics. It would seem that the practice of using rubrics to assess has become entrenched if the accounts of the grade 8 teachers in Group A are to be considered as well. According to them, the district officials stipulate which 'tasks' are to be formally assessed and they provide the rubrics to be used to assess them. Xena in particular criticised the fact that 'no criteria' were given with the task brief. It was evident that teachers believed that it was important for learners to know the criteria their work would be 'measured' against. To some extent I saw this as symptomatic of the increasingly mechanistic approach to teaching in South African classrooms. Specific steps have to be followed and assessment criteria for tasks have to be presented in the form of rubrics, rubrics which very often seem to be generic and not to reflect the specific competencies required by a particular task. On two occasions, teachers from the host school e-mailed copies of their assessment rubrics to me for comment and each time I indicated that I thought the rubrics were very generic and a disproportionate weighting of the marks had been allocated to correct spelling and grammar.

Their other criticism linked to assessment was of the quality of 'Debby's' feedback to learners. Again, the teachers appeared to empathise with the learners. In this instance it was 'Thabaleng' who at first read 'too quickly' and was told to 'read slowly…we're dying

to hear your story'. She received 'lovely story' as the feedback for her effort and nothing more. Zoe said

> *I think she needs to tell the child WHY is the piece of writing good or WHY is the story lovely*

This comment indicated Zoe's awareness that task specific feedback (Gipps, 1994) is one of the most meaningful and effective forms of feedback.

Although teachers did not generally use academic terms to talk about their concerns relating to integration of assessment in the learning process, it was clear they had developed views on what would improve the quality of learners' writing: learners' needed to know the criteria for the writing task and they deserved task specific feedback on their work.

Teachers in Group B displayed markedly different attitudes towards participating in a PLC to the teachers in Group A. They indicated a willingness and a desire to learn ways to teach writing more effectively whereas teachers in the Group A did not see a need to improve their practice. However, the challenge with Group B would to be to persuade them that they could make changes or adaptations to their understanding of how to implement their language curriculum. The way the curriculum had been presented encouraged an understanding that the content had to be taught in the sequence in which it was presented and within the time frames indicated. Reading and Viewing, Writing and Presenting, Language Structure and Use and Listening and Speaking are set out in separate columns and there is no indication that there is any link required between the four sections of the curriculum. When I indicated in the fifth meeting that this interpretation of the curriculum could safely be challenged from my knowledge and interactions with senior national department officials, and the curriculum statement itself (2. 5.1.3.1), teachers showed distinct anxiety and unease with the idea. Their responses indicated the powerful influence of the district officials on their beliefs and practices but it also highlighted their lack of agency within the PLC.

6.5.2 Teachers' beliefs about teaching English

Teachers in this group did not express strong views about the teaching of English. They admitted a strong sense of responsibility to provide support for learners because many of them did not speak English as their home language. They believed it was important for learners to read but, except for Yasmine who initially complained that learners did not read

and described various initiatives at her school used to promote reading, teachers agreed that learners were generally avid readers. Zoe said

> *Parents want their children to learn English and it doesn't matter what the home language is because they recognise that it's an advantage for the child.*

The lack of any apparently strong opinion on the teaching of English was perhaps indicative of teachers' limited content and pedagogical content knowledge. Zoe and Xena had studied at teacher training colleges and neither of them had studied English as a major subject. Warren had completed a teaching degree at a university, but he had chosen to major in Natural Sciences. Yasmine was the only one in the group with English as a major in her initial teacher education qualification and she did not appear to have the same strong views expressed by the teachers in Group A (5.4.1.2). Teachers seemed open to considering the importance of teaching English in a way that affirmed the multicultural and multilingual nature of their classrooms. However, despite the fact that significant changes had taken place in the demographics of their classrooms over the past twenty years, this was not as yet reflected in the posters and other displays on their classroom walls. A number of posters displayed definitions of parts of speech and figures of speech and various spelling rules, strongly reinforcing the 'skills discourse'. Whilst such posters reflected that 'this was an English classroom' they did not reflect the multilingual identity of the learners who learned English in the classroom.

6.5.3 Teachers' beliefs about learners

It was evident from teachers' reactions to comments made by 'Debby' about 'second language learners' that teachers did not hold as strongly deficit views of their learners as did the teachers in Group A. Teachers also felt that certain learners were marginalised by some of 'Debby's' words and actions. Firstly, they assumed that it was the 'naughty' children that were "allocated to specific partners" whilst the rest were allowed to choose their own partners. This group of teachers felt that the paired work should either be done with the 'person next to them' or 'perhaps a naughty child also needs to be allowed to choose a partner on occasion'. This response also highlighted how very differently people interpret what they read. I had read the sentence and felt the teacher had acted proactively to ensure that discipline problems would not arise during the paired interactions because she knew her learners well. I suggested this as another possible interpretation but the group maintained their point of view.

Secondly, they were unhappy about her reference to mistakes made 'by not only English second language speakers'. Even though she was saying that not only second language speakers make the mistake in question, they felt this was unnecessary labelling. Zoe felt particularly strongly about it. She said

> *Um you know sometimes they need not feel "well English isn't my home language so if I make some mistakes it's actually ok" but um I think in this situation I just felt that the second language children it might just feel we are (Yasmine: ….ma'am notices) or "we are known to make the mistakes because we're second language speakers' whereas there are some second language speakers that are actually ….*

Zoe is expressing a similar concern to that expressed by Mendelowitz (2010) who questioned whether the comments by 'Debby' about 'second language speakers' contributed to her learners seeing themselves in a negative light as writers.

There were, however, statements that did indicate deficit views of learners. Their home circumstances in several statements were portrayed quite negatively. Teachers said things like

> *But also reinforcement there's no reinforcement at home definitely not. There's no need for them to write anything at home I mean we give them homework but there isn't a need for them to um to actually go home and uh ok let me write a letter (Yasmine)*

Zoe tried to soften this comment with

> *Look there are some parents that do help (there are) like I there are some parents that do help but there's more that aren't because maybe they can't*

and

> *You've got to encourage the child to be an enquirer because an independent enquirer himself because otherwise if you're relying on the parents it's just not going to happen*

This statement by Zoe indicates her belief that it is possible to assist learners to develop in spite of the limited or lack of support from their families, unlike teachers in Group A who indicated that learners' home circumstances meant they were unlikely to grow and develop into competent writers.

Teachers cited examples of several learners with severely disadvantaged home circumstances and abusive parents, which, they agreed, made their jobs more demanding and required them in many instances to be more than just the 'teacher'.

The beliefs teachers expressed about their learners suggested that they would be receptive to learning about what implementing a 'culturally responsive pedagogy' (Jesson et al., 2013) might entail and how it could contribute to improving the quality of all learners' writing.

6.5.4 Teachers' beliefs about learning

A word that was used frequently (19 times) by teachers in this group, in relation to teaching writing, but also in relation to learning more broadly, was the word 'structure'. Xena was the strongest proponent of 'structure' as an important aspect of learning. She said early in the series of meetings

> *…you need a structure*

In this instance she was using 'you' as 'you' the teacher, to emphasise the importance of good classroom management and organisational skills.

Xena then used 'structure' again to defend the teaching of 'the letter' even though it is being replaced by e-mails and other forms of social media as a means of communication. She said

> *No look it's important that they know structures (yes, ja) They need to know structure where the address is written that structure is important*

The other teachers challenged her position, using internally persuasive discourse in the ways that they raised questions and offered alternatives to the writing of 'the letter' but she stood firm and eventually responded with

> *Look what ever's required of us to teach them like the formal letter we do it*

The importance of compliance with policy was once again evident in this statement. She then picked up on the issue of 'structure' again two speaking turns later when she said

> *And the structure also adds to their development it develops who they are I think it gives them structure*

Zoe picked up on the idea of structure and added

> *….And if they've got that structure for the letter if they've gotta write anything else there will be that structure grouping their ideas better together*

It was evident to me that there was more than one meaning being ascribed to the word 'structure' in this exchange. Xena seemed to be referring to something that would impact on the character or personal development of learners whilst Zoe appeared to think that

learning to ‘structure’(paragraphing, sequencing their ideas logically) their writing in a letter would give them the organisational skills that were transferable to other pieces of writing.

Xena seemed to realise this and she developed her ideas about ‘structure’ in the following statement

> *…about the character they develop you know we complain about underlining the date underlining the heading it should be on the right hand side there’s a reason for us doing that because we are teaching them a skill and the skill is being structured not for the classroom but for life out there because they’re gonna be mums and dads one day and have children and they would have to know how to structure*

Yasmine, who had been opposed to the teaching of the ‘structure’ of the letter, embraced the much broader view of ‘structure’ and added

> *… Somehow or other though if you look at some of <u>these children</u> (Xena: It’s terrible I know) there’s no structure*
>
> *But it’s because the mums and dads single parents no structure (Xena)*

The above exchange was the most strongly deficit construction of learners in the seven meetings. Xena in particular defended her belief in the importance of ‘structure’ in the lives of learners, both in the teaching of writing and in broader educational issues. It might have been linked to having taught for twenty two years at a school for where many of the learners had come from a nearby informal settlement and where there seemed to have been limited organisation and monitoring in learners’ lives. It seemed that parents were content to know their children were attending school. Beyond that, there seemed to be no sense of responsibility to monitor and support their children’s learning. It might also have been linked to the enduring effects of behaviourist approaches to teaching and learning which she might have experienced during her lifetime.

Teachers in Group B showed a willingness to adapt their views about learning. When I asked teachers about their thoughts on collaborative writing, Zoe’s initial response was

> *It’s not something I would use (all the time) because I think they have to at some point pick their own ideas put pen to papers. But um sometimes it’s helpful because a stronger child will help the weaker child get something going. Sometimes it’s good because you get two stronger children that come up with such amazing ideas because they’ve had opportunities to….*

Zoe’s repetition of ‘because’ suggests that she was ‘thinking aloud’ and developing her opinion as she spoke. Initially, she was not in favour of collaborative writing ‘because they

have to pick their own ideas, put pen to papers', a sentiment strongly voiced by Anne in Group A. However, she eventually decided it could be good because through sharing ideas, learners could come up with something 'amazing '. Xena and Yasmine also felt it could 'occasionally' be useful.

Zoe seemed to warm to the idea of collaborative writing more as the session progressed because she then added two more comments. The first was

> *I just wanted to say I've got a new boy in my class whose English is not very good. He comes from a township school and I've placed him with three quite strong girls. At first I had him sitting on his own and as soon as the class was busy I'd go and help him and it just wasn't working so I placed him with these little girls and he asks them what they must do- a questionnaire or all sorts of things and they working together. And he's producing something better than what he was or he's producing something as opposed to nothing….*

Zoe introduced a new reason why collaborative writing might be a good idea. With more than thirty learners in her class, she did not have the time to provide the support and guidance the new learner needed. By placing him with other learners who were able to support and guide him when he was required to complete written work and by allowing him to talk to them and ask questions in his home language, he seemed to be slowly progressing. Whilst he was not as yet producing good work, he was, in her opinion, at least 'producing something as opposed to nothing'. This comment, however, also highlights the challenges faced by learners moving from 'township' schools to what are often referred to as 'ex model C" schools where English is not only a subject but also the language of learning and teaching (LOLT). The new grade seven learner did not have strong enough language skills to cope with English LOLT or with the subject English. When learners move from one school to another, teachers have to find ways to provide the additional support needed for such learners in order to bridge possible gaps.

Zoe also said

> *I think it's a huge mistake not to let children work in groups 'cos when they actually collaborate and work together even the strong child is developing because to be able to talk and to express and develop someone else's ideas you actually improving yourself..*

In the above excerpt Zoe expressed yet another reason why collaborative writing could be useful. She believed that it enabled learners to develop through helping and supporting other learners to develop their ideas and she deems this to be important.

I suggest that Zoe's expression of her thoughts about collaborative writing as they developed during the course of the session reflected the continuing growth of the group towards becoming a PLC. She revised her initial response and what seemed to be ambivalent views about collaborative writing as she talked through reasons why it was a good idea. Whilst she perceived it mainly in terms of weaker learners benefitting from the help and support of their stronger peers, she at least showed a willingness to reconsider her initial response to the idea of collaborative learning.

6.5.5 The Learning Activity

All teachers expressed a sense that a PLC as a teacher development activity could be valuable. Zoe spoke these words at the first meeting in February 2015:

> *I think with all the issues you've raised I do agree with you and I think um and I'm actually quite excited because I think we will learn a lot of things and I'm excited that we are actually a team so I think as a team we'll connect better and we'll work better. I believe we will work better from this experience because often in our time there's not enough time for us to get together to chat about things whereas this now is going to force us to get together and I'm hoping it will continue even once we're finished.*

Zoe's words reflected her own belief in the value of teachers working and learning together or collaboratively. She spoke of the group as a 'team' and expressed her belief that the 'team' would 'connect better' and learn together. The repeated use of 'team' and 'get together' all reinforce the positive view that Zoe had of collaboration. Xena felt

> *I[she] would have liked more schools involved to get different ideas as to how other schools are managing and doing their English*

This reinforced what she had said earlier. She liked to hear from other teachers and learn from them. It seemed they had greater credibility for her if they had classroom experience to support what they said.

Yasmine felt a PLC had value because

> *It's basically looking for solutions to our common problems and I think if you have like you say different schools um or different teachers representing the schools it would help because then they may come up with something that could work for them and then we could try it so yes, ja,*

I noted with interest that Yasmine believed that sharing 'something that could work' was an effective way to 'solve common problems'. It again reinforced the idea that teachers liked to learn from other teachers (2.5.2.2). There seemed to be greater credibility if

someone had tried and tested ideas in a classroom and could report on the strengths and weaknesses of what they had done.

On the other hand, Zoe made this comment

> *I also feel it's something really so valuable it's so nice to talk about it, go back practice it come back talk about the same things and I do feel it would develop our skills so much better….so sad it's come to an end*

Zoe believed that there should not just be talk about what could be done, but the opportunity to try things out and then discuss the successes or failures with colleagues and grow as a result.

Teachers admitted that meeting every two to three weeks had proved quite a challenge once the demands of each term had escalated but they 'had managed'. They suggested that meetings once a month might be more manageable. They also agreed that if several schools were to be involved, they should be close enough to each other to keep travelling to a minimum and that the hosting of the PLC sessions should be rotated. I felt that the reason the group had begun to gain momentum and grow towards becoming a PLC was because we had met at such regular intervals, but understood that the demands on teachers' time and energy were significant.

All the teachers agreed that they had enjoyed the meetings because they provided opportunities in a non- threatening context for sharing with other teachers as well as for learning. Zoe, however, added that

> *I think you do need someone like (Researcher) to add…(Yasmine: To oversee it, yes, definitely)..Because sometimes people actually need to be guided. They think they know certain things but they actually don't so we need someone to be guiding us about writing or whatever it is that we want to find out about…*

The issue of whether 'outside expertise' was needed in a PLC had not been discussed with the group, so this was an interesting comment from Zoe. Whilst teachers had all expressed the desire to learn from other teachers about how they were 'doing things', they nevertheless felt the need for outside expertise. Furthermore, because Warren, Xena and Zoe had not completed initial teacher qualifications that included an in-depth study of English, they may have felt they needed to learn more about the subject. None of the teachers reported receiving any training on the teaching of writing, and this may have added to their sense that there was more knowledge they needed to gain and skills they needed to learn. Group A were more confident about their subject knowledge and did not

appear concerned about their narrow understanding of how to teach English. Cereseto asserts that "The greater the depth of teachers' knowledge, the more likely it [is] that PLCs could be a vehicle for teacher learning" (Cereseto, 2015, p.283).

The experience of the teachers in Group B suggests that even without a depth of subject knowledge, teachers can learn in a PLC. Group A teachers all had language degrees and better subject knowledge of English than Group B teachers, but there was no progress towards becoming a PLC in Group A. This suggests that teachers' 'attitudes and dispositions' also play a significant role in determining whether teachers learn through PLCs. Teachers without strong or deep subject knowledge may prioritise different things to focus on compared to those who have better subject knowledge, but this is possibly an advantage of the PLC in that it enables teachers to focus on their particular learning needs and priorities.

Teachers then discussed the inclusion of other grades in the PLC. Xena provided one of their reasons for suggesting this:

> *…very often you find you're teaching grade 4 and then all of a sudden you're thrown into grade 7 or you're thrown from here to there so you don't have that proper foundation of how to do certain things..*

Xena's use of the words 'thrown into' and 'thrown from here to there' is revealing. It also links to her use of the word 'forced' (6.3.2.1) in her personal interview. It indicates her sense of being moved (quite forcibly) at someone else's will. It also supports the assertion (Taylor and Vinjevold, 1999) that the philosophy of fundamental pedagogics produced teachers who were passive and obedient. In many instances, teachers have to be prepared to teach whichever grade and subject they are given. She believed that as we had dealt with principles that could be applied to the teaching of writing in all grades, all teachers would benefit from participating. Yasmine provided another reason why all grades should participate: if everyone was applying the principles of the effective teaching of writing, learners would acquire stronger foundations and perform better and better with each successive year. Zoe however cautioned against the 'PLC" group being too big

> *'cos with big groups people will be lost in the group there won't be the opportunity for everybody to be heard..*

This comment highlighted another critically important issue with regard to PLCs. It is very important for PLCs to be of a size where, indeed, 'everybody can be heard'. Xena then

proposed that teachers meet in their grade groups as a solution to this and Zoe added that occasionally they should then all meet together because

> *I feel because I've taught up to grade 9 I feel I know where the children are going and I've taught grade 1 up to so I feel I know where they're coming from so it helps you prepare the children better. So I do I think meeting with the teachers from different directions would really help you and the children..*

When they considered the type of teacher that might benefit from participating in a PLC, Xena suggested 'younger teachers' because older teachers thought they 'knew it all'. Yasmine thought it would be

> *.... the people who would be interested in making a change or making sure they're on the right level would be the ones that would be attending, would be the ones that would make time*

Yasmine's words 'would make time' were well chosen as participation in a PLC must be voluntary. Teachers would therefore need to believe participating in a PLC has value for them in order for them to 'make time' (as these teachers had) to participate. All of them had extremely demanding workloads as well as sometimes stressful family responsibilities and yet they had 'made time' to be at each meeting.

Zoe, who has taught for more than thirty years said

> *Well I'm not a young teacher but I'm actually hungry to learn from the younger and older and the learned 'cos I feel (Researcher) you've got an understanding of writing that I actually haven't got……. I feel I've learnt so much from you about writing so I want more I will go out and find and try and develop myself*

This statement led to Xena sharing something about herself which once again pointed to the progress the group was making towards becoming a PLC. It was quite personal but she felt 'safe' enough to share it with the group, something I know could not have happened in the first couple of sessions where she seemed quiet and reserved. She said

> *The school where I come from I come from a township school. This is my third year at the school and (Zoe) is an amazing teacher she's taught me so much. And my reason for the move is because I felt so much I was stagnant there wasn't development there people were doing their own thing. And that is why I moved - for growth for development-and um I don't regret it.*

Teachers agreed that not all teachers would benefit from participating in a PLC. Zoe concluded that

> *It's almost like you seeing the need in yourself because you want to develop your children better so you go and find something that's going to help you be a better teacher*

Her use of ‘you’ emphasises the importance of the individual ‘you’ making the choice to participate because ‘you’ want to ‘be a better teacher’. This comment from Zoe captured perhaps the essential purpose of a PLC.

As the session wound down, teachers made an unexpected request. They stated that while they may not have the expensive equipment that schools in the northern suburbs had such as smartboards, they felt these teachers were more highly skilled and they wanted an opportunity to visit their schools and to learn from them as they believed they were ‘better’ teachers. I disagreed saying often teachers from well-resourced schools faced similar if not many of the same challenges and were not necessarily better at dealing with these. I did agree however that both groups could learn from one another and that I would look into arranging such an exchange.

6.5.6 Structure and support provided by the school

Neither of the schools represented in Group B showed visible support for the group. I was aware that both principals encouraged their teachers to attend the meetings, but (quite rightly) did not insist on it. The HOD at the host school chose not to participate, citing her ‘workload’ as the reason, but as she left at the end of October, I wondered if she chose not to participate because she was in the process of planning to resign.

6.6 Reflection

Summary of PLC meetings:

Date of meeting	Topic of discussion
28 January 2015- Introductory session	Information session-what is a PLC? Why this study” Who am I? (researcher) Questions
4 February 2015- Group B meeting 1	Folders for teachers including letters to the teachers and requests for permission to record/ transcribe meetings/ interviews. Handouts – Timperley et al. (PD cycle) and Ivanic discourses of writing summary

	Explanation of the Professional Development cycle for Continuous Improvement (Timperley et al. 2007) Discussion of Ivanic's (2004) discourses of writing and link to CAPS.
25 February 2015- Group B meeting 2	Reading of lesson transcripts – 'Debby' and 'Fiona' (Mendelowitz, 2010) followed by discussion of lessons (see Appendix I.)
11 March 2015 – Group B meeting 3	Continued discussion of lesson transcripts
22 April 2015 – Group B meeting 4	Summary of 3 group meetings held during term 1. Discussion of accuracy of summary, identification of key themes/ issues emerging. Discussion of possible learning focus for the next session
6 May 2015- Group B meeting 5	Learning Focus – 'How can we better mediate/ scaffold the writing process?' Discussion/ focus on how to bridge the gap between oral and written language. Reading- excerpts from chapter one "Writing voices: Creating communities of writers"(Cremin and Myhill, 2012).
20 May 2015 – Group meeting 6	Reciprocity between reading and writing Focus on promoting an integrated approach to teaching writing.
5 August 2015 – Group meeting 7	Is there 'wriggle room' within the CAPS for a more integrated approach to the teaching of writing- close reading and discussion of CAPS teaching plan for grade 7.

Teachers in Group B took the first three sessions to work through what DuFour (2004) refers to as the 'pre-initial stage' of a PLC. It was at the end of the third session that they formulated a specific goal and began to move towards creating a collaborative team and move into the initial stage of a PLC. I had to take a directive role in the fourth session in order to provide the information teachers would need to proceed to the next stage, the development stage of the PLC, the stage at which they become willing to review their existing practices and begin to change these based on their learners' learning needs. Teachers in fact requested another meeting at the beginning of term four, after we had officially come to the end of our planned series of six meetings. At the seventh meeting, teachers asked me to work with them on changing their planning and preparation for the writing task in the fourth term. During that meeting it was evident that a small shift had taken place in their thinking. Instead of talking about teaching the various components of the curriculum separately, they started to propose ways in which they could make links between the reading and viewing, listening and speaking, writing and presenting and language structures and usage (evidence that they had retained some of the ideas we had discussed in session 4. They had begun to recognise that teaching writing does not involve 'standalone' lessons but requires the integration of language and literacy knowledge and skills). Whilst their discussion still did not focus sufficiently on the need to equip learners with an understanding of the linguistic devices that make texts more effective and how these work in particular genres, there was a shift from the ways teachers talked about their teaching of writing in the earliest sessions. This provided encouraging evidence that for some teachers a PLC can prove to be effective for continuing professional learning. It was also evident, though, that it was a slow process that would require patience and perseverance. Teachers have requested that I continue to meet with them in 2016 and as encouraging as this is, the ongoing process will not be without challenges. I will need to find ways to persuade teachers to be more flexible in their understanding of how the curriculum is to be taught and that may entail forging a stronger partnership with their district subject advisors, their principals and heads of department.

Machado, in Cochran-Smith (2004) is quoted as saying

> …..Traveller, there is no path
> You make it as you go along
> *In walking the path is made* (Machado, in Cochran-Smith, 2004: xvii my emphasis).

PLCs are increasingly endorsed by the DBE as recommended models of teacher development. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 have provided ‘snapshots’ of my journey of ‘walking’ and ‘making the path’ towards understanding what it is that enables or constrains the development of a PLC with a focus on the teaching of writing. It has been a challenging journey, with several changes in direction having to be made along the way, but important lessons have been learned and valuable insights gained and these will be discussed in the final chapter.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Contextual variables that enable or constrain the work of PLCs in public schools

7.2.1 District level variables

7.2.2 School and classroom level variables

7.3 Teachers' life histories and current identities as enabling or constraining productive participation in a

PLC

7.4 The facilitation process as an enabling or constraining variable

7.5 Teachers' knowledge and beliefs about teaching writing

7.6 The potential of a PLC for developing teachers' understandings of writing

7.7 Limitations of this study

7.8 Recommendations

7.8.1 Promoting teacher agency

7.8.1.1 Enabling districts to enable teachers

7.8.1.2 Limiting the monitoring and control of teachers

7.8.2 Disrupting deficit discourses

7.8.3 Facilitating PLCs

7.8.4 Reconsidering writing pedagogies and the writing curriculum for schools

7.9 Concluding reflections

7.1 Introduction

In this concluding chapter, I draw on the most significant findings from the three data chapters to respond to the main research question posed for this study (What factors enable and / or constrain the development of a professional learning community (PLC) which has as its focus the teaching of writing?) and to the sub-questions related to this question:

- What is enabling or constraining about the contexts in which teachers work in public schools?
- What, if any, impact do teachers' life histories and current identities have on the take-up of professional development opportunities in a PLC with a focus on the teaching of writing pedagogies?

- In the context of South African public education, to what extent is a PLC a suitable intervention for developing teachers' understandings and enacting of writing pedagogies?

I also reflect on the limitations of the study and make a series of recommendations regarding PLCs as a model of teacher development.

As indicated in Chapter 1, my interest in professional learning communities as a vehicle for the development of teachers' writing pedagogies was stimulated by *The Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Development in South Africa* (ISPFTED), published in April 2011. Publication of this framework was followed by the DBE's official launching of Subject Committees and PLCs in August 2014 and by the convening of Colloquia with a focus on Professional Learning Communities in September 2014 and December 2016. In May 2015, the DBE published *Professional Learning Communities: A guideline for South African schools*, signaling the intention to pursue the establishment of PLCs. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 provide an account of my attempts to work with teachers in the establishment of PLCs which would focus on the development of teachers' writing pedagogies. The question I have posed, and the possible answers suggested by the data analysed in these chapters, indicate that there are several contextual variables that need to be taken into account when initiating a PLC and facilitating its work, and that teachers' life histories and current identities are particularly important to the success or failure of a PLC as is the facilitation process.

7.2 Contextual variables that enable or constrain the work of PLCs in public schools

Teaching in South African schools during the past two decades has involved responding to several kinds of change. Adler has described South Africa as a country in which, since 1994, 'all embracing' encompassing 'social, political and educational change' (2002, p. 2) has taken place. Not only have teachers had to manage three changes in curriculum in the space of twenty years but, in many instances, the demographics of classrooms have changed significantly, as was the case for the schools in which the teachers who participated in this study were teaching. Parents, because they are no longer limited to racially demarcated schools, make substantial sacrifices in order to enable their children to attend quintile four and five schools which are perceived to offer a better quality of education. In these increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse schools there are

contextual variables at district, school and classroom level which may either enable or constrain the establishment and wok of PLCs.

7.2.1 District level variables

While district officials are supposed to play a supportive role by providing professional services to schools (McKinney, 2010), in practice their more dominant role is in ensuring teacher accountability and compliance with policies. District officials receive directives regarding curriculum implementation and assessment from their provincial offices and are then responsible for ensuring that these are carried out in the schools in their districts. Districts quite often issue an instruction for teachers to attend a cluster meeting at short notice and teachers have to cancel any other commitment they might have in order to attend these meetings. On one occasion, a scheduled meeting with the Group A teachers in this study had to be postponed because of a notice received to attend a meeting on the same day. In another instance, a teacher who had agreed to join Group B had to attend a district meeting on the day the first meeting was scheduled. She unfortunately decided not to attend thereafter. It thus became evident that the scheduling of PLC meetings needed to be flexible in order to accommodate these occurrences.

Districts have also been slow to fulfil the responsibility they were given to provide correct information and guidance to school leaders and teachers about the ISPFTED. Teachers began reporting notices to attend 'PLC meetings' in the middle of 2015, four years after the publication of the ISPFTED. These meetings appear to have followed the publication of *Professional Learning Communities: A guideline for South African schools' in May 2015.* When I first started approaching schools to partner with me in this study in 2012, they had no knowledge of the ISPFTED or PLCs. Since the publication of the PLC guideline, districts have required teachers to participate in PLCs at least once a term. This instruction runs contrary to what much of the literature has to say about participation in a PLC. For example, Chappius et al. (2009) and Hargreaves (2007), state that participation should be voluntary, with teachers participating because they recognise the need for improvement and believe that continuous learning is part of their evolving professional identity. PLC sessions also seem to be run along very similar lines to previous cluster meetings. Other district level constraints became evident during the course of Group A and Group B meetings. In both groups teachers felt a lack of agency although in different ways. Teachers in Group A felt disempowered by district directives regarding assessment whilst teachers in Group B expressed a lack of choice when it came to interpreting what and how

to teach term by term and week by week because they were expected to conform to the directives of district officials.

Teachers in Group A referred to an assessment document issued by their district officials entitled the *NCS Assessment Guideline*. This document provided details as to the assessment tasks teachers were to complete each term, and supplied the assessment rubrics to be used to assess the tasks. Anne stated that 'everything [was] so assessment driven' and she was particularly resentful of the amount of assessment of oral presentations that learners were required to do. She said

> *I wouldn't do a speech. I hate them, they don't prove anything.*

Anne argued that 'in the old days, you taught better somehow because you could do what your kids needed not what you needed to do for marks'. Teachers in Group A, besides perceiving that there was an assessment 'overload', also indicated that they had no control over what to prioritise in the writing assessment rubrics. Anne, Eric, Beth and Carien expressed unhappiness at not being able to weight grammar more heavily in the rubrics. Anne maintained, once again, that 'in the old days'

> *if the kids wrote bad grammar, they would fail. If they had a stupid idea or not a grown up enough idea they would fail. Now, they get 40%*

Another example of teachers feeling disempowered by district directives was their lack of authority to decide whether a learner should be promoted or not. Carien claimed that she

> *…would like to have the power to decide whether or not a child may fail…[I] work [my] bum off with a certain kid and then he gets to the end of the year and he cannot construct a coherent six word sentence and then the department says 'ah, condoned!'*

Teachers in Group A did not, however, seem to feel the same constraints as those felt by teachers in Group B to choose the sequence in which they taught aspects of the curriculum week by week. They believed they could choose as long as 'everything' was completed by the end of the term, an understanding consistent with what is stated in the CAPS Home Language document (DBE, 2011, p.12).

Teachers in Group B showed visible discomfort when I encouraged them to consider rearranging the sequence of their language teaching document in order to create more links between the different components and to stop teaching writing in 'standalone' lessons. Yasmine said

> *I know they [district officials] often prefer to follow the order of things however we've been fighting with them to say that learners need reinforcement. There is no time for reinforcement of the more important concepts that we think the children should understand……as long as we tick it off to say it's complete but they not very happy when we deviate.*

Riveros et al. (2012) argue that in order to develop strong professional learning communities, teachers' sense of agency needs to be supported. A study by Hargreaves, Berry, Lai, Leung, Scott and Stobart (2013) on PLCs in London and Hong Kong concluded that there was evidence to support the argument that limiting teachers' sense of autonomy or agency through a focus on prescribed, measurable and predictable outcomes may in fact limit the achievement of these outcomes. They advocate a focus on revitalising the teacher's initiative, independence and critical reflection suggesting that such a focus is more likely to be productive for quality teaching and learning. Teachers are increasingly being constructed as 'implementing agenc[ies] of larger interests'(Batra, 2009, p. 132). Facilitators and providers of teacher development activities, and even departmental heads like Yasmine, thus need to play an active role in encouraging teachers to find "wriggle room" (Ryan and Barton, 2013) within the perceived constraints of the curriculum to promote changes that will improve the quality of the teaching of writing (2.5.1.2).

Facilitators of professional learning opportunities need to acknowledge the 'realities' teachers experience, and rather than offering generic content, they need to work to specifically address the questions and concerns of the teachers. In doing so, teacher educators and other facilitators of teacher professional development need to find opportunities to open up discussion of alternative ways to accommodate teachers' day to day 'realities'. Theoretically, PLCs should enable these conversations to happen. However, Hargreaves et al. (2013) reported that some teachers in PLCs in Hong Kong and London experienced limited autonomy where meetings were held in a ritualistic fashion and the process became one of following instructions, a pattern which seems to be developing in South African subject PLCs, too. If teachers are to 're-imagine everyday realities' they will need to have some sense of autonomy or agency. The issue of teacher agency or teacher autonomy is particularly important with regard to the teaching of writing. In 2.5.2.1 I indicated that the type of programmed instruction increasingly evident in South Africa (scripted lesson plans, prescribed pacing of lessons and common tests and exams) turns teachers into mere technicians or puppets (Atwell, 2002). If teachers are framed as little more than technicians of a state agenda (Samuel, 2008) they are unlikely to respond to the need to support and promote the ideals of teaching as a profession. According to Fullan

and Hargreaves (2012), a classic definition of a profession includes the 'autonomy to make informed discretionary judgements' (p. 80) as one of its characteristics. The trend, evident at district, provincial and national levels in South Africa, of prescribing almost every aspect of teaching, will constrain the development of a PLC because of the way it de-professionalises teachers (1.1.2). If teachers are to direct their own learning in PLCs, they need to be able to question 'the rules of the game' and to test whether such rules promote the best possible outcomes for the learners that they teach.

In summing up, it would seem that districts largely constrain the development of PLCs in several ways. Firstly, teachers are unable to schedule PLC meetings with any confidence that they will be able to maintain that schedule because they are frequently required to attend district meetings at short notice. Secondly, districts have conveyed incorrect or inaccurate interpretations of the NCS-CAPS in that they have increasingly depicted the curriculum as narrowly prescriptive in ways which developers of the documents maintained was never the intention. Such prescription limits the choices teachers have regarding necessary changes they may wish to make. Districts can, however, play an important role in the enabling of the development of PLCs if they develop a better understanding of how a PLC should function.

7.2.2 School and classroom level variables

Little (2006) maintains that the school is an important factor in creating an environment conducive to professional learning. However, there are many things that happen in schools that are beyond the control of even functional, well-managed schools. Different types of challenges to the establishment of a PLC emerged in the two groups.

The teachers in Group A experienced a very difficult second term in that the school was burgled twice in quick succession and classrooms with smartboards were vandalised. This meant that I was unable to observe Carien teach a lesson as hers was one of the classrooms vandalised. Timetables then had to be revised because Dineo took ill and had to be hospitalized for the whole term. A replacement was not appointed in her post and teachers had to share her teaching load among themselves. These incidences affected the morale of the teachers and we could only schedule two meetings during the second term. One meeting was held early in the term, the second just before the writing of exams in June. It was difficult to gain any kind of momentum for the group or to move discussions on from

the extremely negative tone that had been set. Teachers were unwilling to explore or consider proposals to address learners' learning needs. For example, I gave teachers several articles to read but when they indicated that they had not time to read them, I then used excerpts from a chapter in 'Writing Voices: Creating Communities of writers' (Cremin and Myhill, 2012) which we read during the meeting. The very useful ideas for 'reducing the cognitive load' of writing and for bridging the gap between talk and writing were rejected, largely because teachers believed they did not have enough time to implement the ideas. Anne eventually said in her forthright way:

> *I'll do what **I believe and know is right for the kids** not what some book says I must do (my emphasis)*

Time was often cited as a reason for not doing things better. For example, Eric described how he occasionally sat down with learners and helped them to take a 'brilliant oral' and use their notes to write a good essay. Whilst he found that when he did this the quality of writing improved, he maintained that he simply did not have the time to do this often and with all learners. The time constraints experienced by teachers may well be why they look for tips for teaching and are not prepared for a more reconstructive type of learning model (Spillane and Thompson, 1997).

Teachers also maintained that it would not be feasible to implement the ideas of Cremin and Myhill (2012) about writing because of the discipline problems they experienced with what they called the 'little ones' (grade eight learners). They claimed that 'older' and 'brighter' learners would respond well, but not the younger learners.

Teachers in Group A had expressed a lack of agency or autonomy with regard to the assessment in their classes. However, they exhibited a strong sense of agency in choosing whether or not to introduce the ideas and approaches to the teaching of writing suggested by Cremin and Myhill (2012) in their classrooms. Robinson (2012) asserted that although agency is often equated with positive practices of change, in practice it can also be used to maintain the status quo and resist change. Brodie (2013) states something similar when she indicates that social practice theory argues that communities of practice contain seeds for both growth and resistance to growth, and this was evident in Group A's responses.

Teachers in Group B also described occasional discipline problems, but these did not seem to be as much of an inhibiting factor as they were for teachers in Group A. Perhaps notable is that Group B's learners were younger (Grade 7) than those taught by Group A (Grade 8) although they taught larger classes (35 to 40 learners per class compared to between 23 and 27 learners in Group A's classes). Beth (Group A) went as far as to say that the discipline problems she experienced prevented her from teaching learners as much as she believed she could teach them. Because the four teachers in Group B taught at what appeared to be well-managed schools, and they did not experience the same type of disruptions experienced by teachers in Group A, it was possible to schedule meetings regularly. We met every two to three weeks. Whilst this proved to be difficult at times for teachers, they remained committed to meetings and attended faithfully. On one occasion Yasmine was late because of what she referred to as 'school matters'. A parent had detained her as she was leaving to come to the meeting. However, it was in Group B that 'compliance' seemed to be an issue. Teachers at the host school, although they chose their learning focus to be the mediation and scaffolding of writing, also wanted me to look at the rubrics they were required to use to assess writing. The planning and preparation for grade 7 English was done by the host school's head of department, and the rubrics were developed by her. Teachers emailed me examples of the rubrics, but, once again, when I proposed changes that needed to be made to the rubrics, teachers were reluctant to deviate from what their senior had prescribed. Unfortunately, what seemed to be evident was the enduring effects of 'fundamental pedagogics' which Enslin describes as 'an ontology which produces useful and docile teachers' (Enslin in Taylor and Vinjevold, 1999, p. 133). It was a policy which promoted passivity and obedience to authority (Taylor and Vinjevold, 1999).

Another hindrance to the optimal development of a PLC by participants in Group B was the loss of one of the members of the group, Warren. It seemed to be accepted practice at the school to give teachers subjects to teach which they had not studied as part of their initial teacher qualifications. This was true for both Warren and Xena. Warren, who had recently qualified, had majored in Natural Sciences but was teaching English. However, when the deputy principal was promoted to a principal's post from the beginning of the second term, Warren's timetable was changed so that he could teach all the grade 7 Natural Science and he was no longer able to teach English. We thus lost a very valuable member of the group who had enriched discussions with his fresh and different perspectives on the teaching of writing.

In 6.4, I quoted Johnson (2009) who stated that the context within which teachers work is extremely influential in shaping how and why they do what they do. This was perhaps most notable in the different attitudes of the two groups of teachers towards professional collaboration as a means of teacher learning and development. Whilst all three schools that the nine teachers taught at were in Johannesburg, one in the north east of Johannesburg and the other two in the south, there were significant differences in the specific contexts of the schools which appeared to influence their attitudes towards participation in collaborative learning.

Whilst teachers in Group A described getting together for staff meetings and subject meetings, they never described working together to plan lessons or to assist and support one another with, for example, the setting of exam papers. Dineo, whilst she was offered support and guidance by a senior teacher, was left largely to her own devices and described enjoying a level of 'autonomy'. Teachers were free to choose the sequence in which they wanted to teach the term's programme as long as they completed everything by the end of the term. Teachers' discussions in this group were often characterised by authoritative discourse and they largely supported and reinforced one another's views.

Teachers in Group B shared planning, preparation and resources and described consulting with one another about the actual teaching of their lessons. Warren described this supportive and caring culture as part of the reason why his confidence as a teacher of English had grown. They seemed to share a 'collegiality' not evident in Group A and which enabled them to move towards becoming a PLC more effectively than Group A. According to Stoll (2011) the members of a PLC need to respect and care for one another and to establish trusting and honest relationships that result in their being prepared to risk exposing their practice and to engaging with one another in a truly collegial manner. This was evident in the more dialogic discussion in Group B. There were also some real debates at times and the juxtaposition of ideas such as their different interpretations of Debbie's instructions to her class. Their discussion of the writing process as a linear or recursive process was another example.

It would seem that more than just a well-managed school environment is needed for the development of a PLC. If professional development activities are not prioritised, and in particular PLCs which require sustained participation, these will be put aside as a result of the many disruptions that can affect a school. For example, when Dineo took ill, a replacement was not appointed and teachers had to take on additional teaching

responsibilities. When Warren's deputy principal left the school at the beginning of term 2, he had to teach all the grade 7 Natural Science and could no longer teach English. Carien's sudden departure in term 3 meant that a newly appointed teacher joined the group at a very late stage of the process. There seemed to be fewer disruptions at the two schools represented in Group B than the Group A school but when there were disruptions the teachers' commitment to the meetings enabled it to continue to meet at regular intervals. Group B teachers exhibited different 'attitudes' towards learning in a PLC which may, in part, be due to their identities as 'compliant' teachers but I believe it was also because of their desire and willingness to become better teachers of writing, as well as the more directive approach to facilitation adopted by me. An important question I should perhaps have considered in my role as the facilitator of the series of meetings with Group A teachers was whether there might have been a way for me to utilise their 'agency of resistance' to motivate them to make different choices.

According to Timperley et al. (2007) teachers' prior theories have a powerful effect on how learning experiences are understood and these prior theories are developed through a range of factors. These include the biographical, contextual, institutional and programmatic forces which were discussed in 2.3.1 (Samuel, 2008).

7.3 Teachers' life histories and current identities as enabling or constraining productive participation in a PLC

As stated in Chapter 1, in 2013, the number of teachers in South African schools between the ages of 40 and 49 was 169 000 (six of the nine teachers in this study fall into this category). This constitutes almost forty five percent of the teachers in the system (Hofmeyr and Draper, 2015). Thus, a significant percentage of South African teachers during the course of their lives have been educated in the previously divided apartheid system. The impact of teachers' apprenticeships of observation (Lortie, 1975) or old beliefs on their professional learning is an important concern when envisaging what might enable or constrain the development of a PLC with a focus on the teaching of writing or any other professional development focus.

Many South African teachers have not received an initial teacher education, or opportunities through continuing teacher development to reflect on the implications of the linguistic and cultural diversity of their classrooms for their teaching practices. Teachers' beliefs about their learners, about teaching and learning and about teaching writing proved to be influential in both Groups A and B. The nine teachers included in this study all taught

at quintile five schools located in middle class areas but which drew learners from a variety of contexts. Whilst some learners lived in the area, many traveled to schools from nearby townships by taxi. In Group A, deficit views of learners dominated discussions more than they did in discussions in Group B. One example is how teachers talked about learners who were speakers of English as an additional language. Teachers in Group A spoke of second language speakers as 'holding back' (Anne) learners who spoke English as their home language. Teachers in Group B, on the other hand, objected to learners being 'labelled' as second language speakers (Zoe, Warren and Yasmine). Teachers in Group A described second language learners as 'Afrocentric' and as 'empty slates' with no knowledge or ideas to communicate. Teachers, they believed, had to 'fix what was wrong' (Anne) by 'hammering' and 'pounding' information into learners to get them 'right' (Carien, Beth, and Eric). The philosophy of teaching suggested by the words and phrases (discourses) used by these teachers is reminiscent of the Christian National Education policies of the apartheid era, and of fundamental pedagogics.

Teachers in Group B expressed a belief that with support and encouragement, learners could produce good writing. The kind of support they suggested included breaking the process down into more manageable stages (Zoe, Warren and Yasmine) and providing specific guidelines at each stage. Group B referred to this as 'structure' which could also be construed as being motivated by deficit views of learners. However, it did not amount to quite the same low level drill and skill instruction (Ball and Ellis, 2008) evident in the approach of Group A, nor was it motivated by the same view of learners. Anne in Group A said 'we think they know stuff but they don't so I'm beginning to take it *back to basics*' (my emphasis). Taking learners 'back to basics' entailed having learners do more 'rote' tasks (Anne) and making them do 'exercises to death' (Carien). Group A regularly expressed the view that many of the learners in the classes they taught did not have the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991) needed to become proficient writers. Their deficit views prevented them from coming up with the necessary learning focus for the group to move closer towards becoming a PLC, because they did not believe there was anything they needed to know or learn that would make them more effective teachers. Teachers shared an entrenched view that learners who performed well '... come to us excellent due *to their circumstances*..'. (my emphasis). Their strongly deficit discourse of learners made them externalise the challenges they identified: the learners, the curriculum, the parents, the

system and the lack of time were responsible for poor performance, not the quality of classroom instruction.

By contrast, teachers in Group B, whilst acknowledging the gaps in learners' knowledge and skills, chose a learning focus for the group in the expectation that this would enable them to teach better. They chose to focus on how they could better mediate and scaffold the writing process. They already had some strategies they believed provided some scaffolding of this process. For example, teachers provided learners with planning worksheets with guidelines for each paragraph of the type of text they were required to write. I believe this indicated their desire and their belief that they could assist learners to write better by structuring the process more tightly.

Negative positioning evident in counter-productive discourses that constitute certain learners as deficit – "the poor, the willful, the disabled, the non-English speaking, the slow, the bottom 10%" (Comber and Kamler, 2004, p. 293) are likely to constrain the development of a PLC. Dineo, as a young and inexperienced teacher was beginning to adopt some of the deficit discourse of her older colleagues even though she revealed a more open and enquiring attitude towards her teaching of writing. A deficit discourse was one of the reasons why Group A never progressed from the first stage of development of a PLC, whilst Group B were at least able to get to the point where they established a learning goal for the group. The question raised by Hoadley and Ensor (2009) regarding whether a relationship can be established between teachers' own social class backgrounds, their professional dispositions and their pedagogic practice seems particularly pertinent to this study. What was interesting to note in this study was that the better qualified teachers (those with academic and professional qualifications) seemed less able to critically assess their professional practice (Baxen and Soudien, 1999) suggesting that teachers' professional dispositions might play as important a role in their effective participation in a PLC as their academic and professional qualifications.

Teachers in both groups were demographically mixed. In Group A there were three white teachers, a coloured teacher and a black teacher. All five described middle class backgrounds and all spoke English as a home language (even Dineo, the young black teacher who was educated at a private Catholic school). All grew up in communities outside the community in which the school was situated and at the time of the research, lived in other communities. By contrast, teachers in Group B all lived in the same community in which they taught. The two white teachers, Warren and Zoe, grew up in that

community and attended schools in the community. Xena grew up and was educated in the coloured community not far from where the host school was situated but had relocated and now lived in the same suburb as the host school. Yasmine, the only teacher who grew up in another province, KwaZulu- Natal, also lived in the same community as that of the school in which she taught. Two of the teachers, Zoe and Xena, were from communities that spoke at least one other language besides English. Zoe spoke Greek as her home language and Xena indicated that quite a few of her close family members spoke Afrikaans. Warren admitted to struggling with English even though it was his home language. It was evident that teachers in Group B came from more diverse backgrounds than teachers in Group A and this may account to some extent for professional dispositions and responses to the linguistic and cultural diversity of their classrooms that contrasted with those of Group A teachers.

There was, however, another likely reason why teachers in Group A did not progress towards becoming a PLC and that was my inexperience as a facilitator.

7.4 The facilitation process as an enabling or constraining variable

Cereseto (2015) identifies 'appropriate facilitation' as a key enabler of the development of a PLC. With only what I had read about PLCs to guide me, I committed to a 'bottom-up' organic model of a PLC. I resolved to be non-directive and to allow teachers to establish the direction in which they wanted the group meetings to go. It was when I noted by the fourth meeting that we had made no progress that I realised that I should have adopted a much more directive style of facilitation, establishing myself, not as a fellow learner, but as the discussion leader and the teacher when necessary (Cereseto, 2015). PLCs are not a model of teacher development with which teachers are as yet familiar and I needed to make it much clearer to them that active participation was expected from them, not just in terms of discussion in the group sessions, but in reading articles they were given in preparation for follow up meetings. Teachers also needed to understand that they needed to adopt much more of an inquiry and improvement oriented mindset. My style of facilitation was significantly different with Group B where I did take on the role of the discussion leader and teacher particularly in the first two sessions and the fifth session, by which time teachers had established their learning focus. In session seven I adopted both a fellow learner and discussion leader role with the group. I lead the discussion by using mainly questions to guide teachers in their exploration of the perceived problems they identified with their term four writing task. As a fellow learner, I provided some alternatives to their

proposed solutions and discussed the possible advantages and disadvantages of adopting different approaches. Teachers' knowledge and familiarity with their learners and with school requirements made them better able to assess some of the options than I was and we were eventually able to come up with a plan that they believed could work.

7.5 Teachers' knowledge and beliefs about teaching writing

Five of the nine teachers in the two groups had taught for twenty or more years. Two had taught for more than ten years, and two had only one or two years of teaching experience. Except for Zoe, they all expressed a linear understanding of the writing process. Anne stated emphatically that the way she would

> *get the kids to produce the essay [you] want … (unintelligible). Do me a mind map, do me a rough draft a script or whatever give me a final draft*

And even though Zoe raised the issue of the recursive nature of writing, she did not pursue it as the other three members of the group strongly asserted their belief in a linear process, with strictly demarcated times for writing. Teachers' accounts about the way they taught writing support Kennedy's (1998) contention that much of the teaching of writing stays the same because of the organisational constraints placed on teachers and because of teachers' own beliefs about teaching and learning. The NCS-CAPS document, as well as the mediation of it by district officials reinforces teachers' beliefs about how writing should be taught. For example, teachers are required to assign marks for the mind mapping/ planning of an essay in external assessments like the Annual National Assessment (ANA). Teachers have thus introduced the same practice (evident in the writing samples submitted by Anne and Beth in Group A). This supports Batra's (2009) contention that teachers become the 'channels of reproduction of the officially approved curriculum' (p.132).

Teachers in Group A expressed strong beliefs as to 'what mattered' in writing. On numerous occasions, they emphasised the importance of grammatical correctness and accurate spelling. In one instance, Anne admitted their approach was short-sighted. She said

> *We spend so much time on format and not actually on writing …….*

The rubrics used to assess writing by Group B, although not developed by the teachers themselves, revealed a bias towards the grammatical and other technical aspects of the writing. When I raised this with teachers, they appeared reluctant to do anything about it,

not necessarily because they strongly believed in the weighting, but perhaps because of their beliefs about senior staff and their position of authority in a school. South Africa, like Singapore, has a hierarchical school system which discourages many teachers from challenging authority (Hairon and Dimmock, 2012).

Teachers in Group B also expressed strong views about the need for the writing process to be tightly structured. They used the word 'structure' many times, though with different meanings. However, I gathered from the way they spoke of structure in relation to their teaching of writing that they were referring to how much or how little scaffolding and mediating they needed to do. This was also an issue raised by Group A, but their reason was that they did not want learners 'copying' or imitating the teacher's ideas. By contrast, Group B teachers wanted to do what was best to ensure that learners were equipped to become independent writers. Whilst teachers in Group B did not have the same level of content knowledge of English as a subject as teachers in Group A, their questions and concerns showed an intuitive understanding of important issues related to the teaching of writing. As noted in Chapter 2 (2.4.1.6), addressing the issue of excessive structure in the teaching of writing means that teachers need to find the balance between excessive structure and unlimited freedom (Mendelowitz, 2014), and a PLC offers the potential for teachers to collaborate and explore ways in which this can be done.

7.6 The potential of a PLC for developing teachers' understandings of writing

The teachers in both Groups A and B needed opportunities for professional development in the area of writing pedagogies. None of them had any recollections of learning how to teach writing although interestingly they all adopted very similar approaches. Whilst teachers had evidently all acquired some knowledge of grammar, correct punctuation and various spelling rules and conventions, they also needed to acquire other content knowledge about writing as well as knowledge of approaches to the teaching of writing in order to make informed choices as to what might work best for the learners they teach. Cremin and Myhill (2012) maintain that teachers need a knowledge of genres and their features at text, sentence and word level knowledge, language features and of how texts work to achieve their purposes (2.5.1.1). These scholars also assert that the teacher's subject knowledge needs to be augmented by 'insider knowledge of the writing process and the experience of writing' (p. 139) and thus teachers need to write, to model writing for their learners and to write 'alongside of their learners'. However, recent findings of a systematic review of empirical work on teachers as writers from 1990 to 2015 by Cremin

and Oliver (2016) indicates that there is very little empirical evidence that teachers' sense of self as writers has any impact on the writing of learners. Despite this lack of empirical evidence, I believe it does have positive consequences as it can help develop teachers' belief in the importance of writing and encourage them to appreciate the writing of their learners. It may also play a role in disrupting teachers' deficit discourses (7.6.2). If deficit discourses are not disrupted, teachers will continue to resort to 'low level drill and skill instruction' (2.5.1.4).

Nevertheless, teachers in both Group A and Group B had 'insider knowledge' of the writing process. Anne admitted she had written a variety of poems, song lyrics, two plays and tried to write three novels. Carien at the time of the research had just enrolled for a post-graduate Creative Writing course and Dineo was the editor of the social section of an online magazine. Eric described doing journal writing when he was at school. Their 'insider knowledge' of writing did not seem to influence their approach to teaching writing however. Teachers in Group A consistently referred to the writing process as a linear process and hardly acknowledged the 'cognitive load' linked to the development of written texts. Warren, despite his poor history of performance in English at school developed 'insider knowledge' of writing whilst at university and this knowledge did seem to have an impact on his attitude and his approach to teaching writing even though he, too, expressed a linear understanding of the writing process. Yasmine did a great deal of professional writing but no personal writing, whilst Zoe modelled writing for her learners even though she did not write 'alongside' learners. Zoe was the one teacher who perceived writing as a recursive process and she tried to give learners opportunities to 'go away, think about it, come back, rework. Look for better words..' However, the different accounts of the teachers in this study suggest that not all teachers link their 'insider knowledge' of writing to the approaches they use to the teaching of it.

There is some debate emerging from various South African studies of what can best be learned in a PLC. Cereseto's (2015) study, described in 2.6 showed that teachers learned more practical knowledge than subject matter knowledge and that teachers with the ability to make inferential connections between propositions (Winch, 2010; 2013a), dependent on sound subject matter knowledge, were able to contribute more knowledge and were more confident than teachers whose subject matter knowledge was weaker. However, the group of English teachers, without an 'outsider perspective', displayed a limited understanding of the teaching of writing and also perceived the writing process to be a linear one. This

suggested to me that teachers needed knowledge of a range of writing pedagogies which could have been provided by an 'outside expert' (2.4.1.4) and that, in this instance, the facilitator of the group should perhaps have invited external input. Graven (2002), Maistry (2008) and Brodie (2013) argue that, if a PLC is to be a vehicle for the effective development of teachers' pedagogies, there are times when there needs to be some input and guidance from an outside expert. I indicated to both Group A and Group B that a genre-based approach to teaching writing was also evident in the curriculum. Group A showed no interest in developing their understanding of the approach, and I did not pursue it as at that early stage of learning how to facilitate a PLC I took a non-directive approach. In the first session with Group B, I gave teachers a summary of Ivanic's (2004) 'Discourses of writing' and used the skills based approach, process approach and genre approach in relation to the CAPS language curriculum, mentioning examples of each as I explained them. However, I chose not to impose a deeper discussion of any of the approaches on teachers but continued to allow them to direct the focus of the discussions. Even though I adopted a more directive approach to facilitating the PLC with Group B, I believed that in a PLC, teachers should determine the learning focus of the group.

Marchant (2015), in a study of conversations in a Mathematics PLC found that while teacher conversations prioritised pedagogical content knowledge, there was also an unexpected amount of time spent on content knowledge conversation. She suggests that it is the type of professional learning community meeting activity that is the main determining factor in the type and depth of teacher knowledge and learning discussions that take place. It would therefore seem that if teachers' content knowledge of the teaching of writing is to be developed as well as their pedagogical knowledge, the types of PLC meetings and activities need to be very carefully conceptualised, prepared and facilitated in order to develop both types of knowledge.

It is thus possible to conclude that PLCs offer opportunities for learning and for the development of teachers' writing pedagogies but there may be significant limitations and constraints on that learning. Perhaps one of the most significant is teachers' attitudes towards teaching writing and their beliefs and attitudes about learning and the learners that they teach. Furthermore, deeply entrenched beliefs and misconceptions about the teaching of writing, informed both by curriculum documents and departmental officials, must also be addressed. This would necessitate the development of teachers' sense of agency, the

belief that they can make choices and maintain or change their classroom practices in the best interests of their learners.

In response to the main question of this study: What factors enable and / or constrain the development of a professional learning community (PLC) which has as its focus the teaching of writing, it would seem that there are more constraining factors than there are enabling factors. Two important enabling factors emerged from the study: positive attitudes and dispositions of teachers and highly skilled PLC facilitation. The quality of the commitment and participation of the teachers in Group B, meant that despite the time constraints and the increased workload and the language and cultural diversity of their classes, teachers showed a keenness and a willingness to learn. Earl asserts that

> Teachers' knowledge, skills, *attitudes and dispositions* have direct and serious implications for the success of the students they teach. From this standpoint, professional learning represents an enormous investment in the development of human capital, directed at ensuring that the teaching and learning in our schools is up to date and effective (Earl, in the foreword to Timperley et al., 2007: vii-viii my emphasis).

Even though Group B teachers had limited knowledge and skills, their 'attitudes and dispositions' influenced their approach to the learning activity. Warren in particular proved to be an interesting case that raises questions about the importance of content knowledge in a PLC. Because of his openness to learning and his attitude towards learners he was able to compensate for the gaps in his content knowledge with an engaging attitude. His interest and enjoyment of writing poetry enabled him to develop his identity as a writer which some scholars (e.g. Cremin and Myhill , 2012) claim is important for teachers of writing.

The second factor, highly skilled facilitation, might also reduce some of the constraints. Even with only the small improvements I was able to make to my style of facilitation from Group A to Group B, we were able to move closer to establishing a PLC. A well trained and skilled facilitator could, as Marchant (2015) has indicated, develop learning community activities that promote depth of both content and pedagogical content knowledge during professional learning community meetings.

7.7 Limitations of this study

A significant limitation of this study is that I was unable to conduct a full action research study. When I embarked on this research, I had hoped to focus on encouraging teachers to rethink the way they teach writing. I had not sufficiently considered historically located traditions which shape and inform practices (Kemmis, 1992), both in relation to 'traditions'

of teacher development and the teaching of writing. I encountered one challenge after another in an attempt to establish a PLC, and once a group had been formed, difficulties and obstacles continued. Furthermore, a new group had to be formed after the first group had disbanded, and the process had to begin anew instead of moving into a second cycle of planning and acting developed after observing and reflecting on the first cycle of research. Whilst the insights gained from the research cycle with Group A enabled me to develop a more effective series of meetings with Group B, I should ideally have been able to apply my new understandings of PLC facilitation in working with Group A. Conducting action research in contexts that were unstable and where teachers kept moving meant that I was not able to create the dialogic space I had hoped for.

7.8 Recommendations

The *Professional Learning Communities: A guideline for South African schools* stipulates that the role of teacher unions in the establishment of PLCs is "to promote teacher professionalism through advocating, supporting and encouraging teachers to participate actively and meaningfully in PLCs and address their development needs" (DBE, 2015, p. 9).

To enable me, as the professional development officer of a teachers' union, to 'advocate, support and encourage teachers to participate actively and meaningfully in PLCs, I suggest that both the national and provincial departments of education consider the recommendations made below. These are largely linked to the importance of teacher agency in the development of PLCs.

7.8.1 Promoting teacher agency

7.8.1.1 Too little attention has been given to how PLCs are conceptualized and implemented at district and school levels.

In view of the lasting effects of the authoritarian pedagogical philosophy (Christian National Education and fundamental pedagogics) that underpinned the school education and initial teacher education of many of the teachers still teaching in South African schools, few believe in their right to question or challenge existing practices. Not enough work has been done to address the limited meaning of 'teacher professionalism' within the South African context. It has emerged in this study that districts largely constrain the

development of PLCs, but they could and should play an important and constructive role in the establishment of effective PLCs.

However, to do so, district officials would need to heed the warning by Brodie at a colloquium convened by the DBE in September 2014. She urged participants including departmental officials, university staff, subject organisations, NGOs and teacher unions to understand and appreciate the complexities of establishing effective PLCs. She challenged the perception that it was 'every imaginable combination of individuals with an interest in education' (DuFour, 2004). The DBE needs to provide more thorough information and training for officials who are responsible for establishing PLCs in their respective provinces. To simply change the name of 'cluster meetings' to 'PLCs', which is what is happening in some districts in Gauteng, is to deny teachers the opportunity to develop their professional identities and their sense of agency and empowerment. Teachers will continue to be cast in the role of little more than 'deliverers of curriculum' rather than as the agents of change that they can be through learning together in a PLC. Teachers need to be allowed to choose whether they wish to participate in PLCs and they should have a voice in determining the learning focus of the group. The role of a skilled facilitator will be of critical importance in guiding teachers to accurately identify both their own learning needs and those of the learners they teach. These should then be used to formulate the learning focus of the group.

7.8.1.2 Deeply embedded, traditional school practices of 'top-down' control need to be re-examined.

Strongly linked to the first recommendation, is the second, which is a recommendation to district officials and to senior management staff at schools to reconsider the levels of monitoring and control they exercise over teachers. This is another factor that inhibited teachers' sense of agency. Teachers, according to Stoll (2011) need to adopt a collaborative, reflective and growth oriented approach towards investigating their practices. If 'new ideas' and 'new strategies' cannot emerge from the process of collaboration and reflection because so much of what teachers do in their classrooms is prescribed by senior staff and district officials, teachers are unlikely to benefit from more collaborative learning processes such as PLCs. It might have been productive for DBE officials to have taken note of an important question raised by Hairon and Dimmock (2012) which is "How well do the ideas and practices associated with schools as PLCs transfer to other cultures, such as those of Asia [Africa]?" (p. 407).

Despite a careful, evolutionary process of introducing PLCs to schools in Singapore which started in 1997, researchers found that societal culture and context fundamentally shaped the inception, development and sustainability of PLCs. Hairon and Dimmock (2012) argue that the 'hierarchical dependency' and strong respect for authority in Singapore pose challenges for teachers and school leaders who are required to establish PLCs. They maintain that 'professional development leading to innovative changes in the Singapore context will at the very least, require a shift in the pattern of power and influence relations…and this will take time' (p.419). These are important insights for the South African context and the hasty establishment of so-called PLCs needs to be critically assessed to enable the adoption of a more systematic and informed approach which takes cognisance of teachers' histories and contexts.

7.8.2 An awareness of the beliefs that teachers bring to the classroom needs to be fostered in order to shift fixed notions of deficit.

Deficit discourses were particularly evident in Group A and suggested to me that insufficient attention has been given to what Comber and Kamler (2004), refer to as 'disrupting deficit discourses'. This is not unique to the South African teaching context as generations of teachers have been inducted into counter-productive discourses that constitute certain students as 'deficit'. 'Second language learners' and the learners from feeder primary schools in nearby disadvantaged communities were spoken of in deficit terms by teachers in Group A. Although 'Diversity' was one of the topics listed in the training conducted by PEDs in Chapter One, teachers do not appear to have been 'inducted' into understanding and adapting to the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity[14] of their classrooms over the past two decades. There needs to be a more sustained effort to interrupt the 'circularity and persistence of deficit discourses' (Kamler and Comber, 2004, p. 293). Kamler and Comber argue that redesigning 'new pedagogical repertoires' to reconnect with learners' lifeworlds is a long-term project and needs to provide teachers with ways to contest deficit discourses. For example, the work of Luis Moll (2000) shows how teachers can become 'community ethnographers' who visit families in order to learn about their 'funds of knowledge'. Thompson (2002, in Kamler and Comber, 2004) advocates that teachers recognise that all learners come to school with 'virtual schoolbags' which are full. However, only some are given the opportunity to make

[14] The Gauteng Department of Education have included a one day training course on 'Diversity Management' for school management teams from all districts in their Teacher Development Training Schedule for 2017. These will be held in February, April, May and July 2017.

use of what is inside them during their school lives. The Department of Basic Education needs to consider providing teachers with professional development opportunities that focus not only on subject content and pedagogical content knowledge, but also on developing their understanding of the importance of the cultural and linguistic diversity of their classrooms.

7.8.3 Appropriate and skilled facilitation of PLCs is essential in order to support teacher learning.

A third recommendation is that the importance of appropriate and skilled facilitation of PLCs be acknowledged and that individuals (for example, senior teachers and subject advisors) who will be required to facilitate PLCs be carefully selected and receive training and development for this role. Facilitators need to demonstrate 'leadership intelligence' (Chapman et al., 2006, in Hadfield and Chapman, 2009, p.76). For example, whilst they may not necessarily have the subject knowledge and expertise a group may need, they must be able to recognise when to draw on the expertise within the group and when there is a need to draw on expertise outside of the group. Furthermore, facilitators of PLCs with a focus on the teaching of writing need to be equipped to design activities that will promote both pedagogical content knowledge conversations and discussions of content knowledge relevant to the teaching of writing.

7.8.4 The school writing curriculum should be reviewed

The process approach to the teaching of writing is presented as a linear process in the NCS-CAPS (DBE, 2011). This understanding has been perpetuated by the district officials and lead teachers who conducted training for teachers on the NCS-CAPS and by senior teachers who monitor and supervise teaching at schools. Whilst the process 'steps' originate from Flower and Hayes's (1981) concepts of planning, translating and reviewing, process pedagogy foregrounds writing as a cognitive process. This assumes that writers engage in particular kinds of thinking whilst composing their texts. This thinking is recursive, meaning that 'in the act of writing, people generate or recreate their own goals in light of what they learn' (Flower and Hayes, 1981, p. 381). Writing as a means of generating thinking needs to be given more emphasis in the curriculum document. According to Zamel (1987), one of the key principles of process writing is that writing generates thinking and that often we write in order to discover what we want to say. Teachers thus need to develop a flexibility in dealing with the various elements of the

writing process rather than the mechanical and repetitive way in which it is presently done. Thus, a fourth recommendation is that the way in which the writing section of the NCS-CAPS is presented be revised.

Dornbrack and Dixon (2014) highlight two more reasons for the revision of the writing section of the NCS-CAPS. Firstly, they show that the process and genre approaches to teaching writing are conflated in the curriculum statement. They argue that such conflation increases the challenges of the teaching of writing for all teachers but more so for those who have had little access to these approaches in their own education and training (2.5.1.3). For example, there was little evidence of teachers' understanding of the importance of 'audience' and of their encouraging learners to develop a more 'social view of the relationship between the writer and the reader' (Ryan and Barton, 2013, p.72). While audience, purpose and genre are frequently mentioned in CAPS, this does not appear to have been dealt with effectively in the training and development of teachers to implement the curriculum. Only the writing of a letter suggested an audience and purpose for learners' writing and there was no evidence that the letters ever actually reached the intended audience, nor was the importance of achieving the purpose for the text included in the assessment rubric criteria.

Secondly, they challenge the perception of writing as involving 'standalone lessons'. Whilst the NCS-CAPS states that 'Language teaching happens in an integrated way' (DBE, 2011, p.9) the curriculum for each grade is 'packaged' into four sections: Listening and Speaking, Reading and Viewing, Writing and Presenting and Language structures and conventions. There is generally a lack of progression and grade differentiation in the way the writing section of the curriculum is constructed as well. Each component has its own time allocations in the annual teaching plan, and they are presented in separate columns. At times there appear to be links between the reading, writing and language structures (for example, reading of poetry followed by the writing of poetry) but these are rarely emphasised and the general format of the curriculum reinforces the perception of the different components as discrete and to be taught and assessed in 'standalone' sections.

Added to the recommendation that the teaching of writing as is presented in the curriculum thus needs to be reviewed is the recommendation that substantive re-education of teachers be done through continuing professional teacher development initiatives which can be developed in conjunction with the promotion of PLCs. For example, after attending a course designed to develop teachers' knowledge of current ideas about the teaching of

writing, and their understanding of writing pedagogies, teachers may then be invited to work in smaller PLC groups thereafter to refine their understanding of what they have learned, and explore how this knowledge might be translated into practice in their classrooms and contexts. In view of the fact that much of the deficit discourse in Group A was linked to what could or could not be done in the teaching of writing in their context and with their learners ('they cannot construct a basic sentence'; 'we're teaching communication, not English'; 'English is not their first language'; 'they cannot express ideas because they have no ideas'), I believe Comber and Kamler's (2004) argument for the importance of disrupting deficit discourses to be relevant. They state that in order to disrupt deficit discourses like those evident in the statements of teachers in Group A, teachers need to be involved in 'serious intellectual engagement over an extended period of time in ways that foster teacher agency and respect, without celebrating the status quo' (p. 295). I believe that the potential importance of PLCs in achieving this purpose and in the possible re-education of teachers can be significant.

7.9 Concluding reflections

As indicated earlier in this chapter, nothing went 'according to plan' in this study and I had to constantly review and revise my strategies. The envisaged support from districts and school management did not transpire, nor did teachers respond as I had imagined they would. The series of meetings with Group A left me with grave doubts about the place of PLCs in contexts in which legacy of an authoritarian pedagogical philosophy (Christian National Education and fundamental pedagogics) is still strongly present in many schools. Welch describes how this philosophy positioned both teacher and learner as passive subjects, and the child as a product of original sin needing to be 'led to enlightenment by the wiser pedagogicians' (Welch, 2002, p.20). I believe this view of learners was one of the reasons teachers constructed learners in deficit terms, with learning to be 'pounded' and 'hammered' into them (5.4.1.1) . However, the series of meetings with Group B enabled me to see that there are teachers who may benefit from a collaborative model of professional development. Meticulous planning, thorough preparation and strong support from districts and school management staff could result in 'active and meaningful participation by teachers '(DBE, 2015) in PLCs. As the professional development officer of a teachers' union, I will continue to participate in meetings with both the provincial and national departments of education. These meetings include language subject committee

meetings where I will have opportunities to foreground the weaknesses in the CAPS document, and various teacher professional development task teams, where I will raise questions and concerns about the way in which PLCs are being established. I will also include more courses in the union's professional development programmes that offer teachers opportunities to develop and enrich their writing pedagogies despite the weaknesses in the CAPS curriculum. Programmes will particularly focus on:

- promoting an understanding of writing as a recursive process and providing teachers with a range of methodologies relevant to a process approach to teaching writing;
- developing a bigger range of scaffolding activities within grades and across grades so that there is a sense of progression that is not made explicit in the curriculum document
- providing alternatives to entrenched practices such as 'brainstorming' or 'mind-mapping' in the planning and pre-writing stages of the writing process and encouraging multimodal opportunities such as talk, drama, drawing, responding to visual images and music to generate ideas for writing;
- promoting an understanding of the teaching of writing as an integral part of the language curriculum and not as a separate, unrelated, 'standalone' activity;
- maximizing the potential of their multilingual and multicultural classrooms in their writing lessons and encouraging teachers to draw on the multilingual repertoires of their learners when appropriate;
- providing teachers with opportunities to do some writing to enable them to reflect on the challenges of the writing process.

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Appendix A – GDE Letter of Permission

GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

For administrative use:
Reference no. D2015 / 341 A

GDE AMENDED RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	**24 November 2014**
Validity of Research Approval:	**9 February 2015 to 2 October 2015**
Previous GDE Research Approval letter reference number	**D2013/240 dated 19 November 2012 and D2013/60 dated 6 June 2012**
Name of Researcher:	**Joseph M.**
Address of Researcher:	**P.O. Box 50**
	Buccleuch
	2066
Telephone Number:	**011 486 1256; 083 320 3678**
Email address:	**marionj@naptosa.org.za**
Research Topic:	**A Professional Learning Community as a vehicle for the development of writing pedagogy: a case study of a teacher professional development project**
Number and type of schools:	**FOUR Secondary Schools**
District/s/HO	**Johannesburg Central and Johannesburg North**

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

24/11/2014

1

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Knowledge Management and Research
9th Floor, 111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, 2001
P.O. Box 7710, Johannesburg, 2000 Tel: (011) 355 0506
Email: David.Makhado@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

1. *The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s concerned must be presented with a copy of this letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*
2. *The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.*
3. *A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*
4. *A letter / document that outlines the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.*
5. *The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.*
6. *Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.*
7. *Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.*
8. *Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.*
9. *It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.*
10. *The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.*
11. *The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.*
12. *On completion of the study the researcher/s must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.*
13. *The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.*
14. *Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.*

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards

.....

F.L. Tshabalala
Acting Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: 24/11/2014

Office of the Director: Knowledge Management and Research
9th Floor, 111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, 2001
P.O. Box 7710, Johannesburg, 2000 Tel: (011) 355 0506
Email: David.Makhado@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

Appendix B - Teacher's Consent Form and questionnaire

Please fill in and return the reply slip below indicating your willingness to fill in a questionnaire for my voluntary research project called: A Professional Learning Community as a vehicle for the development of writing pedagogy.

Permission for the use of a questionnaire

I, _____

Give/do not give* my consent to fill in a questionnaire.

[ ] I know that I may withdraw from the study at any time and that I will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way.

[ ] I know that I can decline to answer a specific question.

[ ] I am aware that the researcher will keep all information confidential in all academic writing.

[ ] I am aware that my questionnaire will be destroyed between 3—5 years after completion of the project.

Teacher Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact person:

NAME Marion Joseph
ADDRESS P O Box 50 Buccleuch 2066
TEL NUMBER 0833203678

*please delete as appropriate

Questionnaire

This research project aims to investigate whether being part of an externally facilitated PLC enables a group of English home language teachers firstly to identify and articulate their questions and concerns about teaching writing to young adolescent learners, secondly to work collaboratively to address these questions and concerns and thirdly to enact changes to the ways in which they teach these learners to write. The main question is thus: what factors enable and / or constrain the development of a professional learning community (PLC) which has as its focus the teaching of writing.

The following research questions are related to the main question of the study:

- What is enabling or constraining about the contexts in which teachers work in public schools?
- What, if any, impact do teachers' life histories and current identities have on their take up of professional development opportunities in a PLC which focused on the teaching of writing?
- In the context of South African public education, to what extent is a PLC a suitable vehicle for developing teachers' understandings of and enactment of writing pedagogies?

Teachers who agree to participate in this research report are guaranteed complete confidentiality and anonymity in the final report. This questionnaire has been designed to provide me with some background information in preparation for an interview to be scheduled at a convenient time for the teachers concerned.

Questionnaire

Post presently held: _____

Qualifications:

Degree/Diploma	Institution	Year completed

In service teacher training and professional development activities attended during the past five years:

i.e short courses/ workshops attended.

Date of workshop and duration (e.g. 2 hours, 12 hours etc.)	**Venue**	**Offered by.. (E.g. Teachers' Union, IEB etc.)**	**Focus of course (e.g Assessment, OBE)**

Teaching experience:

Primary or Secondary School	**Subject(s) taught**	**Standards/grades**	**No. of years**

Classes and subjects you presently teach

Grade(s) **Please include number of learners in each class.**	**Learning areas/subjects**

Additional Duties/responsibilities at school:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix C – Individual Interview Schedule

Interview questions

1. Do you enjoy writing? (writing for personal purpose – further study, creative) Why/ why not?

2. What do you see as the purpose of writing in your own life?

3. Do you remember how you learned to read and to write? If so, please share some of these memories.

4. What role did reading play in your own development as a writer?

5. How would you describe your own experiences of writing at school? (You may want to differentiate between writing in primary and high school.) Describe both positive and negative memories, where applicable.

6. What kind of writing dominated your schooling experience?

7. Has the way you were taught writing influenced the way that you teach writing? If so, please explain. (Why do you teach writing the way that you do?)

8. Do you think that your pre-service training/ education adequately prepared you to teach writing? Why/why not?

9. What do you think is the best way to teach writing? What activities help? Describe them.

10. What do you perceive as obstacles/difficulties with teaching writing?

11. What are the difficulties children have with becoming good writers?

12. What do your learners enjoy about writing activities? What do they dislike about writing activities?

13. If you had all the resources and time available would you change the way you teach writing? If so, what changes would you make?

Appendix D- Teacher's Consent Form: Interview

Please fill in and return the reply slip below indicating your willingness to be interviewed for my research project called: A Professional Learning Community: as a vehicle for the development of writing pedagogy?

Permission to be interviewed

I, _____

Give/do not give* my consent to be interviewed.

[ ] I know that I don't have to answer all the questions and that I may withdraw from the study at any time and that I will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way.

[ ] I am aware that the researcher will keep all information confidential in all academic writing.

[ ] I am aware that my interview will be transcribed and that the transcript will be destroyed within 3—5 years after completion of the project.

Teacher's Signature: _____ Date:_____

Contact person:

NAME Marion Joseph

ADDRESS P O Box 50 Buccleuch 2066

TEL NUMBER 0833203678

*please delete as appropriate

Appendix E - Teacher's Consent Form: Audiotaping

Please fill and return the reply slip below and indicate your willingness to have our Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings audiotaped and transcribed for my research project …"A professional learning community as a vehicle for the development of writing pedagogy"

Permission to be audiotaped

My name: _____

I give/do not give (please delete as appropriate) my consent to have the meetings recorded.

[ ] I know that I may withdraw from the study at any time and will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way.

[ ] I know that I can stop the audiotaping of the meeting at any time without repercussions.

[ ] I know that the tapes will be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of the project and will be kept safe until then.

Teacher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact person:

NAME Marion Joseph

ADDRESS P O Box 50 Buccleuch 2066

TEL NUMBER 0833203678

Appendix F - INFORMATION SHEET: TEACHERS

DATE

Dear NAME

My name is Marion Joseph and I am a student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand.

I am doing research on "A Professional Learning Community as a vehicle for the development of writing pedagogy".

My research involves implementing an action research project. My study aims to investigate whether being part of an externally facilitated PLC enables a group of English home language teachers firstly to identify and articulate their questions and concerns about teaching writing to young adolescent learners, secondly to work collaboratively to address these questions and concerns and thirdly to enact changes to the ways in which they teach these learners to write. The main question is thus: what factors enable and / or constrain the development of a professional learning community (PLC) which has as its focus the teaching of writing.

The following research questions are related to the main question of the study:

- What is enabling or constraining about the contexts in which teachers work in public schools?
- What, if any, impact do teachers' life histories and current identities have on their take up of professional development opportunities in a PLC which focused on the teaching of writing?
- In the context of South African public education, to what extent is a PLC a suitable vehicle for developing teachers' understandings of and enactment of writing pedagogies?

The reason why I have chosen your school is because you believe professional development is an important part of maintaining effective and efficient teaching practices in your school.

I was wondering whether you would be willing to participate as members of the professional learning community that I would like to establish in your district? You would be asked to attend a Professional Learning Community (PLC) meeting every two to three

weeks for up to ninety minutes per meeting. During that meeting we would firstly identify and articulate our concerns about the writing skills of learners in the grade 8 English home language classroom. We would then collaborate to find ways in which to address our concerns and questions.

Your name and identity will be kept confidential at all times and in all academic writing about the study. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

All research data will be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of the project.

You will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. Your participation is voluntary, so you can withdraw your permission at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating and you will not be paid for this study.

Please let me know if you require any further information.

Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

M Joseph

SIGNATURE

NAME	Marion Joseph
ADDRESS	P O Box 50 Buccleuch 2066
EMAIL	marionj@naptosa.org.za
TELEPHONE NUMBERS	0833203678

Appendix G - Consent Form: Learner's Documents

Please fill in the reply slip below if you agree to have the following documents: writing exercises completed in home language English used for my study called: **A professional learning community as a vehicle for the development of writing pedagogy**.

Permission for documents (samples of my writing) to be used.

My name is: _____

I agree that samples of my writing can be used for this study only YES/NO

I know that Marion Joseph will keep my information safe and confidential and that my real name will not be used. YES/NO

Sign_____ Date_____

Contact person:

NAME Marion Joseph

ADDRESS P O Box 50 Buccleuch 2066

TEL NUMBER 0833203678

Appendix H - LETTER TO THE PRINCIPAL

DATE

Dear NAME

My name is Marion Joseph and I am a student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand.

I am doing research on "A Professional Learning Community as a vehicle for the development of writing pedagogy".

My research involves implementing an action research project. My study aims to investigate whether being part of an externally facilitated PLC enables a group of English home language teachers firstly to identify and articulate their questions and concerns about teaching writing to young adolescent learners, secondly to work collaboratively to address these questions and concerns and thirdly to enact changes to the ways in which they teach these learners to write. The main question is thus: what factors enable and / or constrain the development of a professional learning community (PLC) which has as its focus the teaching of writing.

The following research questions are related to the main question of the study:

- What is enabling or constraining about the contexts in which teachers work in public schools?
- What, if any, impact do teachers' life histories and current identities have on their take up of professional development opportunities in a PLC which focused on the teaching of writing?
- In the context of South African public education, to what extent is a PLC a suitable vehicle for developing teachers' understandings of and enactment of writing pedagogies?

The reason why I have chosen your school is because it falls within the district where I would like to work. Secondly, your school has a good professional development infrastructure and regular time slots allocated for this purpose. I was wondering whether you would be willing to participate as members of the professional learning community that I would like to establish in your district?

Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study. Pseudonyms for your school will be used at all times.

Research data will be used to write a PhD and conference papers. All research data will be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of the project.

The research participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. They will be reassured that they can withdraw their permission at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. The participants will not be paid for this study.

The names of the research participants and identity of the school will be kept confidential at all times and in all academic writing about the study. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

All research data will be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of the project.

Please let me know if you require any further information.

I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient.

Yours sincerely,

M Joseph

SIGNATURE

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Appendix I - Transcripts of Debby and Fiona's lessons

LESSON ONE

Read through the two transcripts for Debby and Fiona's lessons (Debby, pp. 2-3; Fiona pp. 6-
7).

1. What do these two lessons reveal about Debby and Fiona's approach to teaching writing? Explore the similarities and differences.
2. What do you think the learners learned about writing from these lessons?
3. What is your response to these two lessons?

Use the following questions and categories as guidelines:

Compare the role of the teachers and learners in the two different classes in relation to:

- How the teacher mediates and scaffolds the writing process
- Levels and kinds of learner participation
- Feedback mechanisms: peer and teacher feedback
- Collaboration: collaborative tasks, sense of collaboration between teacher and learners

Also consider the following:

- Which discourses of writing and Iearning to write are evident in the two lessons?
- How do the teachers work with grammar? What relationships do they set up between grammatical structure and meaning, purpose and audience?

Debby's Grade 7 English classes

Lesson 1: Journey into Space …and filling up a blank space

Context: *This lesson was the culmination of a space theme. Learners had done comprehensions on a number of texts about space, read and dramatized a science fiction play, and two poems. In addition learners wrote their own horoscopes.*

The double desks are usually arranged in groups but today Debby has spread them all over the class. There are no rows. The children are waiting outside and Debby is priming them for their creative writing task. She tells then they can sit anywhere they like today.

"You can sit anywhere you like. Take out a pencil and something to press on. That's all."

There is also a blank piece of paper on each desk - a sign that they will be doing a task that requires them to fill up this blank page.

Debby is standing in front of the blackboard. There is a tape recorder on a small table.

D: "We're going to do some writing. Get something to press on. Then sit still .... Now you need only your ears. I just want you to listen. Hope I've got it [the CD} on the right track.

The music is weird, atmospheric, instrumental. She finishes playing the first song and then asks the learners:

D: What do you think ... bearing in mind what we've been talking about?

Silence.

D: *You don't know ... ?*

L1: A Space ship ...

L2: Playing music in the spaceship.

L3: Like a part in a movie ... an aliens movie.

D: Now we'll listen to it again. As you are listening to it, imagine you see a space ship coming towards you. It gets closer and closer. Listen with your eyes closed.

The music plays again.

D: Now we're in space.

Most learners have their eyes closed. Some have their heads on the desk. They seem willing to allow themselves to go on the journey that 0 has invited them on. The strange music plays again. When the music is finished, D briefs them on their writing task:

"You will now write a story about something from outer space coming towards you. It doesn't only have to be a machine. You can create anything ... set your mind free.

I would like you to use one simile in this story. "

D then gives an example of a simile. *"As green as an apple; as high as the sky. "*

D continues: "And I'd like you to use one metaphor if you can. And use personification ... but don't use too many. I'm going to put on a CD while you write ... I've given you an introduction but you can use any introduction you like. I don't want to see anyone thinking ... you write. You have some good ideas."

D hands out the task brief, which reads as follows:

As you were looking at the stars through a telescope you saw a space ship coming towards you. It got closer and closer ... Complete the story.

Below the task brief is a large picture of a telescope and stars.

The class is quiet. They seem interested by this task. They are reading their briefs.

D puts more music on, this time with a rock sound.
D: *I think you 'll like this music ve!y much and I think it will send you on your way into space.*
The music plays. The children write. There is total silence and engagement. Most have already started writing. The classroom is atmospheric: the music, the space posters. They have explored this theme extensively, and this task is the culmination of the space theme.

Children are writing, their heads bent over their once blank page that is now rapidly filling up. They are using pencils to write, as instructed. Some are reading what they've written so far and deciding to make changes, rubbing a few words/ sentences out and replacing them with new ones.

The bell goes. The music plays on, the children write on.

D: One more song ... when you are finished read through your story.

Well into the second period some leamers are still writing. Others have finished and are starting to chat quietly in whispers. They seem to respect the need for silence during the composing process.

D: I want you to read your story with your partner.

A few children were allocated to specific partners but most were allowed to choose their own partners.

The children are reading to each other, talking to each other in English and seem to be having animated conversations. This peer sharing process seems to be quite open-ended. There is no instruction or guidance about what they are meant to be looking for.

Levasha is invited by D to read her story. She reads a delightful story about her own joumey with an alien who speaks English!

Next Thabaleng is invited to read her story. Thabaleng is racing through her story and it is difficult to follow.
D : *"Read slowly ... we're dying to hear your story."*
When she is finished reading D says, "lovely story" and then asks for one more learner to read their story.

D: "I want one mor.e ... who else enjoyed their story? Did you enjoy it?"

A few leamers respond positively saying that it was nice.

Lerato is the final reader. She reads very softly and quickly, it is hard to follow. Also about aliens. The bell goes. Lerato carries on reading.

D: "very nice. Thank you .... I want your drafts in my box together with the task instructions.

End of lesson 1.

Debby's Grade 7 English classes
Lesson 2

Feedback on space stories and editing (Back to basics)

It's sportsday so this will be a single period instead of a double. The children are boisterous and excited about the prospect of sports day and escaping a full day oflessons.

It takes the leamers ages to settle down, much longer than usual. Finally D calms then down, greets the learners and starts the lesson.

D: *I know you're excited about today ... it won', be a long lesson.*

I was going through your stories and I've done a little bit of editing.
We're going to do a bit of editing on your stories today. A lot of you are still starting sentences with because, and, so. Please when you edit don't start sentences with and, because, so. You also repeat then too many times. Then, then then!
You know it's wrong so *don't do it.*

What's wrong with this sentence? "They put their weapons into the table."

Noise.

D: If you've got it put your hands up. If you haven't put your hands down!

Learner: ... on the table.

D: On the table (reinforcing correct answer provided by learner).
Before you write your prepositions think about it. How on earth are you going to put a gun into the table?
You're also jumping around with tenses.
When you edit your work, watch your tenses ... Stick to the past tense ... it's easierfor you to write in the past tense.

Have a look at this sentence.

D writes the sentence on the board.
"We should of run for our lives when we saw the space ship."

D: *There's something wrong with this sentence ... don't discuss it. Read it. If you've got it put your hand up.*
It came from one of your stories .... This is a ve,y big mistake made by not only English second language students.
Palesa?

L: *I think it's right Miss.*
L: They should have ...

D then uses this opportunity to explain to learners the difference between speech and writing.

D: *When you talk, you're in a hurry; fast things happen in our lives ... we speak like that. I pick this up all the time. "We should of run for our lives"* is *incorrect. "We should have runfor our lives" is correct.*

D then moves on to discuss sentence length and advises the learners to keep their sentences short especially if they find English difficult.
D: *Keep your sentences short ... some of you have written long, convoluted sentences. If you struggle with English keep your sentences short. If you notice that a lot of the books and poems we read ... are written simply and we understand what they are writing about. If you struggle with English don't write long sentences ... you get your meanings all muddled up and I can't understand what's happening.*
When you think, you don't have to say "I thought (to myself).

Now listen to this sentence:
"I felt the earth shaking and my telescope. " Hands up if you can see the error.

A learner gives the right answer.

D: *Good boy.*
"I felt the earth and my telescope shaking (reinforces correct answer).

D then explains what they will be doing for the rest of the lesson.

D: *You're going to take your stories back. We've read them to each other, I've taken them in. Some are very nice ... now edit with a pencil. You must write your homework assignment neatly in your classwork book. Start editing straight sway.*

D hands out the stories and reminds them to watch "those long, long sentences." D then reminds them about another common error.

"They put their books in they bag" ... another error.

Class responds: *No, it's their bag!*

The children get their stories back. They begin to read their stories quietly.

D: *You can read them to each other if you like. Who needs some help?*

D reminds a group about punctuation. D is working one on one with students, correcting with red pen on their texts.

D: *I did ask you to put in one or two similes so see if you have these.*
D moves around, sitting next to another learner. She asks the learner where his introduction is.

The bell goes. Learners are excited about sports day ..... .

Fiona's Grade 7 English classes

Lesson 1: Painting pictures with words: rotting corpses and sludgy toes

Context: This is the fifth lesson in a two week lesson series that focused on the learner writing their own version of the myth of Theseus. Learners have read the opening of the myth and they are in the process of writing their own versions from the perspective of Theseus. Fiona has also encouraged them to rewrite the myth in a more vivid style than the original. The focus ofthis lesson is on writing evocative story openings.

The basic plotline is that Theseus must go on a treacherous journey to confront and kill the monster. Learners must imagine this journey and decide on a suitable ending. Will the hero triumph? Will the monster triumph? Will they both die?

Fiona begins the lesson by recapping on the descriptive writing task that the learners began in lesson 3. She clarifies what she wants the learners to do. She explains that she only wants a few sentences

F: I'm looking for the best your writing can be. Create a picture of that moment. Don't develop the story; you will have a chance to do that later. Put yourself there as Theseus and imagine. I want you to read them out today.

The learners get back into their groups. Fiona also encouraged them by referring to the pictures as stimulus as well as their group members. She encourages a sense of collaboration.

Learners are working in groups.

F: How did you start Ayanda?

F: (to a group of three boys) Nothing here .... You must see the good beginnings I've got and nothing from my stars!

The boys in the corner are debating their next sentence quite earnestly.

Boy I: It's so dark that he almost falls oJJthe cliff

Boy 2: *No! No! No! He's walking along and his ankle ...*

The boys start writing.
Some learners are forging ahead. Others are stuck or messing around, losing focus. Fiona chats to the group of boys who were battling to come up with something.

F: Remember, describe the feel, the touch, the taste. I'll give you something else to do later I promise that you'll really enjoy.

F: Hey guys listen to his beginning. I think this beginning is really what I'm looking for.

Fiona reads the first few lines and then comments on what she thinks makes it a good opening.

F: It's well thought out, good adjectives. I can really feel this. I want to know what's happening next.

Fiona then has a discussion with the boys group. She confirms their decision to use peered rather than looked.
F: Yes peered rather than looked .... Sounds more frightening.

F: (to the class): Think about what's happening to him. People have died here eve,y year. What kind of smells?

There are a lot of sources of input and ideas floating around the classroom (teacher input, peer sharing, visual text).
F: Every single one I've seen, you've really been thinking about the words. I'm very pleased about that. These will all be different because you all write differently. When you listen, I want you to find something ... a word or phrase that really makes a difference. Rose has said she'll read.

Fiona then reinforces what they are looking for.

F: You are lookingfor words and phrases that you really like.

Rose reads.

Rose: ... The soundfaded but the creature kept coming towards me.

L: Miss, I liked the opening sentence.

F: "In the deathly hush of the dark labyrinth." Well done - you really created atmosphere.

Next learner reads and then the class responds to the reading.

F: My favourite word there is *encounter. You don't know what's coming.*

L: 1 liked "in the midst"

Uyanda reads her group's passage.

Uyanda: ... the soft hissing kind of sound ... one rubbing against his foot.

One learner comments on building suspense.

The next group reads their description. In this text, Theseus "spun round" coming face to face with "the leering face of a rotting corpse" and inevitably "his heart is beating in his ears!"

F: I won't say what 1 liked best. You tell me. "

L: "He felt the presence of something behind him. "

L: 1 liked the rotting corpse!

F: How did I know you'd say that? ... the first sentence is still my best: "Peering into the watery depth ... "

The next learner reads.

F: Don't you want him to tell you what he saw? I like the way he wrote his sentences, long and then short. Anything else?

L: 1 liked the idea of hair standing up like thorns on a tree.

L: I like the sludge between your toes.

Lesson 2

Feedback on drafts

Context: Learners have submitted individual drafts on the story of Theseus and Fiona gives them feedback.

F: *I'd like to talk to you about your stories. This time you'll be working on your choral verses and I'll take you one at a time. On the whole your stories were what I expected. You created tension and some unexpected endings.*

The first thing I want to talk to you about is paragraphs. I know it was your rough draft. Paragraphs in your space stories were quite easy. But paragraphs in this story were harder.

Fiona holds up a story that has no paragraphs.

F: *Come on, you have to tell me how can I break it into paragraphs.*

L: *the beginning of the fight, the body of the fight and the ending.*

F: *Great ... read the story aloud to yourself Then you'll be able to see. Someone had lovely, slithering snakes while poor Theseus was trapped in a rock. Lovely ending yours (Rosa) but it could be broken up.*

L: *Maybe you could take a paragraph to describe the Minotaur. Enter the cave. Then you get to the fight.*

F: *Next thing.*
Then/so. And it didn't happen often so Noddy badge to you. Fiona illustrates poor use of then.

F: *It makes my hair stand on end. We use THEN when we're flying to put things in order but don't use it* in *a story.*

L: *If you say 'just then"??*

F: *That's lovely but don't use then on its own. It really puts the reader off.*

Fiona writes the verb SWING on the board and asks learners for the past tense of swing.

Some learners suggest SWANG,

F: *Not a good word!*
Learners laugh ....

There's a mix of positive feedback and constructive criticism.

F: *Next -long sentences vs. short.*

Fiona writes each key area of feedback on the board as she unpacks it. Learners are not writing anything while Fiona is talking but they are listening attentively and responding.

Fiona writes on the board: Theseus heard heavy breathing, it was the Minotaur. Fiona explains that this isn't really right. Lots of modern writers rather put a dash. She writes the reworked sentence on the board.

Theseus heard heavy breathing - it was the Minotaur.

F: This is *quite nice. Not as long as afullstop but a bit longer than a comma.*
And then ONE other "thing.

F writes on the board:

I swing my sword at his head He ducks and kicked me in the head I was knocked unconscious and fell to the ground

F: This is *not well written. Not as well written as some of yours. The sentences are well constructed but there's something wrong.*

At least five hands go up.

L: Kicked

F: You're right. But why?

Lots more hands go *up (J counted at least* ***11*** *hands).*

L: Because the reader doesn't like to read past tense and then present tense.

Fiona compliments the learner on this response.

F: Still wrong. I like that you 'heard' the one mistake. What else?

L: Was should be am.

F: If you start here (in the present) then you can't change. You must be careful love (to a specific learner). You wrote me a lovely story but you need to work on this.
Okay guys I want to give you this ... which is *how I'm going to mark it. When you hand in the neat copy this will be attached* so *I can mark it.*

Each learner gets a criteria sheet which has the following information:

Theseus battles the Minotaur.

Name:

- Clear and logical flow (5)
- Created atmosphere and tension (5)
- Language usage: spelling, punctuation and sentence structure (5)

TOTAL: 15

Fiona's plan is that the learners will work on choral verse outside (for a 25 *mark oral mark) and she will meet with each learner to discuss their stories while they work in groups.*
Unfortunately, the groups end up needing more guidance than Fiona anticipated so *she doesn't have the chance to work with many learners on their stories.*