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School of education

The facilitator's role in professional learning communities for inclusive education

By

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A research report submitted to the School of Education

Faculty of Humanities in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Education

Supervisor

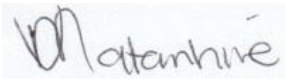
Professor Elizabeth Walton

March 2017

DECLARATION

I **Vimbayi Matanhire** declare that this research report is my own unaided work except as stated in the acknowledgement. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the report. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Education at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other universities.

Signature of candidate Date: March 15 2017



Vimbayi Matanhire

ABSTRACT

Professional learning communities (PLCs) for inclusive education are one way of teacher development for inclusive education. Professional learning communities are gradually being adopted in South African schools to equip teachers with knowledge and skills to teach learners from diverse backgrounds. This study investigated the role of the PLC facilitator for inclusive education in a full service school.

My study was part of a bigger project that focused on a wide range of professional learning communities' issues. Data was collected through semi-structured individual interviews of PLC facilitators, observation of PLC sessions and analysis of PLC sessions' transcripts. Data was analysed using qualitative data analysis where I organised and sorted data into major organising themes and then used an open coding system. Data was presented in the form of figures, tables, excerpts and descriptions.

The findings of the study showed that facilitators of PLCs for inclusive education assume multiple roles that contribute to building the community and knowledge for inclusive education among PLC members. Professional learning communities have the potential to dismantle anxieties associated with teaching learners from diverse backgrounds and of diverse abilities. PLCs also have the potential to develop teachers' knowledge and skills for inclusive education.

Key Terms: Inclusive education, full-service schools, professional learning communities, PLC facilitator

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

C2005	Curriculum 2005
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHE	Department of Higher Education
DoE	Department of Education
EFA	Education For All
EWP6	Education White Paper 6
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
LPP	Legitimate peripheral participation
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NRF	National Research Foundation
OBE	Outcome Based Education
PLC	professional learning communities
SGB	School Governing Board
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific Organisation
VAK	visual, auditory, kinaesthetic

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the problem

An international recognition of the uniqueness of each child and the fundamental right to education, resulted in The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) that strongly focus on inclusion and participation as essential to human dignity. Schools with an inclusive orientation were viewed as schools with the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes and achieving education for all (DoE, 2001). Education White Paper 6 (EWP6) launched in South Africa in July 2001 stated the right to equal access to educational institutions by all. Emphasis was placed on flexibility in teaching, learning and support of teachers and learners (Engelbrecht, Oswald & Forlin, 2006). The advent of inclusive education in South Africa in 2001 was an attempt to represent a new agenda for an educational reform in an attempt to redress educational exclusion.

Implementation of inclusive education in South Africa was a step ahead in realising education for all but it was met with challenges. Amongst challenges that affected inclusive education was teachers' perceptions of under-preparedness for inclusive education (Eloff & Kgwete, 2007). Teachers had not been prepared for inclusive education in their teacher training courses. Under-preparedness of teachers was an indicator that in-service teachers needed professional learning to equip them for inclusive education. Several measures were put in place to address teacher under-preparedness, amongst these were workshops.

Workshops were introduced as a response to improve teacher knowledge and skills in the context of inclusive education (Du Toit & Forlin, 2009). These workshops however did not achieve much in terms of teacher development (Greyling, 2009). Workshops had limited success due to lack of follow-up and topics that were irrelevant to all teachers' contextual needs. This led to a general negative attitude towards workshops by teachers (Greyling, 2009). Teachers felt that trainers came up with wonderful ideas that were not practically relevant to their contexts (Du Toit & Forlin, 2009). Informed by the above challenges that rendered workshops ineffective, there was need for a revision of ways to professionally develop teachers to suit their unique contextual factors at local school level.

Professional learning communities (PLCs) were first developed in the United States as one of the many ways of teacher development. The educational reforms in the United States

brought about by the No Child Left behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 demanded reforms of classroom practices (Borko, 2004). To keep up with the demands of these educational reforms, teachers required a great deal of learning. Such learning could be addressed by teacher development through PLCs. Professional learning communities have generally been viewed as having a positive impact on teacher professional development. Borko (2004) observed that in the United States, PLCs are suited for teacher development and are gradually being implemented with real effect on people's lives. The confluence of PLCs and inclusive education is that introduction of inclusive education in South Africa required a great deal of learning by teachers to enhance their knowledge and instructional practices that would help teachers to meet the needs of learners from varied backgrounds. Although PLCs may register potential success, they are destined to fail if not carefully planned and carried out (Brodie, 2013).

Though PLCs began in the United States to promote teacher learning, they have been adopted in the South African context. PLCs are specifically made reference to by The Guidelines for Full-service Schools (Department of Basic Education, 2009) as another means of teacher development in a full-service school. Professional learning communities have so far registered significant success where they have been effectively implemented. Vescio, Ross and Adams (2008) observed that, although a few studies have moved beyond self-reports of positive impact of PLCs, some research reviews noted a significant improvement in teaching and collaborative culture as a result of PLCs.

1.2 Problem statement

The problem motivating this study is that, the general role of a facilitator is known (Rogers, 1971) but the facilitator's role in an inclusive education professional learning community is not known. The main thrust of this research was on facilitators as leaders and teachers in professional learning communities for inclusive education. Several studies on PLCs for specific subjects have been conducted yet very little research has been done around the role of the facilitator. There is little knowledge on PLCs in the context of inclusive education. There is even less knowledge about the facilitator's role. Research findings by Margalef and Roblin (2016) indicated that the specific roles of PLC facilitators remain underexplored. It is important to know the role of the facilitator in an inclusive context to effectively introduce, sustain and upscale professional learning communities for inclusive education.

Professional learning communities with their roots in the United States (Borko, 2004) were specifically indicated by The Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa (Department of Basic Education & Department of Higher Education, 2011) as another means for professional development. There is no universal way of defining professional learning communities but there is consensus on the characteristics of PLCs that include a strong collective identity through professional commitment and work underpinned by a specialised knowledge base (Stoll & Louis, 2007). Learning in a community entails social collectivity where learning need not be framed as the work and skill of a distinctive practitioner but rather a practice of what individuals in a community do drawing on available resources (Ainscow et al, 2003). Offering some guidelines of judging if social collectivity should be considered a community of practice, Wenger (1998) highlighted that members are expected to interact, be accountable, be able to evaluate and draw on locally produced resources. Members in a PLC group require a team leader who in this case is the facilitator.

Professional learning communities are run at different levels. In this study the PLCs were run at school level with one of the local teachers as the facilitator and other teachers as group members. I intended to investigate the role played by the facilitator as a leader in professional learning communities for inclusive education that would enable the teachers to recognise the presence, participation and achievement of all (Ainscow et al, 2003). I assumed that facilitators played certain roles that have an impact on facilitation. Having investigated and explored the roles PLC facilitators need to run PLCs, it was my desire to investigate and describe the impact of these roles on PLCs in an inclusive education context.

1.3 Aims of the study

The aim of this study was to investigate the facilitator's role in professional learning communities for inclusive education. My focus was on in-service teacher professional growth, learning and community in the context of inclusive education. The PLC facilitator assumes an important role in facilitation of teacher learning for inclusive education. This premise made the PLC facilitator and inclusive education central in this study.

Findings from this study could inform future development of PLCs and facilitators of PLCs. Hopefully in a small way, the study will contribute to the growth of knowledge about PLCs and facilitation of PLCs in the context of inclusive education.

1.4 Research questions

This study was part of a bigger project that had been running at the school where this study was conducted. The bigger project was concerned with a number of wide issues relevant to PLCs for inclusive education in a full service school. This study specifically investigated the PLC facilitator's role in professional learning communities in an inclusive education context. Below are the questions that guided the study.

Main question

What is the facilitators' role in professional learning communities for inclusive education?

Sub-questions

1. What facilitator roles could lead to effective facilitation of professional learning communities for inclusive education?

2) How does the facilitator impact on PLCs for inclusive education?

1.5 Rationale

Though several studies on PLCs for specific subjects for example mathematics (Brodie, 2013) have been conducted, fewer studies in professional learning communities in the context of inclusive education have been conducted. Studies in PLCs for specific subjects may address the content aspect of teaching specific subjects. However, PLCs of inclusive education focus on teaching strategies that cater for all in addition to content knowledge. A lot of resources have been put in place for addressing challenges facing inclusive education. The Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa (2011) put forward a medium-term goal to have established functioning professional learning communities in school across the country by 2020. To achieve such a goal requires commitment from all PLC group members and most importantly the facilitator who is an influential person in group. This study was therefore worth undertaking taking into consideration targets set for PLCs; the investment in time and resources in PLCs and inclusive education. It was therefore crucial to investigate and understand how facilitators work to scale up and sustain PLCs in an inclusive education context. There is lack of knowledge with regard to how PLCs work in terms of what can be achieved, concerning successes and challenges. It was from this perspective that this study sought to investigate the facilitator's role in professional learning communities for inclusive education.

1.6 Research methods

Though I will refer to my study as a qualitative case study, it may not be regarded as a full case study as it only has characteristics of a qualitative case study. My study was based on a full service school in Gauteng. The qualitative case study was adopted to produce descriptive data in peoples' own written, spoken and observable behaviour (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). To get the people's spoken and observable behaviour, I conducted individual interviews of the facilitators, observed PLC sessions in progress and analysed verbatim transcripts. This enabled me to describe and interpret the facilitator's role in PLCs for inclusive education.

Data was analysed using six steps of analysing data proposed by Creswell (2012). Data was organised and stored by transcription of interviews before sorting and coding it according to major themes that emerged. Data was then refined by revisiting it and fitting it into new categories. These steps provided findings on the role of the facilitators in PLCs in an inclusive education context.

1.7 Key concepts

Key concepts that were used in this study may mean different things in different contexts and may be practised differently. For the purposes of this study, key concepts were operationalised as follows:-

1.7.1 Inclusive education

Inclusive education is a system of education that provides the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes to achieve education for all by ensuring access and participation of all children (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2011). Inclusive education is grounded in the presence, participation and achievement of all students. Inclusive education therefore in this study, is a system of education that acknowledges, recognises and respects differences in all learners. In this study, I use inclusive education and inclusion interchangeably.

1.7.2 Professional learning communities

Professional learning communities are small group of professionals within a specific community focusing on professional learning (Brodie, 2013). In this study PLCs are small groups of teachers that provide a setting necessary for developmental trajectories that influence teachers' professional development.

1.7.3 Full-service schools

Full service schools are schools equipped and supported to provide for a full range of learning needs. The Department of Education (2010, p. 6) outlined that full service schools are "ordinary schools which are specially resourced and orientated to address a full range of barriers to learning in an inclusive education setting." Such schools promote a sense of belonging to all learners irrespective of gender, ethnicity, language, class and disability.

1.7.4 PLC Facilitator

The PLC facilitator is a teacher who leads a PLC group. The facilitator was described by Brodie (2016) as a critical friend with dual roles to play as a friend and a critic. On one hand, the facilitator was deemed a friend who supports, cares, tolerates weaknesses and celebrates strengths. On the other hand, the facilitator was deemed a critic who challenges, identifies shortcomings and makes suggestions for improvement. The PLC facilitator in this study provides leadership to a specific PLC group.

1.8 Structure of the Report

Chapter One

This chapter is the introduction of the study and lays out the background to the problem. It lays down why PLCs became a need in the South African education system. The main research question and sub-questions are highlighted in this chapter. I also outline the rationale on why the study was worth undertaking in chapter one.

Chapter two: Literature review

This chapter highlights the central concepts in the study by reviewing literature from other researchers in this field.

Chapter three: Research methodology

In this chapter I explore the methods used to collect data from the participants. The advantages and disadvantages of each method of data collection used are outlined. I also outline how I upheld the ethical considerations for the participants in my study and the limitations of the study are highlighted.

Chapter four: Findings and Discussion

The discussion and analysis of the findings from the study are categorised and presented in this chapter. I made use of excerpts from transcripts from the individual interviews and PLC sessions to describe the role of the facilitator.

Chapter five: Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter recapitulates the findings of the study by outlining how the main question and sub-questions of the research where answered. Recommendations to policy makers, PLC facilitators, school principals and future studies are suggested in this chapter.

1.9 Summary

This chapter has outlined the problem statement, purpose statement and research questions. The whole project will comprise of other successive chapters to follow that will focus on literature review, methodology, data analysis, findings, conclusions and recommendations respectively.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2. Introduction

This chapter guides the research by positioning the conceptual framework of the problem statement. It is a chapter that constitutes a valuable process of research that assists in the delimitation of the research, helps prevent errors in planning the research and acquaints the researcher with new sources of data (Masuku, 2000). In this chapter, I focus on the broad issues of this study, namely inclusive education, full-service school, teacher development in community of practice and facilitation in general and specifically in PLCs. My study is similar to that of Brodie (2016) in that the main focus of both studies was on PLC facilitation. The notable difference is that whilst Brodie (2016) focused on facilitation of PLCs specific to mathematics to make sense of the nature and reasoning behind learners mathematical errors mine focused on facilitation of PLCs for inclusive education.

I begin by looking at inclusive education and full-service schools. I later narrow down to the emergence of PLCs and their suitability to inclusive education. I then focus on facilitation process in general and then specifically for PLCs.

2.1 Background of inclusive education

Inclusive education has an international and national orientation. It is a concept that resists a universally-accepted conceptualisation (Mitchell, 2005) but Swart and Oswald (2008) contend that recognition and valuing of human diversity within the education systems is the common denominator. Furthermore, Ainscow, Howes, Farrell and Frankham (2003) postulated that, the central assumption of educational inclusion is grounded in the presence, participation and achievement of all students rather than limiting it to a special education discourse that focuses on a specific group of vulnerable leaners. The South African Department of Education (2001) acknowledged that recognition and respect of differences in learners was beyond disability but stretched out to embrace age, gender, ethnicity, language, class and infectious diseases.

Internationally, inclusive education emerged as a human rights discourse that intensified following the 1st World Conference on Education for All in Jomtein, Thailand in 1990 (Miles & Singal, 2010). This conference acknowledged the marginalisation and vulnerability of learners worldwide and paved way towards achieving Education For All (EFA). The

Salamanca Statement of 1994 envisaged that inclusion and participation are essential to human dignity by advocating the following:-

> "Regular *schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all …* " (UNESCO, 1994, p. 3).

The above quotation implies that inclusive education does not require separate schools but inclusive education can still be practised in the mainstream schools. Therefore schools with an inclusive orientation are seen as overcoming discriminatory attitudes that hindered education for all (Armstrong et al., 2011). This stance was a result of the biggest review of education led by UNESCO undertaken by 183 countries. This stance culminated with the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal where countries adopted a World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) (Armstrong et al., 2011). The declaration of EFA was an ideal commitment to ensure that everyone received quality basic education but there were contextual challenges. Besides these challenges, Miles and Singal (2010) point out that, since the Salamanca, the term inclusive education assumed multiple meanings for different countries. The above authors cited examples of differences in conceptualisation of inclusive education in some areas. In England, the term is used to describe practices within special schools or associated with school attendance or behaviour. In South Africa inclusive education is a response to address learning barriers in the education system (Dalton, Mckenzie & Kahonde, 2012) as to be discussed below.

2.2 Development of inclusive education in South Africa

The South African context of inclusive education was a response to the educational inequalities that had characterised the pre-1994 era. Educational marginalisation and apartheid policies in South Africa had separated communities in all spheres of life (Pather, 2011). This separation led to unequal accessibility or no access to education at all. The implementation of inclusive education would not only align South Africa at par with international standards but would assist in realisation of constitutional values of rights to education, equality and freedom from discrimination (DoE, 2001).

The historical context background leading to the development of inclusive education in South Africa is accounted for by The Department of Education (2001) in Education White Paper 6

(WP6). The Apartheid education system is criticised in WP6 for segregation of learners on the basis of disability. Additionally, during this era, special education was organised into two entities of race and disability as dictated by the apartheid policy. White disabled learners were reportedly well resourced and the reverse was equally true for the few black disabled learners. Concurring is Pather (2011) who resonates with the DoE (2001) by confirming that provision of resources was mainly to White and Indian communities at the expense of Black learners who constituted 80% of the of the population. Access to schools was not easy coupled with rigid admission requirements that made it difficult for disabled learners coming from poverty-stricken families to be admitted into schools resulting to only about 20% of learners with disabilities being accommodated in schools. This informed the launching of Education White Paper 6 in 2001 that arose out of the need to provide education and training that that is responsive and sensitive to the diverse learning needs through a commitment and comprehensive approach to all areas of education in South Africa.

From the above background, the advent of inclusive education in South Africa in 2001 was an attempt to represent a new agenda for an educational reform. An educational reform that would dismantle the socio-political, personal and interpersonal dimensions giving rise to a flexible and inclusive system of education (Engelbrecht, Oswald & Florin, 2006). Special emphasis was to be put in place on flexibility in teaching, learning and for the provision of support to educators and learners (Greyling, 2009). The South African Education Department declared the intention to work towards establishment of quality inclusive education system based on democratic, participative and reflective practice (Swart & Oswald, 2008). The thrust of inclusive education was concerned with reducing barriers and inequalities to enable learners to participate meaningfully. Emphasis was also put on the significance of distinguishing between mainstreaming and inclusion with mainstreaming described as getting learners to ‘‘fit’’ in a particular existing system with focus on the learner. Inclusion was seen as acknowledging and respecting difference among all learners and focus was on adaptation of support systems available in the classroom (DoE, 2001). This was based on the premise that, all children can learn when given support, accepting that all children are different and that attitudes, behaviour and teaching methodologies need to be changed to meet the needs of all learners. The implementation of inclusive education was gradual starting with turning a few schools into full service schools as discussed below.

2.3 Full service schools in the South African context

The notion of full-service school in South Africa was adopted in Education White Paper 6 to foreground the pivotal role played by mainstream schools in light of inclusive education and recognition that every child has the potential to learn (DoE, 2009). Full service schools were defined as "schools and colleges that will be equipped and supported to provide for the full range of learning needs among all our learners" (DoE, 2001, p. 22). These schools were deemed necessary in promoting a sense of belonging to enable all learners and families experience a sense of worth in the learning community. In addition to that, The Department of Basic Education (2010) outlined that, these schools are specially resourced and orientated to address a full range of barriers to learning in an inclusive education setting. Initially it was planned that at least one school out 30 would be selected to become full-service schools and later 500 schools would be selected paying attention to parent and community participation (DBE, 2010).

There was a laid down plan on how inclusive education would be realised in South Africa. Every stakeholder had the responsibility to see to it that every learner learns irrespective of learning needs. Full-service schools were to be resource centres for other schools as outlined by the DoE, (2001) that maintains that, selected schools that were converted into full-service schools were to be resource centres for neighbouring schools and provide expertise and support for children with high level needs as it was acknowledged that "…some learners may require more intensive and specialised forms of support to enable them develop their full potential" (DoE, 2001, p. 16). Hence these schools would serve as examples of good practice to pave way for other schools to follow suit by supporting both the educators and the learners through embracing the vision of a society for all (DoE, 2009).

The DoE (2009) clearly articulates the characteristics of full-service schools as schools that understand that barriers to learning can also be systemic and cultural in addition to them being intrinsic. Since full service schools acknowledge the infrastructural barriers to learning, these schools ought to be well resourced and have additional support programmes and structures for teaching and learning of children with diverse needs. Full-service schools need to be ready to examine and address school life challenges. These characteristics have not been easy to maintain or implement due to insufficient funding, lack of implementation capacity, lack of clear national guidelines and funding norms and standards (Pather, 2011).

To add on to that, Walton (2011) concurs that, lack of training, resources and the demands of a new curriculum compounded the challenges of implementation of inclusive education policy. She however noted that, despite these constraints, some schools facilitate access and participation of children with diverse needs.

2.4 Implementation and challenges of inclusive education in South Africa

Despite the clear aims of inclusive education in South Africa, there is neither consensus nor a clear definition of inclusive education. No author clearly defines inclusive education by simplifying what it is exactly, what we have are deduced definitions. The absence of a clear definition poses a problem of conceptualisation. It is difficult or near impossible to implement an educational system that is not well understood. Inclusive education is viewed by Pather (2011) as a strategy or educational policy that makes access to education possible to all learners with special needs and disabilities. Walton (2011) views inclusive education as a process of reducing exclusionary pressures by enhancing access and participation. Definitions seem to be conciliatory in nature for varying groups of people ranging from the marginalised, people with disabilities be it physical or intellectual disabilities, different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and so on. Furthermore, failure to come up with a concise definition of what constitute disability makes it difficult to conceptualise, implement and evaluate inclusive education.

Besides absence of consensus on what constitutes inclusive education, there are different views surrounding the implementation of inclusive education around the thinking that it was introduced prematurely and too rapidly (Greyling, 2009). It seems inclusive education came at a time when South Africa neither had the financial backing and infrastructure nor the human resources to back or deal with a proposed change (Wildeman & Nomdo, 2007). In other words, inclusive education came into existence by default when there was insufficient ground work done to ensure its effectiveness. However, findings of case studies carried out in KwaZulu-Natal and parts of Johannesburg inner-city schools demonstrate tensions and contradictions in some areas with notable successes in some isolated cases (Walton, 2011).

Studies were carried out in various provinces in the rural and inner-city schools to provide data around inclusive education in South Africa regarding how it has been conceptualised and how it is being implemented. A myriad of challenges facing inclusive education were identified. These included little collaboration due to negative attitudes held by certain

teachers or principals (Pather, 2011), resistance and non-implementation (Walton, 2011) and teachers who felt that they had inadequate knowledge and skills to effectively teach inclusively (Eloff & Kgwete, 2007). This status quo was accelerated by the aftermath of the problematic Outcomes Based Education (OBE) which consequently fuelled teachers' negative morale, commitment and trust thus further complicated the work of teachers and their future identity (Swart & Oswald, 2008). In an attempt to address teacher inadequacy to deal with diverse leaners in an inclusive education context, several ways of teacher professional development were adopted.

2.5 General teacher professional development

The need for professional development for teachers was foregrounded by DoE (2009). It was envisaged by the South African Department of Education (2009) that, staff development programmes would ensure that teachers develop the ability to address diverse needs and barriers to learning. This would be achieved through continued professional development as established by The National Norms for Educators and The National Teacher Development Framework. Professional learning communities and peer mentoring were singled out among other structures as effective structures for continued professional development.

2.6 Professional teacher development and inclusive education

At the heart of many educational reforms lies professional development. Ono and Ferreira (2010) and Wood (2007) suggest that on-going professional learning is integral for teachers. Since inclusive education was faced with a myriad of challenges that included teacher under-preparedness, several measures were put in place to address teacher under-preparedness. One of these measures included workshops, seminars, conferences and courses aimed at professionally developing teachers (Ono & Ferreira 2010). In addition, Villegas-Reimers, (2003) outline that professional development of teachers, often called in-service education or staff development, has been conducted for different purposes and in different ways that include workshops, seminars, conferences or courses. A brief historical background for workshops and teacher development is provided by Ono and Ferreira (2010) when they trace the onset of workshops in South Africa to the time when OBE and C2005 were implemented but were not successful as was hoped. They describe this form of professional development as a "cascade" model whereby teachers were trained and developed and in turn had to pass on their knowledge to other fellow teachers. Nevertheless, the teachers felt that they did not

benefit much from teacher development through workshops. In support of this, Fullan (1991, p.315) reported the following:-

> "Nothing has promised so much and has been so frustratingly wasteful as the thousands of workshops and conferences that led to no significant change in practice when the teachers returned to their classrooms."

The above quotation clearly indicates that the workshops achieved little in as far as professional development was concerned yet there was a lot of professional learning required in light of inclusive education, Walton (2011) agrees that research has confirmed that there is need for on-going support and encouragement in facilitating access and participation for all learners. This is attested for by evidence of teacher enrolment in workshops and short courses offered by various NGOs. (Walton (2011) further elaborated that, teachers need not learn about inclusive strategies only but question beliefs, values and structures that perpetuate exclusion in South Africa.

2.7 Teacher learning

Teacher learning is focused on knowledge for teaching and teacher transformation. Teacher transformation was defined by Jacobs and Yendol (2010) as understanding personal assumptions and frames of reference that filters one's view of the world. This does not happen in isolation but through grounded inquiry, reflection and experimentation that is participant driven. Little (2006) highlighted four key pointers for teacher professional development that lead to teacher learning. This includes firstly, the capacity to mount a strong collective response to school problems and goals. Secondly, is the quality knowledge, skills and judgement that teachers bring to their work individually and collectively. Thirdly is strong teacher learning communities for teacher growth and contribution to favourable student outcomes. The final pointer is support, appropriate stimulation and implementation of acquired expertise and experience that will encourage commitment to teaching over time. One way of achieving teacher learning was professional development through situated learning.

2.8 Situated learning

Situated learning provides a strong base upon which teacher professional learning can be grounded (Lave & Wenger, 1991). From this perspective, all learning takes place when there

is engagement with others in activities in specific contexts. Learning from this perspective is characterised by being part of a social activity. Becoming a member allows participation and learning. According to Lave and Wenger (1991) learning is an aspect of all activities rather than a special process that takes place when explicit instructions are given. Lave and Wenger (1991) contested the idea that learning consists acquiring of abstract knowledge that may be transferred across contexts. In support of situated learning, Anfara, Caskey & Carpenter (2012, p. 53) claimed that learning is effective when "…it is situated within authentic activity, context and culture." Lave and Wenger (1991) claimed that human minds develop in a social situation and learning is located in co-participation as opposed to cognition.

Situated learning was referred to by Lave and Wenger, 1991 as legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) where learning is socially achieved through participation in social contexts. The legitimate peripheral participation refers to the way in which learners participate in actual practice of experts. In other words according to legitimate peripheral learning, the focus of learning is moved from the individual to the activities of a community of practice. Learning is therefore among the community members and not in the mind of an individual (Joram, 1993). In this study learning is achieved through participation of all PLC group members. The legitimate peripheral participation requires that newcomers become old-timers through participation in activities of the communities. In this process the identities of newcomers, structure and meaning are shaped by participation and get validation from participants (Lave, 1991). Linked to this study new and old teachers learn from each other through participating in the PLCs. Therefore, learning through the process of legitimate peripheral participation is a process of shared cognition that is not an end in internalisation of knowledge by individuals but rather, a process of becoming a member of a sustained community of practice. Additionally, Herrington & Oliver (1995, p.2) observed that meaningful learning will only take place if it is embedded in the social and physical context within which it will be used. Emphasis is placed upon interdependency of agents, world, activity, socially negotiated meaning learning and knowing (Lave, 1991). The legitimate peripheral of learning by Lave and Wenger (1991) is however criticised by Fuller, Hodkinson, Hodkinson and Unwin (2005). These authors criticised legitimate peripheral participation on the grounds that LPP placed emphasis of progression from newcomer to full participant but ignored the "old-timers" from elsewhere. According to Fuller et al (2005) there is a notable gap between the learning of experienced members and newcomers in this study this could be translated to the tension between new teachers in PLCs and those that

have been there for longer periods. Fuller et al (2005) nevertheless observed that Lave and Wenger (1991) belatedly recognised this shortcoming towards the end of the book by acknowledging that LPP led the experienced members to think more comprehensively about the organisation of their productive activities. Hence communities of practice are not subjective to novices only but impact on all participants.

Lave and Wenger (1991) also acknowledged that communities of practice and LPP are characterised by power relations. Power relations are brought about by the relationship between newcomers and old-timers that could make LPP empowering or disempowering. However, as highlighted earlier, situated learning is a result of learning from others through participation. Learning is not about transmission of ideas but it is about knowledge and understanding how to behave and what to do in different situations bringing about identity change. Construction of meaning through situated learning that is constantly evolving. Sfard (1998, p.6) concurs by noting that ‘‘there has been a shift from the idea that knowledge is something that is permanent but something in a constant flux of doing.’’ Knowledge is thus constantly evolving between the individual and the other members of the community as they participate in PLCs.

2.9 Background of professional learning communities as a model for teacher development

The spread of PLCs as effective for teacher development can be explained by focus on the limitations of professional development through workshops. Professional development of teachers through workshops can be criticised on the basis that it renders the teacher passive. Wood (2007) suggested that, teachers should not be passive recipients of others’ expertise but instead, they should be actively involved in their learning. Furthermore, Anfara, et al (2012) reinforced that professionalisation of teaching is dependent upon teachers having opportunities to contribute to the development of their own knowledge and grow intellectually throughout the process. Although workshops and short courses were criticised, they contributed in bringing awareness to new practices and to a limited extent, involved active teacher learning leading to the development of situated learning in various configurations (Swart & Oswald, 2008). Situated learning in communities of practice is preferably being adopted as a means of professional development for teachers (Borko, 2004). Professional learning communities become professional in the sense that teachers can and

should work together to plan lessons, develop assessments and study curriculum not reinforce existing practice but reform the practice (Servage, 2009).

2.10 Emergence of professional learning communities

Professional learning communities were first developed in the United States of America. (Lee & Lee, 2013). Educational reforms in the United States brought about by the No Child Left behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 that demanded reforms of classroom practices (Borko, 2004). To keep up with the demands of these educational reforms, teachers required a great deal of learning. Professional learning communities took root in the United States in the 1960s based on Dewey's assumption that, reflection is the ''central modality of human intellect'' (Lee & Lee, 2013). The assumption was derived from Dewey's laboratory model where teachers engaged in collective inquiry to weigh practice against empirical evidence and dialogue.

The values and skills learnt in PLCs have the potential to be implemented in class to the benefit of the students and teacher professional development. Teachers will be able to ask the pertinent questions such as "what is it that we want students to learn and how will we know when each student has learnt?" (Ferger & Arruda, 2008, p.32). This provides opportunities for teachers to explore and understand identities, values and systems that impact on student performance making PLCs suitable for professional development for inclusive education.

In the South African policy, PLCs are directly made reference to by DBE and DHE (2011, p.5) 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''.

It was envisioned by DBE and DHE (2011) that PLCs would assist teachers with knowledge about content and practice including integration of their own professional knowledge with the latest research-based knowledge about content and practice. There are several characteristics of PLCs but Katz, Earl and Ben Jafaar, (2009) singled out some characteristics as key. These characteristics include a challenging focus, creation of productive relationships through trust, collaboration with moderate conflict and rigorous enquiry. The significant characteristics of PLCs are discussed below. It has to be noted that most available PLC literature focuses on characteristics of general PLC and specific subjects such as maths and science (Borko, 2004,

Brodie, 2013 and Oehrtman, Carlson, Sutor, Agoune & Stroud 2005) but his study intended to focus on PLCs in the context of inclusive education.

2.11 Characteristics of PLCs

The term professional learning community was regarded by Brodie and Borko (2016) as a term with three important words. The term professional denotes how PLCs are underpinned by a specialised knowledge base. In this study the knowledge base was an intersection of expert knowledge that came from the Wits university team and teachers experience. In the context of this study the term learning has emphasis on improvement. Improvement was on the part of the teachers' knowledge and practice in relation to inclusive education. The term community draws attention to collaborative, supportive and sharing engagement between members. The term community thus moves from discrete groups of teachers to establishment of school-wide culture that makes collaboration expected, genuine and on-going.

In light of workshop disadvantages a ''new'' dimension of teacher professional learning in the form of professional learning communities (PLCs) gained momentum. Anfara, Caskey and Carpenter (2012) acknowledge that, the term professional community is not really new, it first appeared in the 1960s but gained much attention in the late 1980s and 1990s. The characteristics and benefits of PLCs in general show that PLCs are suited for teacher development, though there are some restrictions. Although Borko (2004) agrees that PLCs are effective, she does so with restrictions. She argues that changes in the classroom are ultimately dependent upon the teacher. However, Stoll and Louis (2007) maintain that teachers have limited control over professional standards though elsewhere in the world, teachers may have the influence over curriculum standards. Teachers may participate in PLCs but that does not guarantee that what was learnt will be implemented hence the effectiveness is situational. Below are characteristics of PLCs.

2.12.1 Collective learning and focus on a common goal

Learning as a result of participating in PLCs has far reaching effects. Learning in PLCs is experienced by the teachers, learners, leaders and schools (Brodie, 2013). Learning by participation provides opportunities for teachers to explore and understand identities, values and systems that impact on student performance in a community. In Brodie's study (2016) the focus of the teachers and facilitators in the PLCs was to understand the reasoning behind

learners' mathematical errors and respond accordingly to address these errors at different grades. Professional learning communities are guided by a common focus to help all children learn essential knowledge, skills and dispositions (Dufour et al., 2010).

From the above explanation it can be argued that focus of PLCs is on learning of the teacher and on learners' performance when teachers come together to collectively discuss ways of enhancing learners' performance (Borko, 2004). Teachers begin to speak the same language and focus on a common goal when working collectively. They do this through supportive and shared leadership with a focus on shared values and visions as opposed to being dominated by some facilitator who does not share the common values and vision (Ferger & Arruda, 2008) as would be the case in workshops. However, conflicting agendas may characterise PLCs and deeply held beliefs about inclusive education within schools may compromise the experimentation necessary to foster development of inclusive practices in the classroom.

2.12.2 Collaborative nature of PLCs

The collaborative nature of PLCs provides a good platform for teachers to engage in meaningful discussions with a positive bearing on their work. Collaboration among PLC group members helps teachers reflect on what works and what does not work and this motivates the teachers to go and practise new ways of doing things in their classes. Collaboration means more than just relationships; rather it entails intensive interaction that engages educators in dynamic interpretation and evaluation of practice (Katz, Earl & Ben Jaafar, 2009). The collaboration nature of PLCs is described as the engine that drives the PLC effort nevertheless; it does not guarantee an improvement of results but redirect focus on the right issues (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker & Many 2010).

2.12.3 Relationships built on trust

The pivotal condition for productive and meaningful relationships is trust (Katz et al., 2009). A study conducted by Ainscow et al (2003) revealed that teachers are more comfortable to engage in a discussion at a more general level amongst themselves. As the teachers interact more intensively they develop trust, new ideas and evaluate what they are doing now measured against what they intend to do. Although trust among teachers is foregrounded, conflict among the teachers cannot be ruled out. Illustrating the benefit of conflict in a study, Little (2006, p.35) illustrated the benefits of conflicts by reporting that:-

> "A group may deny differences and proclaim a false sense of unity….with the formation of community, differences among participants can be acknowledged and understood. With such recognition comes the ability to use diverse views to enlarge the understanding of the group as a whole."

These diverse views about topics under discussion in PLCs enable teachers to question their own practice and thus equip teachers with necessary skills to match educational reforms, thus making PLCs suitable for teacher professional development for inclusive education.

2.12.4 Professional learning communities for change

Professional learning communities are focused on action and commitment to continuous improvement of student learning and teaching practice (Katz et al., 2009). The effectiveness of the changes is measurable through learner performance. (DuFour (2004) describes how PLCs' effectiveness was evaluated and it was observed that PLCs registered an improvement in student performance, increased parental involvement, improved literacy, student behaviour and motivation. Furthermore, Botha (2012) acknowledges that literature shows that, in America, participation in professional learning communities led to positive changes in both teaching practice and improvement in learner achievement. In support of that, studies conducted by Dunne et al as cited in Botha (2012) highlight differences in performance between teachers who participated in PLCs and those who did not. The practice of teachers who had participated in PLCs became more learner-centred and there was flexibility in classroom management and pacing of instruction to accommodate diverse learners in the classroom and the reverse was equally true for the teachers who did not participate in PLCs.

The argument above points out to the effectiveness of teachers who participate in PLCs thus rendering PLCs as potentially suitable for teacher professional development in an inclusive context. A crucial question to ask however is the possibility of the Hawthorne Effect (alteration of behaviour by participants due to their awareness of being observed) to have influenced the findings (Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008). In response to the possibility of the Hawthorne Effect, Vescio et al., (2008) noted that there was a strong relationship between higher student achievement and strong PLCs. In cases where PLCs are reportedly not to be effective, a thorough investigation could be taken up as there could be more threats to PLCs such as school culture, location, history and climate of the school, policy decisions and availability of learning structures (DuFour, 2004). Teachers may be well equipped for inclusive education but if the school climate in which they practice is not conducive and if

there is resentment from educational district departments their effectiveness may be compromised.

2. 12. 5 Knowledge focus of PLCs through critical interrogation

Rigorous inquiry and dialogue are necessary attributes for effective PLCs. Rigorous inquiry is necessitated by a critical interrogation of practice in a reflective way (Brodie, 2013). Critical interrogation of practice ensures that teachers effectively engage in productive teacher relationships that consequently pave way for teachers to be accountable for their actions thereby enhancing learning for all students (Brodie, 2013). Ensuring learning for all students is the ultimate goal for realising effective inclusive education. However PLCs are not adequate to ensure an effective inclusive system of education. Brodie (2013) argues that focus should be placed on content and instructional practice and that one of the common arguments against PLCs is their failure to adequately develop teachers' mathematical knowledge in deep conceptual ways. As a result more emphasis should be thrust upon content knowledge and instructional practice to reach out to all learners. Additionally, Brodie's study (2016) highlighted that emphasis on facilitation should not only be placed on content but in addition to content, the processes involved and role of the community should not be underestimated. Teachers need to embrace and enact the mandates of professional learning community as part of everyday practice (Anfara, Casey & Carpenter (2012).

The characteristics of PLCs and the role of the facilitator discussed earlier show how PLCs can encourage learning through participation, rigorous engagement and collaboration. Lave and Wenger (1991) challenge what constitutes learning and participation. To these authors, learning occurs in a participation framework mediated by differences of perspectives among co-participants. It is not a one person act, the facilitator only, but everyone is involved. Applied in the context of teacher professional learning through PLCs, what teachers learn in PLCs has the possibility of being demonstrated in their teaching practice and learners' performance.

As highlighted earlier my study draws a lot from Brodie's study of facilitation (2016). The main similarity being that both studies focused on facilitation of PLCs. The major differences were that Brodie (2016) focused on PLCs that are subject specific, mathematics whilst I focused on the inclusive education issue. The other difference was that whilst Brodie was actively involved in the study as one of the external facilitators, I was not actively involved as a facilitator during the PLC meetings.

2.13 Link between PLCs and inclusive education

Before linking PLCs to inclusive education, I will first elaborate what inclusive education set to achieve. Thereafter I will show how teachers can learn for inclusive education in PLCs by bringing ideas from learning in communities, ideas from PLCs and ideas from inclusive education together.

White Paper 6 foregrounds the need for teachers to familiarise themselves with practices and strategies to enable them to teach inclusively. This is made possible by recognising and accommodating the diverse range of learning needs of learners and build up an open, lifelong and high quality education and training system (DoE, 2001). The Department of Basic Education (2010) positions the learner as central to learning and assessment. All learners are equally valued and teaching should be adapted to suit the needs of the learners. From these premises, the teacher is positioned to be well-versed in effective teaching methodologies suitable for responding to learners with diverse needs.

One of the reasons attributed to as challenges of inclusive education was inadequacy of teachers' skills to teach in inclusive classes. Walton (2016) acknowledges that PLCs are not an easy solution to the inadequacy of skills to teach in inclusive classes but noted that they offer space for regular and sustained learning opportunities for teachers that are contextually relevant. Walton (2016) indicated four broad needs for teacher development for inclusive education as understandings and positive attitudes towards inclusion and learner diversity, classroom practices that support inclusion, developing collaborative relationships and life-long learning needs. Arguably, PLC characteristics earlier discussed make PLCs potentially suitable for inclusive education for the following reasons. There is a strong relationship between knowledge from professional learning communities and practice of inclusive education. The characteristics of situated learning proposed by Herrington and Oliver (1995) exhibit interconnectedness with PLC characteristics making situated learning relevant for PLCs. These characteristics were discussed as *authentic context* that enable reflection of how knowledge will be used in real life situations. *Authentic activities* that afford detection of relevant and irrelevant material through collaboration and reflection that enable abstractions to be formed (Herrington and Oliver, 1995). These characteristics make a suitable connection between theory and what transpires within PLCs.

The ability of teachers to reach out to all learners is not embedded in their knowledge of subject content only but rather their attitude to dislodge exclusionary practices. When

correctly and consistently adopted, PLCs can improve teachers' knowledge and skills in teaching in an inclusive education orientation. Three assumptions that underpin professional learning were posited by Anfara et al (2012) as firstly, ensuring high level learning for all students, secondly, teachers cannot achieve their collective purpose in isolation and finally, verification of effectiveness of professional learning must be found in clear evidence of what students know and can do. These assumptions are closely aligned with the precepts of inclusive education that focuses on all learners. The collaborative nature of PLCs provides a good platform for teachers to engage in meaningful discussions with a positive bearing on their work. Teaching in an inclusive education context entails combating discriminatory attitudes and eliminating social exclusion (as was the case in the apartheid education system) to achieve education for all by ensuring access and participation of all children (Pather, 2011). The characteristics of PLCs may offer teachers insight into developing attitudes and methodologies that enable them to tackle the anxieties that come with working with learners from diverse backgrounds and give teachers direction towards inclusive pedagogies through collaboration and reflection within their groups as shall be discussed below.

2.13.1 Effective sharing of ideas in PLCs through dialogue

Teachers' collaboration through learning in a cohesive group may have great impact on learner performance as highlighted by Stoll and Louis (2007). Teachers who participate in PLCs can be resourceful and will learn to be well equipped to teach all learners without exclusion and maximise learner performance. They become accountable for learners' performance because according to Brodie (2013), deepening teachers' knowledge on subject matter could lead to new teaching practices which in turn improve learner achievement.

The dialogue created in professional learning communities enhances effective sharing of ideas as opposed to workshops. Du Toit and Forlin (2009) noted that workshops were conducted by trainers with ''wonderful ideas'' but not practically applicable to the teachers' situation. However, describing communities of practice, Ainscow et al., (2003) maintain that, teachers are more comfortable engaging in a discussion at a more general level thus clear anxieties about working with children from diverse backgrounds. As the teachers interact more intensively, they develop new ideas and evaluate what they are doing measured against what they intend to do, what is likely to work and what worked in their inclusive classes. Nevertheless, conflicting agendas highlighted earlier and deeply held beliefs (e.g. disability

issues) within schools may compromise the experimentation necessary to foster development of inclusive practices.

2.13.2 Teachers learn for inclusive education in communities

Another aspect of PLCs that make them suited for teacher professional development for inclusive education is that PLCs enable learning in community (Ainscow et al., 2003). This is a positive aspect of PLCs considering that education materials used in some African schools e.g. in Uganda are poor and more often than not, resources are not available (Miles & Singal, 2010). Unavailability or insufficient resources is not limited to Uganda, it is a characteristic of some South African Schools. However, teachers are able to learn for inclusive education through critical interrogation of practice and resources that take place when teachers are learning in community as a team. Ainscow et al (2003) view communities of practice as where teachers use available resources to further a set of common goals through participation. In this sense, once PLCs have been established and there is commitment on the part of the teachers then teacher learning for inclusive education in communities is a great potential.

2.13.3 Teacher professional learning from contention

Professional learning communities can be strong contributors of instructional improvement in schools. As highlighted earlier contention exposes differences of opinions which when facilitated in team discussions provide opportunities for growth (DuFour, 2004) thus learning from difference. Contention channel teachers' focus towards finding a common cause in a particular context and consequently lead them towards establishing a common agenda and meaning from difference (Ainscow et al., 2003). Such learning thus assists teachers in finding the most appropriate way to move forward with regard to inclusive education, making PLCs suitable for teacher professional development. Therefore teacher learning in PLCs may improve teacher confidence in using different forms of instructional pedagogy.

2.13.4 Summary of factors for effective PLCs for inclusive education

From the discussion above, PLCs may be viewed as fostering positive attitudes towards inclusion and diversity for all children. What inclusive education is set to achieve coupled with characteristics of PLCs make PLCs capable of changing teacher attitudes towards learners deemed different (Walton, 2015). Teacher learning for inclusive education professional development is no longer a one-time process of teacher training neither is it a process of periodic staff development. It is learning in a community where teachers are not

congregated to receive the latest information about teaching process from an expert (Cochran- Smith, 1999) as would be the case in workshops; they still need a leader to facilitate the learning. Below I focus on small group facilitation and then I narrow down to PLC facilitation.

2.14 Small group facilitation

Leadership of a group is more of an art than a skill and it is pivotal as it greatly influence what happens in a group and group outcomes (Napier & Gershenfeld, 1983). There are differences in how workshops and professional learning communities are facilitated. I will begin by giving a general view of facilitation, however it has to be noted that some of the characteristics of general facilitation are still present in facilitation for professional learning community.

A detailed outline of facilitation is offered by Rogers (1971) who describes facilitation in a more general way in what he calls encounter groups. He starts off with effective facilitation which is characterised by setting of a conducive climate for learning that will ensure that members benefit from the encounter groups. The climate according to Rogers (1971) should be safe to encourage members to open up and develop trust with the facilitator. An open climate is created when all members of the group are accepted, valued and not judged. He further added that effective encounter groups have facilitators who refrain from passing interpretive comments that may lead to members feeling they are under scrutiny consequently leading to them becoming self-conscious. Rogers (1971) contrasts effective facilitators with ineffective facilitators who make rules for the group, manipulates the group by directing members to unspoken goals, attacks the group members and holds himself aloof as an expert who is able to analyse group members. There are group norms suggested by Napier & Gershenfeld (1983:26) that facilitators need to recognise in the initial stages of the group. These group norms include; recognising people, safety assurance, acknowledging feelings, objectivity and planning jointly.

2.14.1 Facilitators' roles in PLCs

The role of the facilitator is crucial because success of a group is dependent upon the leader's ability to plan, diagnose, implement and evaluate what was agreed by the group (Napier & Gershenfield, 1983). The facilitator is the leader focused on the vision and priorities of a group (Katz et al, 2009). Professional learning communities focus on transformation of

teachers' knowledge, discuss individual situations, solve problems and talk common concerns (Jacobs & Yendol-Hoppey (2010). These issues demand that the facilitator assume various roles as leader, learner and teacher in the PLCs if they are going to be effective. The facilitator is viewed as having organisational, motivational and professional roles within PLCs (Oehrtman, Carlson, Sutor, Stroud, Agoune & Stroud, 2005). The PLC facilitator is described by Coenders (2008) cited in Hanraets et al (2011) as jack-of-all-trades who creatively work with what emerges to stimulate learning. It is important to note that there is no hierarchy in the facilitator's roles. There are no roles that are more important than others but the roles are complementary.

Adding onto the functions of facilitators, Brodie (2014) highlighted that facilitators' roles vary depending on the context in which they work. Brodie (2014) foregrounded three interrelated roles as outlined. Firstly, facilitators need to create a culture of inquiry based on classroom data that focuses on both strengths and weaknesses of knowledge and practice in their schools. Such an inquiry informs the facilitators of the alternative ways to address their challenges. The second role of facilitators is to support teachers to focus on their learners' knowledge followed by the teachers' knowledge and teachings practice. Thirdly, Brodie (2014) emphasised the importance of allowing external expertise into the community. She added that external expertise avoids recycling of current knowledge and practice and also brings in new ideas that teachers could learn from. External expertise could come from additional resources from elsewhere. In my study, external expertise came from the Wits university team.

2.14.2 Planning role

As an organiser or planner, the facilitator plans and manages the discourse during the PLCs' sessions. The facilitator is positioned by Katz et al (2009) as the 'critical enabler of focused professional learning'. The topics raised ought to be of common interest to get full co-operation, enthusiastic participation and authentic dialogue from the group members (Wood, 2007). The PLC facilitator should possess good managerial skills that maximises efficiency of time. A lot of significance is attached to time because Cochran- Smith (1999) asserts that time is critical and need to be managed to enable members to work in an unhurried manner thus affording ideas a chance to incubate, build trust and allow teachers to reveal sensitive issues. In addition to planning to ensure that there is sufficient time,

It is a facilitator's role to investigate the needs of the group so that issues of concern are tackled with. Hanraets et al (2011) added that facilitators have to investigate the needs and expectations of the participants and chose the right themes for discussion in their planning. Nevertheless, Napier & Gershenfield (1983) assert that leadership in small groups should be shared by involving other members in planning, harmonising and giving feedback needed by a group.

2.14.3 Motivating role

The facilitator need to work towards intrinsically motivating group members to ensure that members participate voluntarily instead of being pushed into participating by the facilitator by implementing a directive attitude. Members can be encouraged and motivated to participate by inspiring them to play a role (Katz et al, 2009). Facilitators are also urged to make use of spontaneous developments as they facilitate to keep the group members focused (Hanraets et al, 2011). This they attribute to the fact that, if learning is to be stimulated then it is key to understand the wish of the group and inspire members discussing their concerns to ensure maximum participation. Motivating participants could be achieved through various ways. Reflecting and acknowledging the participants' responses keep the participants motivated thereby benefiting from the professional communities. Of great importance is the leader's ability to develop evaluation procedures and instruments to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching methods to be implemented in the classroom. The way information is relayed to the group members is very crucial. Napier & Gershenfeld (1983) articulate that how information is said, what is said, who replies and the tone of the reply are key process skills in the effectiveness of a group.

2.14.4 PLC facilitator as a team builder

Facilitators have a role to play as team builders. The facilitators engage, inquire and generate questions, confidence and trust of the participants (Rogers, 1971). The teachers in a PLC look up to the facilitator for guidance and if a facilitator delivers unclear or mixed message the group members are likely to be exhibit boredom and resistance openly (Wood, 2007). The facilitator plans together with the teachers in useful ways that enable teachers to see value in student learning and at the same time providing a range of situations and strategies to analyse through questioning (Ebby & Oettinger (2013). The questions of the group members should lead and not the facilitator's questions (Hanraets et al (2011). There are several ways through which facilitators may focus and engage the group members. One such method is through use

of videos recordings of teachers' lessons. The focus here is not on judging or evaluating if the lesson was good or bad but build up the team through critically discussing strengths and weaknesses. Instead facilitators ought to lead discussions towards contributing to the thinking of what would be helpful in future and not to judge the teachers (Wood, 2007).

Debriefing that followed after watching a video-clip in this study helped all teachers to learn from their classroom practice. On that note, Ebby and Ottienger (2013) concur that videos of teacher lessons assist the facilitator in eliciting and clarifying big ideas and build on them necessitated by the facilitator's directing focus on salient features of classroom interaction. Focus is on student thinking and how teachers can learn from student thinking. As PLC members respond the facilitator encourages them to discuss and support reasoning thus moving discussions gradually towards set goals.

Conflict and questioning practice is inevitable during these discussions and the facilitator has to be effectively handle the conflict (Wood, 2007). Conflict should not be eliminated because Champy (1995, p. 89) cited in Dufour et al (2010, p. 237) cites that

> " A culture that squashes disagreement is a culture doomed to stagnate, because change always begins with disagreement. Besides, disagreement can never be squashed entirely. It gets repressed, only to emerge later as a sense of injustice followed by apathy, resentment and even sabotage"

However, Dufour et al (2010) contends that, recurring conflicts over the same issues drains an organisation in terms of time and energy and it may require closure at some point. In vignettes from studies by Wood (2007) one of the teachers acknowledges that he learnt a lot and built up knowledge through questions from team members and it paved way for a new approach to react to and address student thinking.

Facilitators as leaders are described by Botha (2012) as providing opportunities for teachers to engage with the objective of promoting educational improvement. The facilitators have much to do in setting the initial climate of the group by being accepting, valuing all group members, understanding and focusing on group discussion. However Botha (2012) noted that in South Africa, teachers work in isolation and there is lack of collaboration. Similarly, a United States research at the Annenberg Institute of School Reform (Botha, 2012) noted the

failure of leaders to inculcate a supportive culture, shared leadership and structures that support PLCs leading to PLC resentment by members.

2.14.5 Facilitators' dual roles-as learners and experts

Facilitators in PLCs are positioned both as learners and as experts (DBE & DHE, 2011). They are experts because they contribute their knowledge as learners as they deepen their knowledge through interacting with other facilitators and teachers. Facilitators are also positioned as responsible for supporting other teachers. In support of this Anfara et al (2012) observed that the stance of educators is pivotal when it comes to the effectiveness of PLCs. In a study they conducted on the stance educators have when it comes to learning through professional learning. They deduced three groups of teachers and their stance as follows: - There was a team that invested in collaboration. This team reported that afterwards it felt so connected to and supported by colleagues and became more efficient in curriculum planning. There was a team that shared expert knowledge. This team expressed that they gained ideas and examined beliefs in ways uncommon to most schools. Finally, there was a team that shared an inquiry stance. This was done through exploring patterns, asking complex questions, challenging each other's views and examination of own assumptions. This team reported that they gained elements of transformational learning that transformed practice. Professional learning communities facilitators require support from visionary leaders at school and district level so as to integrate teacher professional knowledge with the latest evidence based knowledge and content. However, Kolfschoten, Niederman, Briggs & Jan De Vreede (2012) noted that the growth of PLC is depended upon the facilitator's capability to meet, discuss and evaluate practice in their communities and on reflection of teacher professional development.

2.14.6 Transformational capabilities

Facilitators are positioned by Napier and Gershenfeld (1983) as working all the time, noting missing functions in the group, understanding what is happening at content and process level. This they do in order to bring transformation in the teachers' classes. It is important to note that facilitators come up with different knowledge, skills and dispositions and consequently with unique transformational and abilities (Jacobs & Yendol-Hoppey, 2010). Echoing the same view was Napier and Gershenfeld (1983) who postulated that, people have different personal theories on what happens in the group based on their personal experiences and the circumstances of their time. As facilitators facilitate they are faced with different dilemmas

emanating from their personal life and identity which can influence the roles in the professional learning communities and consequently enhance or hinder the effectiveness of the group. Examining the dilemmas may help the facilitators to self-reflect about their practice and traits that may influence how they facilitate professional learning communities. As alluded to earlier on, facilitators' self-awareness may have a positive or negative effect on the effectiveness of the group and facilitators may need to make introspection into their deep seated personal values about inclusion that may influence their work.

2.15 A critique of professional learning communities

Professional learning communities do not always work well all the time. Several factors can negatively affect the effectiveness of PLCs such as negative teacher attitudes, unsupportive teachers or structures in which they take place (Dufour, 2004). Although Dufour (2004) had highlighted that supportive structures in which PLCs took place were a requirement for successful PLCs, DuFour, Eaker and Dufour (2005) later noted that supportive structures only were not enough for successful PLCs rather, considerable, coherent and consistent effort over time by all stakeholders to challenge or break old habits and implementation of new habits were necessary for effective PLCs. Brodie (2016) pointed out additional threats to PLCs as tension between the individual teacher and the collective group or tension between autonomy of the teacher and accountability to the profession and to the clients.

Besides negative attitudes and discouraging structures, PLCs are prone to the negative impact brought about by teacher attrition. Stoll and Louis (2007) confirmed that high teacher turnover had an impact on the PLCs because teacher leaders who develop their skills are noticed and promoted or they themselves seek challenging opportunities elsewhere. The loyalty and commitment of their replacements may not be assumed but rather encouraged which in turn may take time.

Even though there are potential threats to PLCs, sustainability of PLCs can be achieved. Dufour, Eaker and DuFour, (2005) suggested that transformation of the school culture, expectations and habits throughout the organisation are required to realise successful PLCs. Furthermore, Brodie (2016) highlighted that PLC sustainability is achieved if the PLCs are compatible with on-going district priorities and existing programmes. Over and above aligning PLCs with district priorities, Brodie (2016) observed that PLCs without strong-site based facilitators are likely to be ineffective to improve teacher learning or learner achievement.

2.16 Conclusion

This chapter covered the relevant literature review pertaining to the study. Professional learning communities are suited to a greater extent to teacher professional development as they bring teachers together to collaborate, question, discuss, and reflect on their practice towards inclusive education. This confirms the view of Ainscow et al (2003) that, teaching is not a personal and private activity but that it is made public when examined openly. Communities of learning can either be beneficial or harmful depending on how they have been adopted. The role of the PLC facilitator is therefore very crucial as it holds a key to real transformation with real effect on people's lives (Ainscow et al, 2003). The situated theory of Lave & Wenger has been motivated as to why it is suitable for this study. Even though there may be some mitigating factors with regard to the effectiveness of PLCs, Katz, Earl & Ben Jafar (2009) highlight that, PLCs can be successful provided they have a challenging focus (to identify practices that enhance catering for the needs of all learners), collaborate for joint benefit and create moderate professional conflict and a productive relationship based on trust.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3. Introduction

Whilst the previous chapter reviewed relevant literature, this chapter will focus on research methodology that describes how the study was carried out. In this chapter I will describe and motivate for the research design, site selection, participants, sampling, data collection and data analysis processes that were used in this study. Describing and motivating for the above mentioned aspects of my research is supported by Wilson (2009) who outlines that methodology is the plan of action which informs and links the methods used to collect and analyse data to answer the original research questions. Closely linked to that, Taylor and Bogdan (1984) claimed that methodology refers to the way in which we approach problems and seek answers. I will also highlight the ethical considerations, design and executional limitations of the study in this chapter. Highlighting ethical considerations of my study resonates with Somekh and Lewin (2011, p. 325) who maintain that

> "In its narrowest sense research methodology is the collection of methods or rules by which a particular piece of research is undertaken and judged to be valid but in the broader sense, it means the whole system of principles, theories and values that underpin a particular approach to research."

Before getting into detail with methodology for the study I will briefly describe the project.

This study was conducted at a full-service primary school, north of Johannesburg. The study was part of a bigger project on PLCs that had begun about three years prior to me joining the bigger project. Whilst the bigger project was concerned with a number of wide issues relevant to PLCs for inclusive education in a full service school, the purpose of this study was to specifically investigate the PLC facilitator's role in an inclusive education context. The focus was on learning and community in the context of inclusive education.

Professional learning communities had long been established in the school and relationships had been established between the University of Witwatersrand staff and students working on the PLCs as part of the bigger project and focusing on different aspects of the PLC. Since I became part of the bigger project through a student-linked grant it was convenient for me to

be part of this long formed relationship and pursue another aspect of PLCs that is focusing on the role of the PLC facilitator in an inclusive education context.

3.1 Research design

Research design refers to a generic research that addresses scientific inquiry, pinpoint to a strategy of finding out something with emphasis on end product, the insider's perspective and research problem as the point of departure (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). This is achieved by clearly specifying what one wants to find out and determining the best way to it. The focus of a research design is on the when, from whom and under what conditions the data will be obtained (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014, p. 28). A qualitative study was therefore chosen to enable the researcher draw the most valid and credible conclusions to the research questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

A qualitative study was adopted for this study. Even though a case of one school was used in this study, it cannot be assumed that this study was a full case study. A disclaimer has been put forward that this study was not a full case study as it only has some and not all characteristics of a case study. The other reason why this study should not be regarded as a full case study is that, I did not do an in-depth examination of the study as case studies ought to be according to the definition of a case study given by Babbie (2010) to be discussed later in this chapter. The focus of this study was to investigate the PLC facilitators' role in an inclusive education context. I did not focus on all aspects of PLCs and facilitation. I however focused on a single entity to achieve description of the role of facilitators for PLCs for inclusive education. Furthermore I also followed the three steps of collecting data in a case study put forward by Wilson (2009) discussed later in the sub-sections of this chapter.

This research distinguishes itself from quantitative research in that, it is conducted with the main thrust on the processes that produce descriptive data in peoples' own written or spoken words and observable behaviour (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). One way of attaining descriptive data is describing and interpreting the way people look at reality by incorporating real world context in a natural setting (Hancock, Ockleford & Winderidge, 2009).

3.1.1 Nature and structure of qualitative research

There is no structure agreed upon on how to design a qualitative study. According to Cresswell (2012) researchers seem to start with a problem, examine literature related to the problem, pose questions, rigorously gather multiple forms of data, analyse the data and

persuasively write up a report so that the reader experiences "being there." Closely linked to the description of conducting qualitative research offered by Creswell (2012) above, Leedy and Ormrod (2013) proposed that when conducting qualitative research the following steps may be followed: Firstly ask or formulate general questions about a phenomena under study. The second step is to ask open-ended questions and finally, describe, interpret, verify or evaluate findings.

In some quarters, qualitative research is regarded as progressive as it is sensitive to the human situation and may contribute to emancipation and empowerment of humans (Cohen & Manion, 1994). In an attempt to describe the nature and structure of conducting qualitative research, Leedy and Ormrod (2013) postulated that qualitative research encompasses several approaches that are quite different from one another yet they have two unifying factors. The unifying factors are focus on phenomena that occur in a natural setting and capturing the complexity of phenomena. Qualitative research is not primarily interested in generalisations therefore does not maintain or claim that knowledge gained from one context will necessarily have relevance for other contexts or for the same context in another frame (Babbie & Mouton (2001).

In this study my focus was on the role of the PLC facilitator in an inclusive education context. It was my belief that the findings from this study would in small way, be used to fulfil what Eisner and Peshkin (1990) summed up to be the objectives of a qualitative study as follows; to inform our deep understanding of educational institutions and processes, attempt to provide richer and wider-ranging assessment of educational processes, products and projects and bring about document change.

3.1.2 Characteristics of qualitative research

Qualitative research has traits that clearly distinguish it from other types of research. Though many researchers would challenge this notion, Taylor and Bogdan (1984) argue that in qualitative research, the researcher sets aside his or her own beliefs, perspectives and predispositions viewing things as if they were happening for the first time. MacMillan and Schumacher, (2014) highlight that data for qualitative research is gathered directly from the source either by observing or interviewing the participants. Direct data collection gives the researcher a full understanding of data as comparisons can be drawn from what is observed and heard and authenticity and credibility of findings is thus improved to a greater extent. The narratives of qualitative data collection are rich in that every detail is valued and

contributes to the understanding of the complexity of human behaviour. Participants' perspectives are valued in the construction of reality as the participants see it not as the researcher sees it. The complex understanding and explanation "central to qualitative research is the belief that, the world is complex and that there are few simple explanations for human behaviour'' (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014 p. 348). The methods used to investigate the role of the PLC facilitator needed to be complex and examine multiple perspectives but at the same time, realising that it is not possible to account for the complexity in every situation. I was cognisant of this fact throughout the data collection procedure hence I strived to give a voice to the participants and at the same time be observant to other salient aspects of the facilitator other than what was said and heard.

The characteristics of a qualitative research design discussed above made this design suitable for this study. Qualitative studies seek to understand the world from the perspectives of those living in it, enabling an understanding of the lived experience of real people in a real setting (Hatch, 2002). Additionally, qualitative studies enable understanding of social phenomena and to make sense of it. This design was therefore chosen as it afforded me the opportunity to interact with the participants and get the experience of the PLC facilitators. I sought to view people holistically and from their frame of reference to develop concepts, insights and understanding rather than collecting data to assess preconceived models, hypotheses or theories (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

3.1.3 Critique of qualitative research

Numerous sound attributes render qualitative research essential when focusing on a phenomenon has been highlighted but that does not make qualitative research free of criticism**.** Two challenges of qualitative research were pointed out by Willig and Stainton-Rogers (2010) as firstly, failure for qualitative research to reveal dimensions of a phenomenon which are concealed. This could be what the researcher found but is not reported. Secondly, the mentioned authors raised issues of ownership and power that arise as a result of conducting qualitative research. The authors questioned who had the last word and where the question of power and ownership leave research participants. Willig and Stainton-Rogers (2010) went further to ask what happens when the research participants do not agree with the researcher's interpretation. There is therefore some degree of subjectivity inherent in qualitative research. This subjectivity is introduced because the researcher shapes the research. Nevertheless, Conrad and Serlin (2006) pointed out that if well executed, qualitative

research enables the researcher to enter the world of the participants in the research and provide a deep understanding of complex social systems. I will now move on to motivate for the choice of a case study for this research. The definition, strengths and limitations of using case studies will also be explored. Before I discuss the characteristics of case studies it is important that I reiterate that my study bears characteristics of case studies but it was not a full case study as I do not discuss the case in-depth.

3.2 Case study

Case studies sometimes called idiographic research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013) have been described and viewed in various ways by different researchers. Even though the descriptions may be different the common factor among the descriptions of a case study is that of the ultimate aim of descriptive or explanatory insights. Historically, case studies were deemed as non-scientific and it has only been within the past two decades that case studies became scientifically respectable (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), Campbell and Stanley (quantitative scholars) rejected the case studies as having no scientific value in 1996. The two quantitative scholars later softened their initial criticism and stated that the negative judgement was not meant to include cases studies as normally practised in social and behavioural sciences. Therefore case studies have widely been accepted as a scientific study of the unique (Simons, 2009). Below I will move on to discuss the definition of case studies.

A case study was described by Wilson (2009) as a data collection method that looks at events, collects data, analyse information and report results with the goal of describing the case under investigation. Similarly, Babbie (2010, p. 309) highlights that ‘‘case studies are in-depth examination of a single instance of some social phenomena.’’ The common denominator of these authors was the emphasis on study of a single case. The study of such a case is done with rigour to produce a rich outcome. The in-depth examination of phenomena is strongly supported by Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007) who outlined that human systems have a wholeness or integrity to them rather than being a loose connection of traits necessitating in depth investigation. Whilst Babbie (2010) was of the view that case studies focus on a single instance, in contradiction, Creswell (2012) argued that case studies may focus on a programme, event, a single individual, several individuals separately or in a group or a case may be constituted of a series of steps. In this study, the case study focused on a programme constituted by several individuals and with a series of steps. Several PLC

facilitators were the respondents. These facilitators were observed as they interacted with teachers in their PLC group sessions.

3.2.1 Characteristics of case studies

Case studies are characterised by a number of traits. The common feature of case studies lies in what case studies seek to achieve. Somekh and Lewin (2011) highlighted that case studies seek to identify and describe before trying to analyse. Case studies assume that social reality is created through social interaction albeit situated in particular contexts and histories. To illustrate the purpose of case studies, Simons (2009) postulated that the purpose of undertaking a case study is to explore the particularity of the single case and understand the distinctiveness of the individual case. Delving much deeper into the characteristics of case studies, Cohen et al (2007) considered case studies to have several hallmarks;

rich and vivid description of events relevant to the case

Case studies afford the researcher the time and different methods to engage with the case under study. The focus on a single entity gives the researcher ample time to thoroughly engage with the participants and event(s) under investigation. Resonating with Cohen et al (2007), Wilson (2009) noted that the systematic approach of case studies satisfies the expected goal of being a full and accurate description of the case under study. Although I did not do an in-depth study, I made an attempt to portray the richness of the case in writing up the report. This was achieved when data was presented in quotations of participants' actual language or vignettes. Such a presentation produces quality findings and provides vicarious experiences for the reader.

focuses on individual actors or groups of actors, and seeks to understand their perceptions of events.

Due to the focus on a single entity, there is continuity and accumulation of findings on the aspect under investigation which in turn improves the quality of the findings. Rather than using large samples and following rigid protocols to examine limited variables as would be the case in quantitative research, case studies involve longitudinal examination of a case and rely on multiple sources of evidence (Wilson, 2009). The researcher's involvement in the case improves the authenticity and credibility of findings and conclusions. The credibility and authenticity is further improved depending on the data collection methods employed by the researcher.

In this research, focus was on PLC facilitators hence it was easy to focus on these particular individuals in a group and as individuals during the observation and interview process respectively. There were teachers involved especially in the observation of PLC groups in session but my main thrust was not on the teachers but the facilitators.

3.2.2 Types of case studies

There are several types of case studies. According to Yin (1984) case studies are classified in terms of their outcomes and these are *exploratory, descriptive* and *explanatory* case studies. Exploratory case studies were deemed as pilot to other studies or research questions. Descriptive case studies provide a narrative account of a study and explanatory case studies test theories. Three types of case studies are suggested by Creswell (2012). These types are *intrinsic case, instrumental case* and *collective case studies.* An intrinsic case study is reportedly of an unusual phenomena and has merit in for itself. The instrumental case illuminates particular issues and the collective case study dwells on multiple cases that are described and compared to provide insight into an issue. On the other hand, Yin (1984) highlights that; case studies may be classified into three categories depending on their outcome. These are exploratory *case studies* which serve as a pilot to other studies or research questions. *Descriptive case studies* provide a narrative account of phenomena and *explanatory case studies* test theories. From Yin's (1984) perspective, this study falls under descriptive case study as it describes the PLCs facilitator's role in a given context.

3.2.3. Steps in collecting data in a case study

Three major steps to follow when collecting data using case studies were suggested by Wilson (2009) as follows:-

Determining and defining the research questions:-A firm research focus had to be determined that is, the role of the PLC facilitator in an inclusive education context. There should be a research object in a case study which is often a programme, an entity, a person or a group of people. In this study, I had two research objects. The first was a group of people specifically the PLC facilitators but these facilitators did not work in isolation. There were a group of teachers in each group who acted as members of the PLC. My second research object was inclusive education. I intended to investigate the role of the PLC facilitator in promoting inclusive education.

*Select cases and determine the data gathering and analysis techniques:-*The ability to use multiple sources and techniques in the data-gathering process is noted as one of the key strength of case studies. In this study, I used individual structured interviews to interview three PLC facilitators who volunteered and gave their consent to be interviewed after being invited to take part in the interviews by the researcher. I observed and audio-recorded four 2015 PLC meetings in progress. I also used the 2015 PLC meeting transcripts after getting permission from the group members to observe and audio-record meetings. Data from observations was organised, sorted and organised into major themes. Data gathered using individual interviews and 2015 PLC meeting recordings was transcribed and sorted, coded and organised into major themes for analysis.

Preparation to collect data: - Case studies generate a lot of data from multiple sources. The organisation of data is essential to prevent losing data. During the period of data collection, I handed over the recordings to my supervisor (since my study was part of a bigger project that I found already more than half-way) soon after recording. These recordings were stored under lock and key and then taken for transcription. I securely kept my field notes on interviews and observation notes.

3.2.4. Reasons for choosing case study

I have explored a variety of aspects of case studies, what they are, why they are conducted and steps to be followed when carrying out case studies from the perspectives of different researchers. I have also attempted to place my study under one of the categories as per the aim of my study. I will now move on to motivate why I chose a case study over other methods.

A case study was chosen because my study had traits of a case study. This method is an empirical study in a real life context that allows collection of data from a population in a natural setting through an analysis of a whole entity. It "… enables the researcher to understand a complex issue or object and bring with it a familiarity to the case that no other research approach is able to do" (Wilson, 2009, p. 3) Furthermore, focusing on a specific case improves insight and understanding of the lived experience as it gives an in-depth understanding and enables description of a particular and contextual case. Babbie (2010) noted that, the focus and attention on a single instance yields understanding of the particular case under examination. Getting in-depth insight and understanding of the participants in a real life setting could in a small way, contribute to the growth of knowledge about facilitators

and facilitation of PLCs. Having explained why I chose a case study, I will now focus on the advantages and disadvantages of conducting research using cases studies.

3.2.5 Advantages of cases studies

There are a number of advantages of using case studies in research. The strengths and limitations of case studies were deduced from the nature, purpose and data collection methods engaged in case studies. The strengths of case studies as described by Cohen et al (2007) are that results from case studies are strong on reality and are easily understood because case studies focus on unique feature that may be otherwise lost in larger scale data. Simons (2009) concurs that case studies enable the study of experience and complexities of programmes. This in turn makes understanding of dynamics of change possible through closely describing; documenting and interpreting events unfold and also makes it easy to from links between events.

Though it has been argued earlier that data gathered from case studies is not easily or not generalisable to other cases (Wilson, 2009, Somekh & Lewin, 2011) because of the difference in contexts, Cohen et al (2007) argues that case studies provide *insight* into other similar situations and cases. In addition to that, the authors claim that case studies can embrace and build on anticipated events and uncontrolled variables. Leedy and Ormrod (2013) outlined that case studies may be suitable for learning more about a little known or poorly understood phenomena. This entails that case studies are not about generalisability but more of understanding programmes, situations or events. The discussion in the data analysis chapter qualifies Leedy and Ormrod's (2013) proposition that case studies may be suitable for learning more about a little known or poorly understood with regards to PLCs.

Whilst Cohen et al (2007) drew the strengths of case studies from the nature of case studies; Somekeh and Lewin (2011) derived strengths of case studies from the methods used to collect data in a case study. Somekeh and Lewin (2011) noted that, because case studies use multiple methods and data sources to explore and interrogate phenomena, it follows then that case studies will achieve rich description of phenomena. The description provided by case studies renders them *heuristic* (enabling learning or discovery) and seeks to illuminate the readers' understanding of an issue (Somekh and Lewin, 2011). Furthermore, Simons (2009) added that, case studies provide researchers with opportunities to take self-reflexive approaches to understanding the case themselves.

Case studies are flexible. They are not dependent on time neither are they constrained by method. They can be conducted anytime and using a range of methods appropriate to understanding the case (Simons, 2009). In agreement Wilson (2009) postulated that case studies rely on multiple sources of evidence.

3.2.6. Disadvantages of case studies

Though case studies are characterised by some beneficial aspects they are not free from criticism. Case studies are prone to subjectivity which is inevitable due to personal involvement of the researcher (Simons, 2009). Counteracting to this potential limitation Wilson (2009) refuted this notion by proposing that the use of multiple sources of evidence, establishing a chain of evidence and having a draft case reviewed by informants may go a long way in minimising the subjectivity of the researcher. Delving deeper into the findings from case studies, Simons (2009) maintained that usefulness of findings is partly dependent upon acceptance of validity and the way findings are communicated.

Critiquing case studies was Thomas and Myers (2015) who vehemently criticised case studies for their deficiency in the generalisability of case studies findings. Critics believe that the study of a small number of cases is limited when aiming to establish reliability of findings. In addition, intense exposure to the study of a single case biases the findings (Wilson, 2009). However refuting the above proposition, Hamel and Yin, as cited in Wilson (2009) argued that the size of the sample does not transform a multiple case into a macroscopic study. The authors further emphasised that the goal of the study should establish parameters that may be applied to all research and thus a single case therefore could be considered acceptable provided that it meets the established objectives. In addition, Simons (2009) added that the aim of case studies is not generalisation but particularisation and to present a rich portrayal of a single setting to inform practice. As highlighted earlier in this chapter, my aim in this study was not to generalise the findings but to enable description of the role of the PLC facilitator.

3.3 Site selection

As highlighted earlier at the beginning of this chapter, my study was part of a bigger project sponsored by NRF so were my studies and thus this school was conveniently selected. The choice of the school was a pragmatic approach. Such an approach was described by Creswell (2007) as an approach where individuals are met on a chance encounter, emerge from a wider

study or are volunteers. Since my focus was on PLC facilitators' role in an inclusive education context, it only made sense that I become involved with a school that had adopted and practising inclusive education. Since my study was part of the bigger project, conducting my study there would enable the researchers involved in the bigger project and myself a chance to research of different aspects of PLCs at this school. I also anticipated that it would not be difficult for me to get research participants for my study. The school that became my site was a quintile 1 school (Gauteng No Fee schools, 2013, p.2) full-service school with five functional PLCs already running simultaneously. I was cognisant of the strengths and limitations of qualitative research using a case study. Nevertheless, the intent of this study was more of understanding PLCs in context and extension of findings as opposed to generalisability of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014) therefore I was not concerned with representativeness but rather an in-depth of this particular case and draw lessons that may to a limited extent be beneficial in informing the knowledge of the growing body of PLCs. Once my site was established I had to make a decision about the most appropriate data collection approaches. To enable me to collect information I had to develop protocols or written forms for recording the information such as interview and observational protocols (Creswell, 2007).

3.4 The population

As highlighted in the preceding chapters, this research was part of a bigger project. Whilst the bigger project was concerned with a number of wide issues relevant to PLCs for inclusive education in a full service school, the purpose of this study was to specifically investigate the PLC facilitator's role in an inclusive education context. The study was based on a case study of a full-service school. Table 3.1 below shows the population at the school. Since the population was small, all staff members at the school constituted the population. I had to be cautious when reporting about the participants to maintain anonymity of the participants. There is omission of certain characteristics in the description of participants. Gender of the participants was left out to safeguard anonymity and confidentiality of participants since there was only one male facilitator amongst the participants.

The population was defined by Cohen and Manion (1994, p. 86) as ''the specification of that population to which the enquiry is addressed, affects decisions that researchers must make for both, sampling and resources''. The staff composition was as follows:-

Table 3.1 showing population at the site in 2015

Grade	Number of teachers	Number of facilitators
R	9	1
1	4	1
2	9	1
3	10	1
4	4	1
Total	36	5

There were a total of five facilitators and 36 teachers teaching grade 1 up to 4. Some of the facilitators who agreed to take part in the study had been with the school since the beginning of the larger project and therefore, familiar with PLC facilitation. On the other hand, there were teachers who were relatively new in the school and novice to the process of PLC facilitation.

3.5 The sample

The research participants were made up of five facilitators from each of the five PLCs and the PLC group members. Facilitators were chosen using comprehensive sampling. Comprehensive involves sampling every participant available for the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Since this study was based on one site, all five PLC facilitators were comprehensively selected as participants in the study. Comprehensive sampling method was chosen because it is easy to administer and less costly but on the other hand, it is time-consuming and difficult to generalise to other populations (Babbie, 2010). Four out of five facilitators agreed to be interviewed and all five facilitators agreed to have their PLC sessions observed. The facilitators were trained by the Wits university team prior to the PLC sessions. In this training an inclusive strategy would be discussed with the aid of video and or hand-outs. After the facilitators' meeting the facilitators would meet with their PLC groups members to discuss inclusive teaching and learning strategies.

3.6 Data collection

Data collection is visualised by Creswell (2007) as a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions. This process is achieved by gaining access and establishing rapport with participants so that they provide good data. I used individual semi-structured interviews, 2015 PLCs meeting observations and analysis of five 2015 meeting transcriptions to elicit data from the participants. Interview schedules for facilitators and observation checklist (Appendices A and B) guided the researcher. Some questions were posed depending on the way the participants answered and further clarification was sought. I chose to use these data collection methods because McMillan & Schumacher (2014) posit that interactive strategies are ideal in collecting data for exploratory and explanatory studies.

Details of data collection for my study are shown in Table 3.2 below. I interviewed three facilitators, observed and audio-recorded four PLC meetings and analysed 2015 PLC transcripts. I observed four PLC meetings by spending half the meeting time (30 minutes) observing one meeting and then I moved over to the other PLC meeting in the last half. This was repeated on the second meeting.

Table 3.2 Data collection methods and frequency

Facilitator (Pseudonyms)	**Consent to be interviewed**	**Frequency of facilitator interviews**	**Consent to have PLC sessions observed**	**Frequency of PLC observation per facilitator**
Nomsa	Yes	1	Yes	1
Sihle	Yes	1	Yes	2
Fiona	Yes	2	Yes	1
Sarah	Yes	0	Yes	0
Michelle	No	n/a	Yes	0
Total	**4**	**4**	**5**	**4**

Pseudonyms in Table 3.2 above were used to maintain anonymity of the facilitators. Four of the facilitators were willing to be interviewed but only three of the facilitators were actually

interviewed because one of the facilitators later excused herself from being interviewed. Of the three facilitators, two were interviewed once while one of the facilitators was interviewed twice. No facilitator declined to have their PLC sessions observed but only four sessions were observed. The other PLC session that was not observed was scheduled for observation in term three; unfortunately the session was cancelled by the school as teachers were busy preparing for a national examination. The PLC sessions took place after facilitators' meeting with Witwatersrand University team.

3.6.1 Interviews

Interviews are a conversation between two or more people to get the point of views, interpretations and meanings to situations (Wilson, 2009). In the interview process, the interviewer establishes a general direction for the conversation and pursues specific topics raised by the respondent who does most of the talking (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The interviewer asks questions and the interviewee is an informant who gives information about her situation. The interviewer rarely enters into an argument about the logic and truth of the revelations of the interviewee but aims to cover factual and meaning level as well as said between the lines (Kvale, 1996).

A series of steps to follow when planning for an interview are clearly illustrated by Creswell (2007). He suggested that interviewees should be identified based on purposeful sampling because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem central to phenomenon under study. Hence in my study, the key participants were the PLC facilitators. Creswell (2007) added that a suitable place should be determined and adequate recording procedures and instruments should be put in place. I used a recorder and a tablet to record the interviews and the interviewees were given a signal to indicate that I was starting to record.

I used semi-structured interviews with both open and closed questions as well as probing to elicit information from the participants (See appendix A). These questions were chosen because a combination of closed and open-ended questions was used to get predetermined and insightful answers respectively (Babbie, 2010). I came up with these questions with my focus on responses that would help answer my research questions. Although Creswell provided steps to follow when conducting interviews, Simons (2009) argued that there is no single right way of interviewing. What he emphasised was the establishment of rapport to enable the participants to express inner most thoughts and feelings. Active listening was prioritised so that the researcher would hear the meaning of what is said. Of most importance

was never to allow interviewees to dominate thus taking the interviewee off-track and cutting off the interviewees before they finish talking.

Questions asked during interviews were elaborated by Bowden (2005) as neutral questions that aimed at getting interviewees to say more. Specific questions ask for more information about issues raised by interviewees earlier in the interview. For example, after the interviewee has talked about *x* and *y,* the interviewer may ask for the meaning of *y* and other questions that invite reflection about information said earlier on. Some techniques that could help improve the quality and time spent on interviews were prioritised. These included keeping an interview on track by resisting being caught up in a an opinion by getting back on track, recapping, checking for gaps in what the respondent says and allowing respondents to theorise on their experience where necessary (Bowden, 2005).

3.6.2 Advantages of interviews

Interviews are an ideal way for eliciting information and elaborate feelings, thoughts and attitudes of participants. Interviews are an efficient method of getting clarification on answers that may not be clear. Interviews often reveal more than can be detected or reliably assumed from observing a situation (Simons, 2009). In addition, interviews allow provision to match body language with spoken words thereby improving the reliability of responses. Leedy and Ormrod (2013) noted that interviews yield a great deal of information that include facts, feelings, motives, present and past behaviours and conscious reasons for actions and feelings.

3.6.3 Disadvantages of interviews

Although interviews help elicit information they have their shortcomings. Interviews are time-consuming because the method requires that the researcher asks questions to and records answers from only one participant at a given time (Creswell, 2012). The researcher is required to be extremely thorough in setting valid questions. Interviews run the risk of biased responses (Babbie, 2010). These challenges were minimised by probing the interviewees, rephrasing the questions. The researcher had to be cautious about asking leading questions that could interfere with participants' responses (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). In addition to the above disadvantages, Leedy and Ormrod (2013) noted that researchers will only get what the respondents remember because the interview method relies on memory and human memory is not always accurate as it is subject to distortion. Leedy and Ormrod (2013) stated that some respondents may be intentionally dishonest and some of their response may

be influenced by their beliefs and attitudes. In addition to that, interviewees may attempt to deduce the interviewer's desired responses (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014) and tell the interviewer what they want to hear. To mitigate the effect of memory, dishonesty and attitudes on interviews I used other methods of data collection to check for consistency or find out new information. In addition to interviews I also collected data from observations and transcript analyses. Wilson (2009) also noted that another limitation of interviews is that the researcher will only be able to establish what the interviewees think at a particular time. However, Simons (2009) highlighted that notes can help to signpost or query details in subsequent interviews, may provide a starting point for early analysis, note issues to follow up and note participants' reflections.

3.7 Observations

Observation entails an open-ended systematic way of gathering first-hand information by being present in a situation and making a record of one's impressions of what takes place at the research site (Creswell, 2012). These impressions need to be consciously gathered through sight, hearing, tastes, smell and touch with the aid of record keeping (Somekh & Lewin, 2013). Observations provide the evidence about the extent to which something is implemented and can be a vital part of an empirical process of triangulating what people say (during interviews) and what they actually do in an observation (Conrad & Serlin, 2006). According to Somekh and Lewin (2013) there are two ways of observing namely structured and unstructured observation. In a structured observation a schedule is prepared in advance with predetermined categories of behaviour to observe (See appendix B). An unstructured observation does not have a predetermined schedule. The observer sits back and makes detailed notes guided by prior knowledge and experience. In this study I made use of an observation checklist informed by research questions. My focus areas were the topic of the PLC meeting, organisational, leadership, motivational and professional skills exhibited by the PLC facilitator during a session and general comments. Under general comments I wrote what I observed for example the reaction of the teachers to the facilitator or anything that would help me analyse and interpret what was happening during the observed session.

3.7.1 Advantages of observations

Observations have their strengths in research. They afford the researcher the ability to see, hear and compare data obtained from interviews or any other forms of data collection and what is observed. Observation enables the researcher to gain a vivid perception of events and thoughts as expressed in interviews thus, one gains the opportunity to record information as it occurs in a setting and study actual behaviour (Creswell, 2012). The researcher is able to acquire tacit knowledge which may not have been given by interviews (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Additionally, observation offers a way of capturing the experiences of those less articulate, a provision for cross-checking data obtained and gives a sense of the setting and a rich description and the basis for further analysis Simons (2009). Observations field notes can be taken and Somekh and Lewin, (2011, p. 132) claimed that ‘‘neither audio-recording nor video recording replaces the need to make field notes.’’ This is because technology keeps a partial record and cannot replace the sensitivity of the researcher. It is important to note the advantages of the combined observation, interview and transcript analysis which mitigate the disadvantages of them on their own.

3.7.2 Disadvantages of observations

In as much as observations are rich with data, they have their shortfalls. Observations are time consuming and the presence of the researcher may influence the proceedings in the PLCs’ meetings. Influence on the proceedings of the observation may have been introduced by tension arising due to awareness of being observed. Members may have a strong sense of over performing due to being conscious of being inspected (Somekh & Lewin, 2011). To alleviate the extent of this limitation Somekh and Lewin (2011) suggest that the purpose of the observation and how data will be used is made clear in advance. Babbie, (2010) and Hancock et al., (2009) concur on the limitations of observations by highlighting that, observing and taking field notes may interfere with the participants and researcher’s thoughts leading to inaccurate reflections of what transpires in the PLCs. Additionally, the observer maybe under pressure to make an immediate decision of what to record thus making observations superficial or an unreliable account with no chances of action replay. Though this may come as a limitation, observing and taking notes may help capture information that could otherwise be missed in the interviews thus improving the quality of data obtained.

The other challenge of observation put forward by Somekh and Lewin (2011) is that human behaviour is enormously complex and there is likelihood of an incomplete record of what

transpired due to researcher subjectivity. In addition to that, what is observed is ontologically determined and to a larger extent depends on how the observer conceptualises the world. The observer is limited to those sites and situations where you gain access and it is difficult to establish rapport with individuals being observed (Creswell, 2012). Creswell did not underestimate the limitation that observation requires that the observer pays attention to detail especially visual detail and the potential of deception by people being observed. I tried to minimise the potential of the above limitation from happening by remaining unobtrusive, recording utterances and I paid attention to non-verbal cues that I could pick from group members. Since I was using an observation checklist, I already had aspects of the PLC proceedings to focus on without leaving anything that could arise during the meeting other than what I had written on my checklist. I took limited precise notes so that I would not intimidate the PLC group members. In addition to that, I conducted multiple observations from different groups over time to enable me obtain the best understanding of the proceedings and different individuals.

The PLC meetings that were observed were audio-recorded but Leedy and Ormrod (2013) argue that audio-tapes and video-tapes are not always completely dependable due to background noise. The scholars went on to give suggestions on how to improve the quality of observation by having someone to introduce the researcher to the people you are watching whilst the researcher remains quiet and inconspicuous. Creswell (2012) added that field notes should be reflective and capture the broad insight of ideas. This is exactly what transpired in the PLC meetings. Whenever we as The Wits University team went for PLC sessions we were two or three and I did not talk as I prepared to observe whilst the other members of the team would introduce the topic under discussion on that particular day.

3.8 PLC meetings and interviews transcriptions

Transcription is defined as a process of converting audio-tape recordings or field notes into text data (Creswell, 2012) or rather conversion of oral data into textual data (Wilson, 2009). This process takes notes and other information and converts them into a format that will facilitate analysis or a visual analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Transcription of the audio recordings from 2015 PLC meetings and interviews was done verbatim in a dialogue format by a professional transcriber. The audio-recordings were taken for transcription immediately after recording and transcriptions were obtained as soon as they were done.

3.8.1 Advantages of transcriptions

Transcriptions help identify traces of evidence to verify what was observed and elicited from the interviews by capturing sounds of a situation and replaying the recording several times for discussion (Wilson, 2009). Audio recording and transcriptions improves the accuracy of obtained data and frees one from writing notes all the time and transcriptions will give a provision to compare data from other sources of information (Simons, 2009). Transcriptions help reduce researcher subjectivity as utterances of the participants are recorded as they are and Bowden (2005) added that the primary way of minimising distortion and subjectivity is to base all analysis on the transcripts.

3.8.2 Disadvantages of transcriptions

The notable disadvantage of transcriptions is that they lure one into a false sense of security and not pay attention to issues thinking one can always turn back to the recording (Simons, 2009). Furthermore reliance on the recording instruments has the potential to disappoint if the instruments fail or when the researcher lacks the expertise to use them. Transcribing is time consuming and transcription by someone else is the greatest drawback as time lapses between transcription thereby substantially increasing analysis time making it difficult to recall the exact nuances of the meaning or tone (Simons, 2009). The most serious limitation of transcriptions is that there is loss of important visual cues for example facial expression, gesture and other body language (Wilson, 2009).

3.9 Procedure of data collection

I gained access to the research participants through a formal invitation to be part of the PLC meeting with facilitators at a school in the greater Johannesburg North with the project leader and another student who was part of the bigger project. After the meeting with the facilitators I was given an opportunity to introduce myself and my research focus area (See Appendix C). I introduced myself and my research entitled: An investigation of the facilitator's role in professional learning communities for inclusive education.

With reference to my topic under investigation, I explained why the facilitators where the key or ideal participants for this study. I went further to elaborate ways through which the facilitators could participate in study if they volunteered to do so. I later extended an invitation to the facilitators who wished to participate in the study (See appendix D and E).

The first way to participate was explained as allowing the facilitator's contribution to the PLC to be observed during a PLC meeting. I clearly expressed that with their permission, I would like to audio-record the meeting for research purposes. I clarified that audio recording would ensure an accurate record of the PLC meetings which would then be transcribed. The potential participants were told that should they decide that they were not willing to take part any further or did not wish their contribution to be recorded they could do so with no negative consequences.

I assured the PLC facilitators that if they decided to participate by having their contribution to the PLC recorded, they would be completely anonymous. This means that the name of the school or names of members of recorded PLC groups will not be made public. If necessary, a pseudonym (false name) will be used.

The second way to participate was explained as having two, 30 minutes individual interviews with me, one in the second term and one in the third term at a time after school that would be convenient to the PLC facilitator. I extended my request to audio-record the interview for accurate capturing of what they said. I clarified that the questions that I would ask would be around their PLC and what they were learning from it. Although the questions would ask about their personal reflections and experiences regarding the PLC, there will be no questions that would violate their privacy. It was made clear that they could stop the interviews at any time without negative consequences.

Participants were made aware that they could choose not to participate in the research at all, OR only to participate in recorded PLCs, OR only to participate in interviews, OR to participate in both recorded PLCs and interviews.

I clarified that there would be no foreseeable risks in participating and participants would not be paid for taking part in this study. I explained that there were no direct benefits for participating in the study , but that it was expected that research findings would be used to improve the professional development programme at their school, and ultimately to inform professional development for teachers in all full service and inclusive schools.

All research data (electronic and material) would be kept securely in locked offices and would be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of the project. The results of the research will be used by me and the project leader for academic purposes including books,

journals and conference proceedings. A summary of findings will be made to available to participants, the school and the GDE.

Facilitators were invited to complete and sign consent forms should they wish to take part in the study. My numbers and those of my supervisor were availed should the participants wish to contact any of us. The same process was repeated with the teachers a day after meeting the PLC facilitators.

3.10 Design limitations of the study

This study was aimed at investigating the role of the facilitator in an inclusive education professional learning community. Any other aspects of PLCs other than this were not part of the study. There are several factors that contributed to the limitations of this study to be outlined below. These limitations are design and executional limitations.

The design limitations of this study emanate from the design adopted for this study. This study followed a qualitative research design using characteristics of a case study method. This research design has strengths and limitations namely more validity and limited reliability respectively (Babbie, 2010). Validity was defined by McMillan & Schumacher (2014) as the degree to which scientific explanations of phenomena match reality and reliability as the consistency of measurement respectively. To counter these, I used various methods to collect data, individual interviews, transcript analysis and observations, so as to improve the reliability and validity issues. As highlighted earlier, qualitative research falls short on generalizability to other population. Nevertheless, this study was rather about understanding PLCs in context and extension of findings as opposed to generalisability of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

3.10.1 Executional limitations

The executional limitations are mostly informed by time constraints. Time was a challenge seeing that the researcher was a full-time teacher in a district different from the school where this study was conducted. Prior arrangements were made with the researcher's school management for time off and morning or afternoon lessons were taken to make up for missed time.

I experienced a challenge of not getting all the facilitators taking part in the study. Four out of five facilitators gave their consent to be interviewed and one of the facilitator refused to be

interviewed but gave consent to have her PLC session observed. Three of the four facilitators who gave their consent to be interviewed were actually interviewed. One of the facilitators who had previously given consent to be interviewed declined to be interviewed and that decision had to be respected to avoid participation by coercion. It was my intention to interview each of the facilitators twice. Unfortunately due to time constraints on the part of the facilitators, only one of the facilitators was interviewed twice and two facilitators were interviewed once giving a total of four interviews.

Transcriptions are not always dependable due to background noise (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013) however this limitation was addressed by making use of microphones to improve the sound quality. In order to minimise the potential limitation of background noise, I complemented the transcriptions with the field notes during PLC meeting observations. Bowden (2005) suggested that one way of minimising researcher subjectivity during analysis of data from transcriptions is to base all analysis on the transcripts. This entails that Bowden (2005) was arguing that there is no need to delve beyond what is said by the participants. In response to that Robyn, cited in Bowden (2005.p, 56) expressed concern over ‘‘staying with transcripts’’ because "… what people say is not necessarily the same as what they mean." To minimise researcher subjectivity in my study, I analysed what the participants said in the transcripts, what I observed during PLC meetings and what I gathered from the interviews.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

There are binding ethical considerations that I had to pay attention to as I conducted my study because research involves humans whose lives may be affected by the study. There was need to cause minimal disruption to gain access to the research site achieved by consulting with different gatekeepers (Creswell, 2012). I had to consult and seek permission to conduct my study at the chosen site from the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE), School Governing Body (SGB), Principal of the school and the individual teachers (See appendices F G, H and I). It is important that the researcher respects the rights of the research participants by observing ethics when conducting the research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality and freedom from harm and privacy (Babbie, 2010).

There is more to ethics than just acting in honesty, within the law and doing the right thing. According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research is about integrity, ensuring that one has enough data to draw conclusions from and being open about assumptions and limitations of

conclusions. I have discussed the design and executional limitations above and will now move on to discuss ethical considerations.

An ethical clearance was obtained from the University to protect the participants form potential harm. The aims of the research were explained to the participants without deception or withholding information (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014), see appendix C which is the information sheet detailing the study, aims and how the participants were invited to participate.

Protection from harm

Protection from harm entails that all participants are treated in a courteous and respectful manner (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Research should never result in physical or mental discomfort harm or injury to the participants. Protection from harm also includes realising that information that may result in embarrassment or direct negative consequences (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014) is avoided. To guard against the violation of protection harm, I avoided interviewing participants in secluded places and asking personal questions (See appendix A). I made sure that I interviewed the participants at a place and time of their own choice.

Privacy

Privacy gives the individual freedom to decide for themselves where, when and in what circumstances and to what extent their personal attitudes, opinions, habits, fear and doubts are communicated or withheld from others (Cohen & Manion, 1984). Though the risk of privacy is not totally eradicated especially in analysing and reporting results when dealing with a small sample, I guarded against violation of this right by using pseudonyms and avoiding personal information such as gender which could lead to the participants being identified. I guaranteed participants of privacy in appendix C and F and adhered to Leedy & Ormrod (2013) who emphasised that, under no circumstances should a research report be presented in such a way that other people will be aware of how a particular participant behaved or responded unless a participant has specifically granted such permission in writing.

Confidentiality

McMillan and Schumacher (2014) highlighted that confidentiality means no one has access to individual data or names of the participants except the researcher and that the participants know who will see the data. In the information sheet (appendix C) the participants and

stakeholders were guaranteed confidentiality in appendices C, D, E and F. Although as a researcher I would know who provided the information I should in no way make the connection known publicly (McMillan& Schumacher, 2014). Cohen and Manion (1984) maintained that protecting a participant's right to privacy was through promoting confidentiality which I did in my data analysis.

Informed consent

Informed consent is a norm in which the participants base their voluntary participation in research based on a full understanding of the possible risks involved (Babbie, 2010). Informed consent provides participants with an explanation of the research and an opportunity to terminate their participation at any given point with no negative consequences. Informed consent is achieved when the participants agree to take part in the study after the researcher has provided a full disclosure of risks if any, associated with taking part in the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Consent forms were prepared and availed to the gatekeepers (SGB, school principal and the teachers). See appendices F, G, H and I. The consent forms clearly highlighted the voluntary aspect of the research and an invitation to participate without coercion.

3.12 Data analysis

Data analysis in a qualitative research is an on-going process because data collection and analysis go hand-in-hand. Throughout the data collection process, researchers keep track of emerging themes, concepts and propositions and begin to make sense out of data (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Since I had read a lot about facilitation, my categories were informed by the literature I had read. I also followed aspects of inductive process of data analysis to analyse the data. This process was described by McMillan & Schumacher (2014, p.395) as a "…systematic process of coding, categorising and interpreting data to provide explanations of a single phenomenon of interest.'' This process gradually moves from specific data to generalised categories and patterns. The process is made up of overlapping phases because the researcher constantly double-checks and refines analysis and interpretation as the researcher move to abstract ideas. Making sense of data is mainly dependent upon the researcher's tolerance to revisit data until the analysis is complete. After data collection, I had to make sense of the data by focusing my interest on facilitators and aspects of facilitation for inclusive education. Facilitator roles that emerged from the findings were broken down into smaller manageable roles.

Since this study was a qualitative research, qualitative data analysis methods were implemented. Six steps of analysing data proposed by Creswell (2012) were used and these ways are described below. Data was organised and stored through transcription of interviews. Thereafter data was sorted and coded according to major organising themes. Coding of data using coloured sticky notes enabled big chunks of information to be easily organised (Bell, 2005). Coding entails bringing together and analysing all data bearing themes, ideas, concepts, interpretations and propositions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The open coding system was used whereby the researcher went through the transcript line by line and all bits of information that corresponded were labelled by highlighting and writing notes outside the margin and noting new ones that emerged during the process. These codes were sorted into coding categories by assembling all coded data into broader themes of the study which formed major ideas in the data base (Creswell, 2012). Coding was considered by Wilson (2009) as more than labelling but lifting specific points made by the participants to a more generalised conceptual plane. Data that was left out was revisited and further fitted into existing categories or came up with new categories. This process was referred to as data refinement by Taylor and Bogdan (1984). Analysis was done using figures, tables and descriptions. Triangulation was done to validate the accuracy of what was obtained from interviews and observations thus improving the creditability of the research findings.

3.13 Trustworthiness and credibility

Trustworthiness determines the value of qualitative research (Moton & Babbie, 2001). In this study, trustworthiness was ensured by using simple language that could easily be comprehended by the participants and rephrasing of questions if the interview respondents did not quite get the question. Probing was used to get accurate information and the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim thus improving on the trustworthiness of the collected data.

The trustworthiness and credibility of the study is dependent upon steps of data collection and the accuracy of the findings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). It is determined by the relationship between research findings, claims and the reality of the world. Babbie (2010) and McMillan and Schumacher (2014) concur that, participants competence may influence research data. These factors could be participants' educational level, state of physical and mental health and narrative skills.

Credibility

Credibility is one aspect of trustworthiness. 'Does it 'ring' true?' was a question posed by Babbie and Mouton (2001) to emphasise credibility of research findings. In this study, credibility of the study was ensured and enhanced by employing various methods of data collection together with audio-recorded PLC facilitator interviews and audio-recordings of the PLC sessions. This was in line with Babbie and Mouton (2001) who highlighted that credibility is achieved through prolonged engagement with participants and pursuing interpretations in different ways. Findings from these methods were triangulated to improve credibility of findings by comparing data from transcriptions and field notes. Transcriptions helped improve transparency because it is easily accessible and help the researcher identify gaps between notes and transcriptions.

I took into cognisance the aspect of disconfirming data by disregarding isolated or once-off occurrences in the data analysis. Occurrences that were notable in more than one facilitator were considered to lend credibility to the study. This was achieved by going over the audio-recorded tapes and transcripts several times before making a decision of what is to be taken in or disregarded.

3.14 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the research methodology of my study. This study took the qualitative approach. Comprehensive sampling was used to select PLCs' facilitators and teachers as PLCs' participants respectively. Data was collected through semi-structured individual interviews of facilitators, 2015 PLC observation and transcription for 2105 PLC sessions were used. I have discussed the strengths and limitations of the qualitative research using characteristics of a case study. I outlined the advantages and disadvantages of the data collection methods that I used in this study. The steps for data analysis, ethical considerations and limitations of the study were highlighted.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

4. Introduction

This chapter reports and analyses the findings of the categories that emerged from data collection methods used in this study. I used interviews, observations and audio-recorded transcripts to gather the necessary data to describe the role of a facilitator in professional learning communities for inclusive education. The data collection methods used in this study were discussed in detail in the previous chapter (Chapter three). Themes that emerged from data were broken down into smaller manageable categories as shall be discussed in this chapter. I shall begin by giving a description of the participants in my study and the description of the process followed to identify categories that emerged. Finally, I will simultaneously present and discuss the findings.

There are some similarities and differences between my study and Brodie's study (2016). Both studies were focused on facilitation of PLCs however, Brodie's study (2016) entailed watching and discussing recordings from community meetings and enacting the observed practices with facilitators. The aim was to understand and address learners' mathematical errors. In my study the focus was on facilitation of PLCs for inclusive education. The Wits university team convened facilitators' meetings prior to the PLC sessions. In these meetings an inclusive strategy would be discussed usually with the aid of a video and notes or hand-outs. Sometimes the facilitators would request to watch the video again to enable them to have a thorough understanding of the strategy. This would be followed by a discussion on the strategy and clarification by the Wits staff if need be. The facilitators would meet with their respective PLC groups after the Wits staff and PLC facilitators' meeting. More often than not the Wits coordinator would introduce the strategy and the same video watched by the facilitators would be shown to the whole staff component and notes or hand-outs would be handed out to the teachers as well. This process would then be followed by a group discussion amongst the PLC members led by the facilitators.

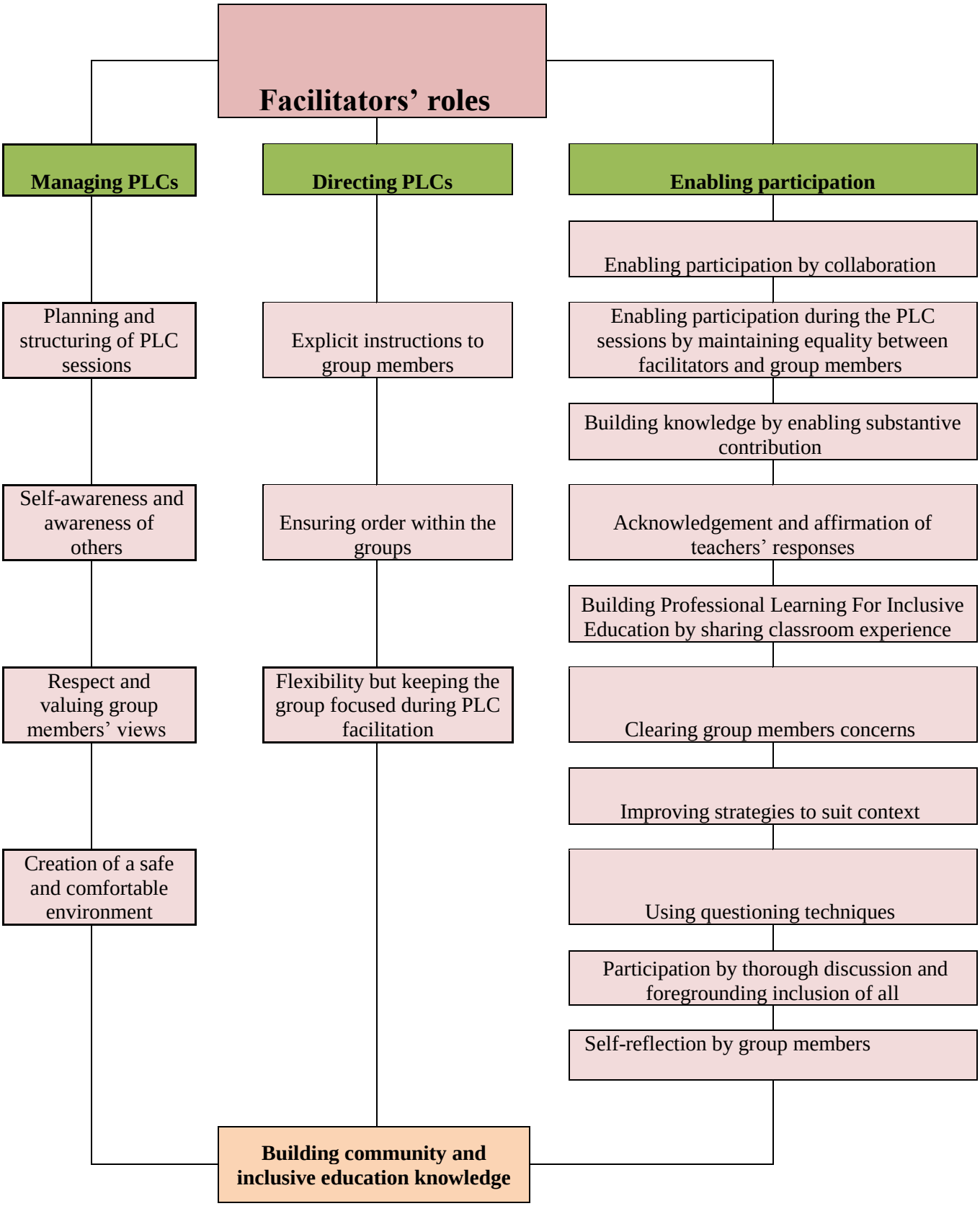
4.1 Findings

This study focused on the role of the facilitator in PLC for inclusive education as the leaders of the communities of practice. Facilitators demonstrated different facilitation roles through several ways. They created a relaxed environment built on trust and willingness to learn from diversity through sharing classroom experiences. These facilitator roles had an impact on the

PLCs of either building community or building knowledge for inclusive education. By assuming these roles, facilitators demonstrated leadership that had direct impact on PLCs. This was consistent with Napier and Gershenfield (1983) who articulated that leadership of a group is more of an art than a skill and is crucial as it greatly influences what happens in a group.

The roles of facilitators of PLCs for inclusive education move from the generic roles of facilitators to more specific roles with specific outcomes. Facilitation of PLCs requires sophisticated skills to strike a balance between learning and community over and above managing the PLCs. Striking such a balance resonated with Napier and Gershenfield (1983) positioned facilitators as working all the time, noting missing functions in the group, understanding what is happening at content level to bring about transformation. In Brodie's study of facilitation (2016) there was development of facilitation guidelines with moves that facilitators could use to maintain the conversation in PLCs. The facilitation guidelines had suggestions of what to do and what not to do in a conversation. Brodie (2016) identified three main categories of PLC facilitation namely process, content and community. The facilitators' roles in my study are illustrated by the Figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4. 1 Snapshot of research findings



There were several facilitator roles noted but these roles were narrowed down to three main roles depicted in Figure 4.1 above. These roles are managing PLCs, directing PLC sessions and enabling participation of group members. These three main roles had sub-roles that ultimately led to building of community and inclusive education knowledge.

During the individual interviews, facilitators mentioned the roles they play as they facilitate PLCs. Observation of PLC sessions and analysis of transcripts, enabled me to check for consistency between what facilitators said in the interviews and what transpired in the sessions. The roles of facilitators identified either built community or inclusive education knowledge or both. Before delving into the findings I will highlight what is meant by community and inclusive education knowledge building.

4.1.1Building community

Community building entails setting the climate of the group so that group members develop a sense of belonging that will result in making group members relaxed, feel free to share and also provide opportunities to learn. Brodie (2016) observed that community awareness emanate from sensing the need of working together for a common goal. I highlighted in the literature review chapter that the facilitator is regarded as a team builder who engages group members and generates confidence and trust amongst group members (Rogers, 1971). In the process of building community the facilitator also effectively handles conflict (Wood, 2007). Managing conflict ensures that the group remains intact focusing on a common goal in this case, professional learning for inclusive education.

4.1.2 Building inclusive education knowledge

As highlighted earlier in the preceding chapters, one of the challenges hindering implementation of inclusive education was teachers' inadequate knowledge to teach inclusively (Eloff & Kgwete, 2007). This implies that some teachers did not have the knowledge of inclusive teaching and learning strategies. The focus of the PLCs that were conducted on the school where this study was carried out focused on inclusive teaching and learning strategies. The knowledge that the teachers got could then be translated into classroom practice. I now move on to discuss the roles assumed by the PL facilitators.

4.2.1 Managing PLC group dynamics

Managing of PLC sessions was reported as important by all three facilitators. Management of PLCs helped facilitators to keep PLCs productive by achieving what they were set to achieve. There were several actions undertaken by facilitators that had to do with managing of PLCs with an effect on either building community or professional learning for inclusive education as shall be discussed.

4.2.1.1 Planning and structuring of PLC sessions

Planning entailed taking into consideration what was discussed in the facilitators meeting with Wits University team prior to the PLC session. Sihle had the following to say in an interview regarding the planning role.

"You must be able to plan and structure your meeting – how you are going to, how are you going to tackle it and how are you going to discuss with your people that you are facilitating. And how are you going to drag them in order to be part, to participate.''

By making reference to ''dragging'' group members so that they are part of the group, the facilitator exhibited her leadership role in trying to make all group members feel that they belong to the group. The excerpt shows how the facilitator plans to manage and set goals for her group thus contributing to building the community.

Upon asking the facilitators what they do with information shared by the Wits team, two of the facilitators had the following to say:-

Nomsa: I'm going to plan further…to recap, to keep on asking questions based on what you have done if it is going to help you achieve or have a fruitful conversation, or fruitful goals.

Sihle: Um, as a teacher ma'am, eh you bring in, you take what you were given by the Wits people and then as a teacher it automatically come that you need to plan. And while you are even sitting at home thinking of the meeting that you are going to have with the people . You plan on how you are going to tackle whatever, skills that you have been given by the Wits people.

The excerpts above demonstrate that the facilitators acknowledged the knowledge they got from Wits team. The facilitators reported that they went further to add onto what they would have received from the facilitators' meeting by planning on how they would facilitate their PLCs. Nomsa elaborated how planning was intended to improve the quality of the PLC sessions. Nomsa's report was more on community building as she stressed on having a fruitful conversation with group members while on the other hand, Sihle was inclined to both building the community and professional knowledge which she acknowledged (in her report above) was given by the Wits University team. The following snippets from Sihle and Fiona demonstrated how the facilitators' meetings contributed to the knowledge base of teachers on inclusive strategies necessitated by the facilitators' planning.

Snippet 1-Sihle

Facilitator: Cooperative learning is a method of teaching and learning in which learners work together to explore a question or create a meaningful project or task. So when we talk about cooperative learning we're talking about a group work but in this group work what is the role of the teacher ? What is the role of the child or learner?

Teacher 1: Mmm

Facilitator: A facilitator doesn't teach but a facilitator just gives guidelines…

Teacher 2: Okay

Facilitator: …here and there. That way. I think that's where we as teachers most of the time lack in. When we give group work, we give group work and then we go back to the table and do something else, do marking or anything.

Here the facilitator was teaching group members how to effectively implement cooperative learning and what teachers should refrain from. The teaching that facilitator did during facilitation could be attributed to planning that the facilitator did after the facilitators meeting with the Wits team. The facilitator did not distance herself from what the teachers were doing wrongly. She made herself part of the problematic practice thus avoiding putting the blame

on the teachers excluding the facilitator so that it would be noted that all of the teachers including the facilitator needed change on their teaching strategies. This was consistent with DBE and DHE (2011) who described facilitators as assuming dual roles as learners and as experts.

Facilitators are deemed experts because they contribute their knowledge and as learners because they deepen their understanding through interaction with other facilitators. Facilitators confirmed how the facilitators' meetings with Wits staff were beneficial to them. After the facilitators' meetings, individual facilitators revisited the strategies and decided how to introduce and discuss inclusive teaching and learning strategies with their respective groups. By so doing, the facilitators brought with them expert knowledge and strategies to impart to other group members.

The following was a discussion between Sihle and group members during a PLC session demonstrating the facilitator contributing towards teachers' professional knowledge.

Snippet 2- Sihle

Facilitator: You have to plan, plan your lessons beforehand

Teacher 1: Mmm

Facilitator: Collect your resources

Teacher 2: In time

Facilitator: Have different activities when pairing because even though they are paired, there are those who are slow.

Teacher 1: Mmm

Facilitator: When you prepare your activities they must have the right activities according to the learning abilities.

Teacher 2: And make sure that the activities that you are choosing for them are going to lead to learning outcomes.

Facilitator: Remember at the end of the day you want to reach the goal.

In another transcript analysis on two occurrences, the facilitator directly taught the group members as follows:

Snippet 3- Fiona

''You correct misunderstandings and misconceptions and ask what supports learners' thinking and learning. How did you do this? How did you get the answers? So that the learner can explain whatever he or she has done''

The above dialogue illustrates how facilitator brought in expert knowledge to improve and emphasise the effectiveness of inclusive teaching strategies. Although group members have some knowledge on inclusive teaching and learning strategies, they look up to the facilitator for knowledge and direction. Facilitators therefore act as resource people who the group members look up to. For teachers to look up to the facilitator means that the facilitator needs to invest time and resources in planning for the PLC sessions.

Fiona acknowledged the role played by facilitators as experts who helped other teachers. Discussing how to implement Think-Pair-Share, the facilitator highlighted to the group members that, some learners cannot learn in big groups hence the need to pair the learners. Teachers were encouraged to alternate the criteria for pairing learners so that the 'fast learners' or friends are not always together all the time. During individual interviews, Fiona explained her role as that of helping other teachers as follows;

Snippet 4- Fiona

"My role is to assist, is to assist other teachers in understanding what is actually happening in the PLC. And not only helping, but sharing ideas with other teachers to enable them to, to teach or to work positively in the teaching environment"

Fiona acknowledged that, as a facilitator she has the role of assisting others. She assisted through teaching group members because she had more information on inclusive teaching strategies from the meetings between facilitators and Wits team. Taking and presenting the ideas from the Wits University team as they are without some form of planning could hinder the facilitator's assisting process.

Even though the facilitators had roles to play of assisting others, the facilitators did not know it all. This was demonstrated when one facilitator corrected herself after she had used derogatory language that has negative connotations as in the dialogue below;

Facilitator: I put the clever one

Teacher1: Mmm

Facilitator: with the stupid one. Sorry not stupid.

Some teachers: [Laugh]

Facilitator: [Laughs] with the slow ones

Teacher 2: Not the slow ones, correction

The above excerpt shows how facilitator was on the lookout of language that may be counter-productive to the notion of inclusive education that all group members needed to guard against. Even though facilitator was on the lookout for language, there were instances where the facilitator also used unacceptable terms such as 'slow learners' as alluded to in the extract above. Unfortunately, that term went unnoticed and was not corrected in the session. This demonstrated that inclusive education acceptable terms were not always upheld by both the facilitators and the teachers. It also resonated with findings by Cereseto (2016) that learning is a slow process. Though facilitators corrected some unacceptable terms in inclusive education some terms went unnoticed and not corrected.

4.2.1.2 Self-awareness and awareness of others

All facilitators highlighted the importance of self-awareness and awareness of others when planning for PLC sessions. Facilitators explained how knowledge of self and attributes of individual group members could help inform planning. The attributes of individual group members could enhance or deter PLC progress. Whilst discussing Think-pair-share, Sihle demonstrated how learners should be encouraged to share, respect and listen to one another in contrast to what she did in her PLC sessions. Sihle acknowledged how she could go on talking without giving other group members a chance to speak.

Sihle: …take turns because like, like me I can talk and talk non-stop, forgetting you that you have to talk. We must be able to teach them that we must be able to listen to another person.

Teacher: Listen to another person, mmm

The excerpt above had two-fold effect. It built both community and professional learning respectively. Whilst the facilitator was encouraging introspection into self and awareness of others, she was discouraging dominance of PLC sessions through knowledge of self. The facilitator was also necessitating learning of what should transpire in the classroom as teachers teach learners to share, listen and respect one another.

Although Sihle had mentioned that her talking non-stop could deter other group members from contributing their ideas, upon further observation of her sessions, she was the most engaging facilitator. This could be attributed to that she knew her personality as an individual. Without self-awareness this could have been difficult to realise and address. Self-awareness of the facilitator and awareness of the individual teachers was therefore pivotal in the success of PLCs in an inclusive education context.

4.2.1.3 Respect and valuing group members' views

Respect of one another was another aspect of managing PLCs observed during the sessions. It had the effect of building community and professional learning. Not only was the facilitator respected but respect was reciprocated by all group members. Facilitators had also mentioned the value of respect of group members in the event of different views. They argued respectfully. Upon being asked how she would react to members with different view to hers as facilitator, Nomsa pointed out that, she had to respect the views of other teachers and not undermine group members simply because they were not facilitators. Fiona highlighted that respect was the responsibility of the group. She further pointed out that, respect guaranteed safety in the group where members would feel safe to share anything, thus impacting positively on participation. Sihle demonstrated respect by addressing teachers as "ma'am'', "sir" or "sister". She also apologised when she interrupted someone and later went on to give them a chance to say what they wanted to say. In Sihle's sessions, the teachers put their hands up when they wanted to say something. This showed that respect was actually a mutual aspect among group members.

In addition to that, in one of the individual interviews, Nomsa shared that a successful facilitator is respectful of the group members' views because each individual is unique and comes with a different line of thinking. Valuing and respecting individuals' different lines of thinking contributed to building knowledge because all group members would make contributions without fear of being embarrassed. She explained that, if the group members' views are valued and respected then it aids participation as the group members will actively

participate. Nomsa added that a facilitator should be approachable and able to take initiative by approaching teachers that may be presenting with problems but not seeking help from fellow colleagues.

Consistency between what Nomsa said in her individual interview and what transpired in her PLC session was registered when it came to respecting the views of other teachers. Her session was one of the sessions where group members freely shared their experiences even of failure to implement learnt strategies. The teachers expressed how overwhelmed they were with a lot of work for example when it came to catering for the needs of different groups of learners. Below is an excerpt from Nomsa's group members;

Teacher 1: And, um, we wanna have different activities .I remember last time we talked about the different activities but I've never done that, maybe someone can…?

Teacher 2: I do it with, I only manage to do it in Maths. In Maths I have 3 different work for the slow learners, the middle and the fine, the coping learners. So it helps, although it's time consuming but it helps.

The above comments from the teachers in Nomsa's group are an indication of the outcome when contributions are valued. Group members will be free to share experiences without fear of being judged by the facilitator or other group members. This finding was consistent with the findings of Smith (2016) in the study of building sustainable professional learning communities. In this study participants acknowledged that they felt safe emotionally and psychologically to share and to differ in opinion because activities were not designed to belittle or embarrass the PLC members.

4.2.1.4 Creation of a safe and comfortable environment

Facilitators created safe and comfortable environment where group members would feel safe and trust each other. This aspect of facilitation enhanced community building. Nomsa's sessions were characterised by informality. This was demonstrated by more use of vernacular than in any other groups. Creation of a safe and comfortable environment enhanced teacher learning in a community where members share common values. Highlighting the impact of learning in a non-threatening environment, Ainscow, Howes, Farrell and Frankham (2003) noted that teachers feel comfortable engaging in a discussion at a more general level. This

enables teachers to clear anxieties about working with children from diverse backgrounds. A non-threatening environment and informality was applauded by Miles and Ainscow (2011) who maintained that, use of humour and some degree of informality was desirable. Miles and Ainscow (2011) argued how humour worked as a hook on which to hang some understanding of more serious content since the content will be remembered as much as the joke itself. By using vernacular, the group members in Nomsa's group were at ease with engaging with each other and expressing their views freely.

Fiona centralised being non-judgemental as an exceptional skill that enabled her to effectively facilitate in her group. She explained that being non-judgemental reassured safety of group members to share successes and failures without fear of being judged. Being non-judgemental was therefore an aspect of facilitation that achieved community building.

Introducing one PLC session, Fiona said;

Facilitator: …So the main thing today is we are going to discuss about the strategies that they used in that class. Which were the, the most effective strategies you thought worked in that classroom and then take them, think of your own classroom while you are discussing. Or still if, if you don't apply them then it's time you check and then apply them. So first we need to, to, to identify the strategies…

Teacher 1: Mmm

Facilitator: You can take notes at the same time. What strategies did you find work in that video?

Teacher 2: It's for them to work in pairs. It's easy for them because they are able to help one another.

Fiona was not judgemental neither did she take it for granted that all teachers had implemented the strategy in question. She gave room for other teachers to contribute by not being judgemental.

During the individual interviews Sihle had explained that she creates a safe and comfortable environment in her group by use of humour and ice-breakers. However, some inconsistencies were observed between what the facilitators said during the interviews and what was observed during the PLC sessions. However, upon observing Sihle's PLC meetings, there was no evidence of use of humour or ice-breakers. Non-use of humour by facilitators in sessions could be attributed to the effect of the presence of the observer that may have negatively affected facilitators. It was noted in the research methodology chapter that observations come with their limitations. My presence could have influenced the proceedings in the PLCs' sessions. Tension arising due to an awareness of being observed may have had a strong sense of over performing due to being conscious of being inspected (Somekh & Lewin, 2011). Sihle did not use humour most of the times though her sessions were characterised by a high degree of teacher engagement. The group members in Sihle's group participated quite well with Sihle spontaneously calling on a specific group member to respond.

There was some element of informality in Fiona's sessions. While discussing the use of classroom questioning techniques, the facilitator posed a question to the group members using sarcasm on how they ask questions in their classes as follows.

Facilitator: And sometimes you find this child is passive, passive, passive.

Teacher 1: Mmm

Facilitator: Just ask them then you will see they are lost. So questioning those it doesn't mean you're always questioning the ***papanis*** *(sarcastic way of referring to naughty and clever people)*

Teacher 2: (Laughs)

Facilitator: Ja

Teacher: sometimes you stop them…

Teacher 3: Mmmm

Teacher 4: Those who are disturbing

Facilitator: Ja, you call the ones that are sitting like this (makes a sitting posture)

The dialogue above and what followed thereafter showed that the group members were at ease sharing information. Furthermore, Fiona often encouraged and motivated her group to 'put on their thinking caps' whenever she wanted them to fully engage and focus on the session. Having discussed how planning the PLC sessions achieved either building knowledge or professional learning. I will now move on to discuss the facilitation role of giving direction.

4.2.2 Giving direction to the PLCs

Another way of managing PLCs that had an effect of building community that unfolded from the findings was possession of the ability to determine the course to be taken by PLC sessions. This entailed structuring and be firm enough to give direction to be taken by a discussion. Giving direction to PLC groups concurred with Wood (2007) postulated that teachers in PLCs look up to the facilitator for guidance and if the facilitator delivers unclear or mixed messages the group members are likely to exhibit boredom and resistance openly. Facilitators used various ways to influence the course of action to be taken by their sessions to be discussed below.

4.2.2.1 Explicit instructions to group members

It was the role of the facilitator to give direction to the PLC sessions. Sihle had outlined during the individual interviews that she gives clear instructions to direct her sessions. To look for consistency from what Sihle said in the interviews and what happened on the ground during facilitation of PLCs, I observed Sihle facilitating her group. There was evidence of explicit explanations given to the group members. Sihle gave a clear explanation of the course that was to be taken in the PLC session. Below is an excerpt of how the facilitator explained what was going to happen;

Facilitator: Okay, we're just doing the recap of what we have been taught or what we have been workshopped, workshopped about Think-Pair-Share. I just want to know from you. Have you used Think-Pair-Share in your class?

Teacher 1: Yes we did.

Teacher 2: Yes we did.

Facilitator: How did it go?

Teacher 1: It went very well. Like when we took the learners to the carpet, it helps…It helps you as a teacher to have all the learners' attention.

Facilitator: I just want to know from you ma'am, what worked well when you used the Think-Pair-Share?

The facilitator did not just plunge into the day's discussion. She recapped and brainstormed on the previous strategy to check if it had been implemented, how it worked in terms of successes and failures. The facilitator created rapport with group members first and then later on got into the business of the day. Creating rapport and giving explicit instructions was geared towards building community to make all group members part and parcel of the community.

4.2.2.2 Ensuring order within the groups

Facilitators managed to bring order to the sessions. In one of the transcript analysed, the group members were tasked to select an inclusive teaching and learning strategy and discuss how it could be used to teach a topic of their choice. Group members agreed on a topic and tackled it for a while then another teacher wanted to change the topic. The facilitator picked up the argument and diversion from issues under discussion and redirected the teachers back to the topic under discussion. There was tension between what the facilitator wanted to discuss and what the teachers wanted. The observed tension was consistent with Brodie and Borko (2016) who noted that the existence of tension between some key elements in various aspects of PLC such as how professional learn, how their current knowledge is valued and how they move beyond their current knowledge. The way the facilitator managed the argument demonstrated the influence facilitators may have over group members. This influence had the potential to negatively influence the productivity of the discussion and learning. This was however inconsistent with findings by Ceresto (2016) who arguing for participation generally, reported on a study aimed at establishing the extent to which PLCs could be vehicles for teachers learning of knowledge for teaching. She noted that learning is likely to be productive if the learning agenda is not imposed upon the teachers and when they participate voluntarily.

The dialogue below is from a July 2015 transcript analysis on Think-Pair-Share. A group of teachers were arguing about the question number they were supposed to tackle. The facilitator was firm to ensure that the group engaged in a fruitful discussion.

Facilitator: Let's go to another question. What should the teacher do if a pair of learners end up arguing or fighting about something?

Teachers kept arguing however, the facilitator managed to get the teachers to agree on a way forward and eventually got the teachers to meaningfully respond to the question. By so doing the facilitator managed to contribute towards building the community amongst PLC group members. From this finding it can be discussed that the facilitator had influence over what and how the teachers learnt.

4.2.2.3 Flexibility but keeping the group focused during PLC facilitation

The facilitators were flexible yet managed to keep group members on track. Flexibility went a long way in building the community aspect of PLCs but at the same time enhanced the quality of discussions during PLC sessions. All facilitators managed to keep the sessions flexible but under control with focus thrust on the inclusive education teaching strategies. Doing such was congruent with Katz et al (2009 p. 23) who observed that PLCs need a clear and defensible focus of their work. While observing Sihle's session when they were discussing cooperative learning, there was a time when group members dwelt so much on the disadvantages of group work. The facilitator allowed them to do so for some time but later signalled that it was time to move on after observing that the discussion was becoming unproductive. The dialogue extract below illustrate how the facilitator managed to bring the group members back on track after the discussion became unproductive:

Facilitator: At the same time just state the problems and at the same time please state the advantages of working in groups.

Teacher 1: Ja no.

Facilitator: because there are advantages. Let's not look at the bad side only.

Teacher 1: Definitely, definitely. Working in groups is very helpful. One thing that you are trying to inculcate to these young ones when they work in groups is that you cannot

work alone all the time…You need some people to work with , cooperation is very important

It is notable from the above that though the teachers were now focusing on the disadvantages which could have made cooperative learning undesirable, the facilitator tactfully managed to have the teachers discuss about the advantages instead. By so doing facilitator maximised on time and at the same time afforded group members ample time to allow ideas to incubate (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) and for teachers to share and benefit from each other's experience.

Ensuring that group members remained focused contributed to building community and knowledge. Maintaining focus helped to keep members aligned to the matter under discussion. There were instances where the group members diverted from the crux of the matter under discussion and it was the facilitator's responsibility to bring back focus where it was meant to be. Whilst observing Fiona's PLC session, there were times when teachers generalised their responses but the facilitator kept probing further for specific responses. By so doing, Fiona managed to keep the group focused on the task at hand thus enhancing building of knowledge. During observation of Fiona's session, the group slightly diverted from the topic by discussing other strategies that were not the focus of the day. The facilitator gave a reasonable amount of time to that but she later successfully managed to get the group members to come back to the strategy under discussion. By letting group members discuss what they wanted for some time, Fiona was consistent with Walton (2016) who highlighted that teachers should be drawn to participate in PLCs by the registered value they find in PLCs and not because they are required to do so. The same was observed in Sihle's meeting as well. After a lengthy discussion on how they implemented the strategy, Think-Pair-Share, the facilitator noted that the discussion was becoming unproductive and signalled that it was time to move on. The facilitator's response was as follows:-

Facilitator: … what didn't work well when you put them together for a long time,

they relax, they get used of each other **….** *Now let's move.*

Did it help learners to learn, this Think-Pair-Share?

Teacher 1: Yes

Group members were made to focus on how the strategy helped the learners learn. The answer yes was not enough for the facilitator and she requested the teacher to elaborate further.

Keeping focus goes beyond the PLC sessions as facilitators remain observant of teacher practice outside the PLC sessions. Nomsa indicated the importance of being observant and keeping the focus on teachers. She confirmed this in the individual interviews that some teachers have problems but are either shy or do not want to come up front and ask for help. Nomsa as a facilitator said she took it upon herself to approach the teachers and render help.

I will now move on to discuss the third role of facilitators that emerged from the findings, enabling facilitation.

4.2.3 Enabling participation

Engagement of the PLC group members was at various levels and geared towards building community and professional learning. The principal of the school where this study was conducted and all facilitators encouraged group members to participate during the PLC meetings. Engagement of all group members in their learning during PLC sessions was in consensus with Brodie (2013) who envisaged that, learning as a result of participating in PLCs is collective learning for a cohesive group. It is experienced by the teachers, learners, leaders and schools. Additionally, Brodie (2016) noted affordances such as interpersonal and social constructs that may enhance the capacity of PLC members to work together. This aspect of facilitation enabled facilitators to achieve community building through engagement of group members. Caution had to be taken on how information was relayed to the group members for effective communication to take place. Confirming that Napier and Gershenfeld (1983) articulated that, how information is said, what is said, who replies and tone of the reply are key process skills in the effectiveness of a group.

Earlier in the literature review (Chapter two), it was highlighted that introduction of inclusive education in South Africa was met with various challenges. These challenges included little collaboration due to negative attitudes held by some teachers or principals (Pather, 2011), resistance and non-implementation (Walton, 2011). There was evidence of collaboration amongst the PLC group members in this study and implementation of inclusive education of the school where this study was conducted. The principal was supportive as she availed herself for some PLC sessions and she also contributed her views during the sessions. What

the principal did resonated with Miles and Ainscow (2011) who noted that, schools with inclusive cultures are likely to be characterised by the presence of leaders committed to inclusive values.

4.2.3.1 Enabling participation by collaboration

There was collaboration between the following, Wits university team and the school at large, Wits team and facilitators and between facilitators and group members. Collaboration means more than just relationships; rather it entails intensive interaction that engages educators in dynamic interpretation and evaluation of practice (Katz, Earl & Ben Jaafar, 2009) this resonated with Dufour, Dufour, Eaker and Many (2010) who confirmed that collaboration is the engine that drives the PLC effort. Resonating with DuFour et al (2010) is Brodie (2016) who puts forward that collaboration enable participants to eliminate potential barriers and misconceptions through negotiation and interpersonal skills. During the individual interviews, Nomsa explained in an interview that, as a result of this collaboration, new facilitators did not feel as if they had been thrown at the deep end as long as they attended the facilitators' meetings and follow what they would have been given by the Wits staff. I had the following conversation with Nomsa;

Interviewer: What advice would you give a new PLC facilitator?

Nomsa: To, to, to really attend the meeting and make sure that, um, whatever documents we do have or they gave it, they must make sure that they use it.

Upon being asked of the benefits of facilitator's meeting Sihle acknowledged the benefits as follows;

There have been benefits on how to approach your classroom, on how to approach your colleagues and on how to, to, to care for one another because as colleagues sometimes we don't understand that my struggle is your struggle.

From the extracts above, both Nomsa and Sihle acknowledged the value of collaboration and information obtained from collaboration with the Wits university team. Nomsa acknowledged the professional learning benefits that were achieved from the documents handed over to them during the facilitators meeting with the Wits staff. Sihle on the other hand,

acknowledged both community building and building learning for inclusive education from collaboration with the Wits university team.

4.2.3.2 Enabling participation during the PLC sessions by maintaining equality between facilitators and group members

Facilitators endeavoured to ensure that there would be participation during their sessions by how they positioned themselves. The facilitators strived to maintain equality between themselves and their fellow teachers rather than impose themselves as the superiors during the sessions. Equality necessitated meaningful dialogue between group members and the facilitator. During one of the sessions Sihle was heard placing herself at the same level with the group members even though she was a facilitator. She said;

Facilitator: Oh okay , thank you very much for the input my colleagues, it's really good to see the input and the feedback of what was happening, you know. And how we need to move to the next step of co-operative learning.

In the extract above Sihle made use of ''we'' as opposed to ''you''. This exhibited that the group was a community where each individual occupied the same level as the other and with shared goals.

Facilitators demonstrated that they did not possess all the knowledge by virtue of being facilitators hence they were not superiors over other group members. Supporting the stance of not knowing it all, two of the facilitators acknowledged during the individual interviews that they did not have all the answers to issues that could arise. Fiona had this to say

"I learn a lot. For instance, last time I mentioned that in my group I normally have grade (grade witheld) teachers, I learn a lot from them as well. And another thing is they don't undermine me as a grade (grade withheld) who is facilitating them.

The above extract is an indication of how the facilitator also learns from fellow group members. Although facilitators acted as the experts of inclusive teaching and learning strategies, there were instances when they also learnt from the group members as they facilitated. Fiona acknowledged that her position as a facilitator did not make her a better teacher compared to the other group members. She had this to say in an interview;

" *I don't show that I'm the leader or I'm the boss of this group- we are all equal in the group and I set my rules or , or instructions clear to them that we are here to help each other, nobody knows better than another person. We are all here at the same level and we are all here to help each other.''*

Sihle added how she sometimes had to consult the internet or her colleagues even though she was the facilitator. The facilitators therefore did not only promote the knowledge of inclusive education knowledge in group members by posing as experts but they also learnt from the group members contributing to building of knowledge as well.

4.2.3.3 Building knowledge by enabling substantive contribution

The facilitators encouraged the group members to substantiate contributions thereby engaging in meaningful discussions. Teachers were encouraged to reflect on what was happening in their classes as they implemented learnt inclusive teaching strategies. Sihle was very good at this as she would use words like '*motivate your answer'* or '*please elaborate'.* Below is an example from Sihle's group after a teacher had reported that she was using visuals and cards to teach reading.

Facilitator: Thank you very much sis {name withheld}. Ma'am {name withheld}, can you please assist? Okay as you are teaching which cards?

The teacher to whom the question had been directed to was able to elaborate her answer. It became clearer to me as the observer, the facilitator and other teachers as to what cards the teacher was referring to. The facilitator even pushed the group members further as illustrated below;

Facilitator: I just want to know from you ma'am is it, what worked for well when you used the Think-Pair- Share?

Teacher 1: Ja it helped me but not all of the learners mmm…

Faciliator: Okay when you say 'but' I just want to know the but part.

Teacher 1: Okay , the but part is that if they are reading together if maybe I combine the one who can read and the one who cannot read , the one who can read, reads alone and the other one is not reading, she is depending on who is reading.

The above dialogue shows a meaningful dialogue necessitated the role played by the facilitator as she requested the teachers to substantiate their answers. Once the facilitator showed genuine interest in the responses of group members, the group members opened up to share their classroom concerns, challenges and successes. Substantiating responses went a long way to build learning for inclusive education.

4.2.3.4 Acknowledgement and affirmation of teachers' responses

Other strategies that enhanced participation ranged from use of interjections, probing, affirmation of teachers' contributions and paraphrasing teachers' responses. Facilitators made use of the technique of calling on group members by name, pin-pointing a particular individual to respond or used words like sis (sister). This worked well in the sense that, when one teacher's name was called out by the facilitator to respond, that very teacher would say something. Calling teachers by name contributed to community building and made group members to be alert throughout the session. This might not have been achieved had the facilitators not called upon group members by name. Some facilitators also used reinforcement of teachers' responses with positive comments such as ''good'' and used rhetorical questions for emphasis. A lot of these strategies were evident from the observed sessions and from transcript analysis. Furthermore, participation during the PLC sessions was aided by that the facilitator continuously made use of interjections such as "*Ja"* and *''mmm''*. Other non-verbal cues such as nodding of the head showed that there was active listening and this encouraged the group members to say more hence aiding acquisition of knowledge for professional learning for inclusive education.

4.2.3.5 Building Professional Learning For Inclusive Education by sharing classroom experience

Facilitators strived to influence group members to actively and effectively participate in discussions that remained productive under the inclusive education domain. The facilitators did this by sharing knowledge from Wits university team and encouraging PLC members to share their classroom experience. Facilitators created a platform where teachers could share how they had implemented inclusive teaching and learning strategies effectively thereby building inclusive education knowledge. In one of the observed sessions facilitated by Fiona, one teacher shared with the group members how she successfully taught addition as follows;-

Teacher 1: In fact, the other day we were doing the three mores and so I started by clapping

1, 2, 3 get the answer 3[claps while she says 1, 2, 3]. So today in our classwork ne, what is 3 more than 52?

Teacher 2: Mmm

Teacher 1: So I told them, whenever they see the more

Some teachers: Mmm

Teacher 1: … they must know , they need to move forward

After that teacher had shared her experience some teachers also opened up to share their varied experience of what was working for them. One teacher commented that some strategies work better when teaching specific subjects, the teacher said "Think-Pair-Share works better when teaching maths not language." However, another teacher said that it still could be implemented with languages especially when teaching reading whereby learners who could read effectively would be paired with learners who struggle to read. Whilst one is reading the other one would be pointing at the words. The value of sharing good practice was emphasised as put across by one facilitator to the group during the session, "And at the end of the day if we share we are equipped.''

As teachers shared their experiences, they agreed that instead of concentrating on learners' answers only, for example when teaching maths learners should be encouraged to explain how they got the answers. Group members were of this idea because it enabled learners to learn as they participated by sharing with the class. Teachers will also be able check if the learners are using the correct method. Allowing learners to share with the class equips other learners with different strategies of getting the answers. What the teachers in this study explained concurred with the findings of Essien (2016, p. 119) who reported that ''Allowing learners to share how they got answers also facilitated co-construction of knowledge by learners and teachers.'' Emphasis was given on how important it was to give all learners a chance to respond in class as opposed to concentrating on those whose hands are always up. Teachers commented on how some learners were passive or reserved and not asking them to say something could hinder the children's learning. A practical maths example was explored during self-reflection by the group members.

Fiona foregrounded the principle of sharing. She gave a vivid comparison of what happens in a PLC and other developmental meetings as follows:-

We go into groups, we discuss, we share rather than any other developmental meetings or whatever, and it's just one person talking. Whether you understand or not, the person just delivers whatever she or he's is delivering and that's it…But with PLC we share ideas, we communicate, you know, we sit as groups; we help each other in our problems that we face in classrooms. It's almost; I can almost say PLC is more practical than theory"

It was notable from the above extract that Fiona was foregrounding the building of community amongst the group members. Fiona made a comparison of the workshop model where the facilitator delivers information which can be viewed as a one-way process with the teachers on the receiving end whereas Fiona viewed PLC as a platform where teachers shared information. Fiona's line of thinking resonated with Ono and Ferreira (2010) who postulated that teacher development workshops have been criticised as brief, fragmented, incoherent encounters that are decontextualized and isolated from real classroom situation. Concurring with the stance of Ono and Ferreira (2010), was Wood (2007) who argued that, teachers should not be passive recipients of others' expertise but instead, they should be actively involved in their learning. Group members were actively involved in the PLCs that I observed. Group members suggested ideas and questioned inclusive teaching strategies.

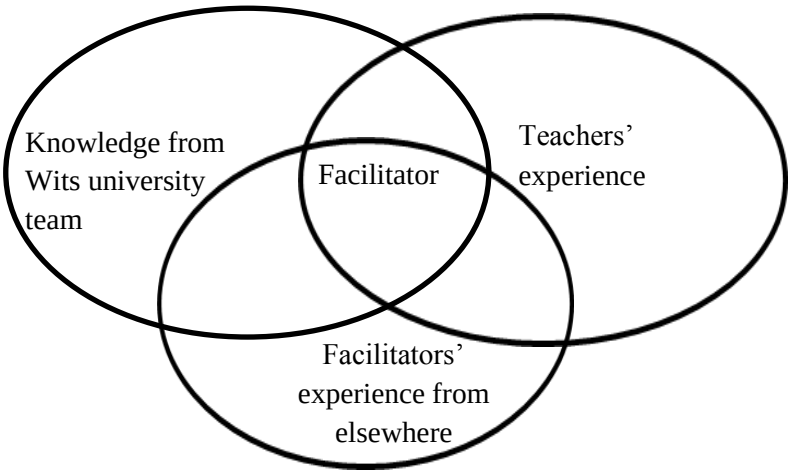
There was congruence between what Fiona said above with regards to building community and what was observed in her PLC sessions and transcript analysis. There is potential that group members learnt from the community as a whole. There were discussions on how to use and improvise strategies to suit the learners' contexts. There is probability that facilitators also learnt from the experiences of other teachers. Sihle explained the essence of sharing by commenting the following:-

"I try my best because I'm new in this thing and you know what they usually say, they have experience. I might have the knowledge, but they have experience. So it's really hard to convince them to try to think in another way but I, I, I for instance we usually, before we do whatever, we watch a video."

Foregrounding the principle of sharing, the facilitator above may have been concerned to be positioned as an expert as it would make her appear to be better than her counterparts as indicated in the above extract. In the extract above, the facilitator acknowledged teachers experience as vital in community building.

From the observation of PLC sessions conducted, it was noted that facilitators were the intersection of teachers experience and knowledge from the Wits university team as shown by Figure 4.2 below. During the PLC sessions, facilitators tried to strike a balance between what they heard learnt from the Wits team together with teachers' knowledge. This was demonstrated when they made constant reference to the videos watched, made direct reference to the hand-outs given and then asked the teachers to bring in their classroom experiences.

Figure 4.2 Facilitator as the link between teachers' experience and Wits university knowledge



The teachers did not come to PLC sessions without knowledge of some teaching strategies. Figure 4.2 shows the relationship between knowledge from Wits University staff, facilitators' knowledge from elsewhere and teachers' experience linked together by the facilitator. It was the facilitators' role to build a professional repertoire of teachers that foregrounds inclusive education. The facilitators would bring their knowledge from elsewhere, knowledge from Wits staff together with teachers' experience to promote inclusive education knowledge and skills which could be translated to practice in the classroom. Facilitators built professional learning for inclusive education in various ways discussed below.

4.2.3.6 Clearing group members concerns

The facilitators attempted to ease the concerns and anxieties that teachers might have with regards to implementation of the inclusive teaching and learning strategies. During the PLC meeting either with the PLC staff or the PLC groups a video was often shown to enable teachers relate to the feasibility of inclusive teaching and learning strategies in the classroom. There were concerns amongst the group members during PLC session observation and

transcript analysis that, the classes in the videos were smaller and availability of resources was different from others. The facilitators here came in as experts, though facilitators refused to embrace this role, and encouraged the teachers to adjust the strategies to suit their context in order to effectively implement the inclusive teaching strategies. A range of alternative ways to effectively implement inclusive teaching and learning strategies were suggested by the facilitators. Below is an extract from Sihle;

… For instance we know that we have the challenges of children who cannot write, did we use the dot matching method in order for those children to complete the word, the alphabet and the words and everything? Uh, did we use the visual arts…because we are doing inclusive education, we want to include everyone into the teaching, to the learning …they cannot be excluded in that learning.

Although some teachers felt that there was a limit to what they could do as far as implementation of inclusive strategies was concerned, facilitators helped teachers to clear these anxieties.

4.2.3.7 Improvising strategies to suit context

Group members sought to improve learnt strategies to suit their school context in terms of availability of resources .In so many instances during two different PLC sessions, the group members discussed ways to improvise inclusive teaching and learning strategies they had learnt about. Doing that was an acknowledgment of the DBE and DHE (2011) premise that, all children can learn when given support and that methodologies need to be changed to meet the needs of the different attitudes and behaviour of all children. The videos demonstrating the inclusive teaching and learning strategies shown by Wits staff influenced group members to want to copy exactly what they seen. In a transcript analysis, a facilitator said;

And also if you look at the clip you see how she also used the different modalities-the seeing, the doing, the talking…So she had all the different, the VAK-visual, auditory, kinaesthetic.

The aim of the teachers in this group was to implement this strategy as shown on the video. However, the teachers reported that it was not always practical to do exactly the same as in the video due to contextual factors such overcrowding, shortage of resources and limited space at their school. Shortage of resources is a real challenge in some South African schools (Pather, 2011) as it is in some parts of the United Kingdom as was confirmed by Miles and Singal (2010) that materials used in some schools are poor and more often than not, resources

are not available. The teachers at the school where this study was conducted reported that shortage of material did not hinder the teachers from implementing good practice as they took it upon themselves to improvise and use what they had. A video was shown on Think-Pair-Share and the teacher in the video called her learners to come sit on a mat, listen to instructions and then go back to work in pairs. The group members began to discuss how and where to make adjustments on what the teacher had done as follows;-

Teacher 1: The practicality of it now in our classes since we are forty something...

Teacher 2: Since…

Facilitator: No, no we can't use the mat. I'm thinking…

Teacher 2: Yes

Facilitator: (Demonstrating)…say it's a desk, it's a desk and it's another desk

Teacher 3: Mmm

Facilitator: We are two, two

Teacher 2: Three, two, two

Facilitator: So like this, these two, you pair them, they work together

Teacher 4: Ja

Teacher 5: So it means we have to change the arrangement.

The teachers were not limited by their contextual factors to implement what they had just watched on the video. As the conversation continued, the group members were coming up with strategies to make the strategy work in their classes despite the limiting factors.

4.2.3.8 Using questioning techniques

Facilitators used open-ended, closed questions and rhetorical questions to enable participation during the sessions. Questions were asked for a variety of reasons that ranged from clarification seeking, developing an idea or ideas or for keeping the teachers on task. During one of the May 2015 discussion on cooperative learning, the facilitator introduced the topic for discussion for that particular day. Thereafter she went further to request group members to discuss different strategies implemented to that date. One teacher responded by

highlighting that she had used concrete material. In order to get further clarification, the facilitator asked;

Facilitator: Concrete material like what?

Teacher 1: Like in art we can use mmm, what is the, them, it's in the arts we can use them.

The…

Teacher 2: Shakers

Teacher 1: The shakers, ne [is it]? The shakers whereby they put the seeds inside the

containers and they can make something like an instrument playing music…

The above question from the facilitator was a clarification seeking question. It improved the clarity of what the teacher was trying to say for the benefit of all group members thus enhancing the building of knowledge for inclusive education. In the dialogue above the teacher had indicated that she was using shakers to teach learners who struggled to write. The facilitator continued with questioning the teacher as follows;

Facilitator: Ma'am, while you were doing that lesson how did the learners who are

struggling to write participate in that then?

Teacher 1: The learners are participating because they can hear the sound of the instruments

and then it's too attractive to them and also encourage them.

The facilitator did not abandon ideas that were brought forward by group members without a thorough discussion of the idea using questioning techniques. As this dialogue developed, the facilitator continued with his questioning techniques which enabled participation that foregrounded inclusive education practice. This showed how facilitators' pursued the teachers' lines of thinking by probing further to make sense out of a response thus improving clarity of responses and improve understanding of inclusive issues.

The questions the facilitators asked during the sessions were geared towards promoting inclusive education knowledge. This was consistent with Brodie (2013) who claimed that a critical interrogation of practice ensures that teachers enhance the learning of all students. Sihle used rhetorical questions and made reference to inclusive education to get the teachers

thinking and reflect on their teaching strategies in relation to inclusive education hence promoting the knowledge of inclusive education. During one PLC session, the facilitator directed a question to a specific teacher and the way the teacher responded exhibited practice of inclusive education by some teachers.

Facilitator: What kind of facilities do you, do you use in order for the children to be inclusive in their own learning so that they can be involved in their learning ma'am?

Teacher 1: Okay, as I'm doing the science subject I think learners are struggling with words because you find that there are difficult words that they have to learn. Imagine a Grade 4 learner reading 'evaporation.' They don't know what's actually that. For them it's a foreign word so I prefer using flash cards where they have to read and talk about the word, and those who understand are the ones that are helping to read the words. And then the other thing I use concrete material.

Both the question and the teacher's response illustrated promotion of inclusive education knowledge as both the facilitator's question and the teacher's response were centred on the achievement of learners by involving and catering for all students. The facilitator developed the dialogue further by requesting the teacher to elaborate on the concrete material.

Rhetorical questions were used to emphasise and reflect on how inclusive teaching strategies were being implemented in class. The following is an excerpt from Sihle.

"Um, we watched the video, the video we watched on the 18th of February, now we want to reflect whether the skills that we got from the video were applied in our classes and how we were able to apply those skills. For instance we know that we have the challenge of children who cannot write, did we use the dot matching method in order for those children to complete the word, the alphabet and the words and everything? Uh, did we use the visual, visual aids…? Did we do actions and life skills, ma'am in order to, you know,

in order for the children to get into …because we are doing inclusive education, we want to include everyone into the teaching, to the learning…"

4.2.3.9 Participation by thorough discussion and foregrounding inclusion of all

The group members had thorough discussions on inclusion for all. The facilitator encouraged group members during the meeting to ensure that all and not some learners are catered for. She said;

Facilitator: So how are we going to approach that assessment? Because we, we have to think of all the learners in class, including [Mary].

Teacher 1: Yes

Teacher 2: So different types of assessment. Maybe you'll give them worksheets to colour

Teacher 1: Yes

Facilitator: But [Mary] cannot identify them so how are you going to help [her]? Because I can draw and then say 'Can you John, colour this because I know that John will be able to identify orange

The discussion above was centred on how best the teachers could cater for all learners by differentiation of assessments. This was based on the premise that all children can learn when given support, accepting that all children are different and that attitudes, behaviour an teaching methodologies need to be changed to meet the needs of all learners (DoE, 2001). Furthermore, ensuring participation of all learners was consistent with the assumption by Ainscow, Howes, Farrell and Frankham (2003) that, the central assumption of educational inclusion is grounded in the presence, participation and achievement of all students. Teachers exhibited evidence that they were building their knowledge for inclusive education by learning how to teach inclusively. This was demonstrated by the shared experiences of registered success in their classrooms. Though there was no first-hand evidence to suggest that inclusive strategies were implemented, there were reports of success in the classrooms.

4.2.4. Self-reflection by group members

The ability of the facilitator to reflect on the proceedings of a session and identify areas of improvement contributed to building the knowledge base. Improvement is important both in the PLC sessions and what happens in the classrooms. It was mentioned earlier that, one facilitator mentioned how she sometimes took initiative to approach teachers who are in need of help in teaching inclusively and render help. The facilitator's role was therefore an intricate process that was on-going.

Facilitators and other teachers encouraged each other to self-reflect the extent to which they implemented learnt strategies to ensure that they cater for all learners. Reflection of practice was foregrounded by Brodie (2013) as a necessary attribute of PLCs as reflection paves way for teachers to be accountable for their actions. Reflection on practice enabled teachers to realise that "children who cannot easily be educated within the school's established routines are not seen as having problems, but as challenging teachers to re-examine their practices in order to make them more responsive and flexible" (Miles & Ainscow, 2011, p. 9). After some group members had given feedback on what they were doing in class, other group members came with suggestions to improve implementation of the strategies. Fiona used this strategy as she facilitated in her group as follows;-

Facilitator: Yes. And then to add to that questioning and answering, I want to share with you this one and you also have to check. Check whether this strategy it's, it's it's what you are doing in class.

Teacher 1: Mmm

Facilitator: Critical

Teacher 2: Ja

Facilitator: Are you implementing it or maybe you find you can go and change here and there?

In another transcript the facilitator reinforced evaluation of implementation of strategies by asking critical questions as follows:

Facilitator: Did learners learn during the activity and how do I know?

Teacher 1: Yes

Facilitator: What values, attitudes need to be reinforced in the classroom to make this activity successful?

Teacher 2: Ja

Facilitator: Learners must respect each other and they must listen

From the dialogues above, it can be noted that in PLCs teachers question their practice, share their experiences and learn from other group members. The group members reflected on practice to ensure that all learners access and participate in learning and at the same time reflection on practice had the potential to inform teachers on needy areas to improve on hence building up on their knowledge for inclusive education.

The group members would reflect and share what worked and what didn't work in their classes as they implemented the inclusive teaching and learning strategies. One teacher in Sihle's group reported on how she had implemented the use of flash cards to help learners who could not read well. The dialogue was as follows;-

Teacher: And with my subject file IsiZulu, I created the chance because I saw that they were unable to identify words and even to write, you know…

Facilitator: Yes sir

Teacher 1: When I made the charts and also giving them mixed words which were written in strips you may call it flashcards

Facilitator: Yes

Teacher 1 : They were able to identify them. I would pronounce a word to them and they were looking at it, especially those who were having challenges in writing a word.

Facilitator: Okay

Teacher 1: And I was so glad during that time I even said it when we were having a meeting with the SGB.

From the dialogue above it can be noted that teachers learnt from each other as the reflected on their practice. As refection of practice continued I noticed that besides teaching of academic content, there were discussions on imparting values that acknowledge the dignity of a person. The discussion was centred on inclusive teaching and learning strategies as well as values.

During observation of Sihle's session, the facilitator emphasised the need for learners to value one another and for teachers to ensure that all learners learn. By so doing the facilitator was contributing to the building of inclusive education knowledge. In one session the facilitator said "*They [learners] musn't undermine other person's answers."* Rather attention should be thrust upon the learners to explain how they got the answer so that areas of need can be identified and addressed. The dialogue continued below to demonstrate valuing of all.

Facilitator: So you must be able to tell them that or teach them that 'Boys and girls you know when you are here we are a family. We need to share and love each other.' So I just want to know from you, what values need to be reinforced in the classroom to make the activity successful?

Teacher 1: Respect

Teacher 2: Honesty

Facilitator: And always…

Teacher 3: And sharing

Facilitator: Take turns because like, like me I can talk and talk non-stop forgetting you that you have to talk. We must be able to teach them that we must be able to listen to another person.

The facilitator was focusing not on academic content but she was inculcating principles and values that ensure valuing of all. The facilitator here showed that she had learnt to inculcate values and beliefs that promote inclusive education. Learning of such values resonated with Walton (2011) who highlighted that teachers need not learn about inclusive strategies only but should question beliefs, values and attitudes that perpetuate exclusion in South Africa.

Additionally Swart and Oswald (2008) affirmed that recognition and valuing of human diversity within an education system is a common denominator for inclusive education.

4.3 Conclusion

Although inclusive education has not been fully recognised in South Africa there are gradual attempts to realise its implementation. The school where this study was conducted is practising inclusive education. Research findings argue that, teachers feel that they are not well equipped to teach in the inclusive classroom (Eloff and Kgwete, 2007). Attempts have been made to professionally develop teachers through various modes. Some of these modes such as workshops have been criticised on the premise that they do not speak to the contextual needs of different schools.

Based on what was discussed in this chapter, PLCs can be rendered potentially suitable for teacher development in an inclusive context. Facilitators in PLCs play a pivotal role in teacher learning for inclusive education. They are crucial in creating an ideal environment that enables teachers to clear and discuss their anxieties when working with children from diverse backgrounds. Facilitators were positioned by Napier and Gershenfield (1983) as responsible for group norms, recognising people, providing safety assurance, acknowledging feelings, objectivity and planning. The facilitator assumes an on-going role, prior to the session, during the session and after the session. The facilitator is pivotal in the planning of the session's proceedings giving direction and enabling participation. Facilitators roles discussed in the findings either built the community or knowledge for inclusive education. The success of a group was solely dependent upon the facilitator's ability to plan, implement, reflect and intervene where there was need.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Introduction

In this section I summarise the main findings of this study. In the previous chapter (chapter four) I outlined the roles played by PLC facilitators that contribute to making PLCs potentially suitable for teacher development for inclusive education. I will begin by outlining how the main research question was answered by this study. This will be followed by my personal reflection on the roles of the PLC facilitator for inclusive education. Finally, I will make recommendations to policy makers, PLC facilitators, principals of schools running or intending to run PLCs and for future research.

5.1 Summary of findings

This study sought to investigate the role of a facilitator in professional learning communities for inclusive education. The main research question was:-

What is the facilitator's role in an inclusive education professional learning community?

Professional learning communities are guided by the theory of situated learning of Lave and Wenger (1991). This theory presumes that learning is socially constructed through participation in social contexts. Learning in a situated context is a process of learning by participating in actual practice characterised by empowering one another between newcomers and old-timers (Joram, 1993). In answering the main question, I noted that the facilitators had two major roles. The facilitators built community and knowledge for inclusive teaching and learning was achieved when group members learnt from each other in the PLCs as their social contexts as discussed below.

5.1.1 Building the community

One of the facilitator's roles in professional learning communities for inclusive education is building community. Reiterating the theory of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), learning takes place when there is an engagement with others because the human mind develops in a social situation and learning is located in co-participation. Building community where learning could take place was vital and was achieved by some of the facilitators through employing different strategies discussed in detail in chapter four. These strategies made the group members realise and demonstrate that they were a community of educators in a specific context with common challenges. The group members therefore needed as sense of

belonging to a community where they are valued and nurtured. As highlighted in chapter four, there were some facilitating techniques that achieved community building such as respecting group members, calling them by name, self-awareness and awareness of others.

5.1.2 Building knowledge for inclusive education

The facilitator's role of enabling participation, asking groups members to substantiate and elaborate responses and maintaining focus on the topic under discussion contributed towards building of knowledge. The second major role of the facilitator in professional learning communities for inclusive education was building knowledge for inclusive education. In the context of this study, building knowledge was focused on knowledge for teaching in an inclusive context aiming for teacher transformation and translation of knowledge into classroom practice. Knowledge of inclusive teaching and learning strategies could improve teacher confidence in using different forms of instructional pedagogy to enable teachers to teach all learners. Learning is about understanding how to behave and what to do (Cox, 2005). The facilitators' roles discussed in chapter four together with community building contributed to the building of knowledge that had the potential to enable teachers to deal with anxieties associated with teaching learners from diverse backgrounds. Some facilitation roles assumed by the facilitator need to be geared towards building the community and building knowledge. Some roles are inclined to either building community or knowledge whereas some do both but with an inclination to one of the two variables. The facilitator achieves building community and knowledge for inclusive education through enacting several roles during facilitation of PLC for inclusive education as summarised below. By summarising these roles the first research question is answered. Facilitators need to play several roles to effectively facilitate PLCs for inclusive education.

5.1.3 Management of PLC group dynamics

The facilitator manages the content and the processes involved in the overall running of PLCs. This is achieved when the facilitator plans and structures the sessions to enable the discussions to attain professional learning for inclusive education. Management of PLCs entails planning with attributes self and those of individual group members in mind. Taking cognisance of these attributes informed facilitators on how they could plan to enhance PLC progress and also identify attributes that could deter PLC progress.

Expert role

The facilitators in the study assumed the role of experts in teaching and learning strategies for inclusive education. The identity of being experts was not fully embraced by facilitators who foregrounded the principle of sharing ideas and learning from each other. Facilitators' knowledge of inclusive teaching and learning strategies was slightly more consolidated than that of group members. The possession of knowledge of inclusive teaching and learning strategies by facilitators could be partly attributed to knowledge from the Wits university team in the form of facilitators' meetings prior to the PLC sessions. Such meetings equipped facilitators with knowledge and strategies to base on when introducing and developing their discussions on inclusive teaching and learning strategies. The facilitators did not impart knowledge to the group members using the cascade model where teachers stood on the receiving end but instead knowledge was shared amongst the group members in a situated community context where group members deepened their understanding through interaction. Besides managing the group dynamics of PLCs, facilitators demonstrated the role of facilitating engagement between PLC group members.

Influencing group members' engagement

All facilitators implemented different strategies to engage group members as a cohesive group. There were several strategies that facilitators used to achieve participation during the sessions. Facilitators showed genuine interest in their group members and used a variety of questioning techniques that enabled the group members to substantiate and clarify their responses. In some cases the facilitators called upon specific members by name to contribute in sessions thus keeping all group members alert. The facilitators went further to create a platform where members could share how they implemented inclusive learning strategies in their classrooms.

Directing the course to be taken by discussions during PLC sessions

Facilitators demonstrated the ability to direct the course to be taken by PLC discussion. This was done through influencing the agenda of the discussion and maintaining group members' focus on the topic under discussion. Group members were allowed some flexibility however, whenever group members indicated that they were diverting from the topic under discussion to such an extent that pursuing with discussion would be time wasting, the facilitators demonstrated their ability to restore order by bringing the group members back to task.

Management of PLCs by the facilitators had an effect on PLCs. The effect of PLC management had an influence on the relational aspect among group members and between group members and the facilitator. Management of PLCs had an impact on the expertise aspect of the facilitator in terms of how the facilitator viewed self in relation to inclusive education knowledge and also in terms of how the facilitator was viewed by group members as far as inclusive education knowledge was concerned.

Creation of a safe environment built on trust

Management of PLCs by facilitators influenced creation of a safe environment built on trust. Reporting on trust, Brodie, (2016, p. 144) noted that "trust can be regarded as the foundation of real collaboration". In my study, the facilitator's ability to create a safe environment built on trust was pivotal to the success of PLCs. A safe environment enabled group members to feel safe and comfortable enough to share experiences of teaching inclusively without fear of being judged. Facilitators were able to create such a non-threatening environment by maintaining some degree of informality through the use of vernacular. Humour was also used to a limited extent. Use of vernacular enabled the group members to freely share their classroom experiences and humour contributed to the relaxation of group members thus enabling learning for inclusive education.

Influence of the facilitators' expert role

It has been argued already that the notion of facilitators as experts was not fully embraced by the facilitators. The facilitators did not show that they knew better than the group members by acknowledging that they also learnt from the group members. It was reported in chapter four how facilitators foregrounded the principle of sharing as opposed to imposing themselves upon group members as superiors. Maintaining such equality enabled and maintained meaningful discussions during the PLC sessions with all group members learning from each other.

The facilitators corrected misunderstandings and misconceptions. This was demonstrated when facilitators corrected language that was counterproductive to the notion of inclusive education. Even though facilitators corrected language that was counterproductive to inclusive education, the group members demonstrated that they had some knowledge of inclusive terms by also correcting the facilitators when they used terms that were counterproductive to inclusive education.

Expert knowledge was also exhibited by the facilitators when they encouraged group members to self-reflect on classroom practice. Reflection on classroom practice enabled teachers to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses and possibly come up with improvement strategies that would help them to teach inclusively. There were times when teachers were anxious and highlighted how they could not implement some of the observed and learnt strategies due to limited resources. In attempts to keep the group members focus on inclusive education, the facilitators suggested ways of improvising the strategies thus dismantling the anxieties and concerns among teachers of teaching in an inclusive context.

Mutual respect between facilitator and group members

The facilitators' roles influenced the reciprocation of respect between the facilitator and group members. The facilitators demonstrated that they respected PLC group members. This was shown by the way they addressed the group members for example sir, ma'am and *sisi (sister).* Respect of group members went beyond referring to them using respectful terms. The contributions of all group members were valued as well. Respect of group members and valuing their views created and guaranteed safety of group members. Members were free to share successes and failures from their classes without fear of being judged or embarrassed.

5.1.4 Influence of directing PLCs

The facilitator's ability of directing the course to be taken by PLCs enabled the groups to remain focused on the task at hand, learning inclusive teaching strategies. Although a reasonable amount of informality and diversion from the topic was allowed the groups managed to meaningfully discuss inclusive teaching strategies. Some degree of informality characterised by use of vernacular and humour contributed to removing potential tension and brought about some element of relaxation within the group. Removal of potential tension and relaxation of group members enabled group members to freely express their ideas thus contributing to building of knowledge for inclusive education and building of the community where group members could learn from each other.

5.1.5 Influence on enabling participation

The ability of the facilitator to enable participation of group members necessitated active involvement of all group members. It was highlighted earlier how some facilitators would call upon group members by name to contribute their ideas. Such a technique had the potential to have all group members vigilant and ready to share during sessions. Group

members that were requested to substantiate their responses improved on the clarity of their responses thus removed potential anxieties of teaching inclusively that other teachers might have had. Meaningful learning for inclusive teaching and learning strategies was therefore a possibility during these sessions as a result of worthwhile participation enabled by the facilitator.

5.2 Recommendations

After highlighting the summaries of the findings, I move on to make some recommendations to policy makers, PLC facilitators, principals of schools who intend to or have implemented PLCs as a way of developing teachers and recommendations for future studies.

5.2.1 Recommendations to policy makers

Based on the findings in this study, professional learning communities are potentially suitable for teacher development programmes if adopted. Learning that results from professional learning communities of practice is situated in a community with people sharing common values and concerns and hence PLCs may be one of the effective ways to develop teachers' professional learning. Professional learning communities have the potential to promote and sustain the learning of professionals in a community where there is collective purpose of enhancing student learning. From this perspective, the policy makers are recommended to consider introducing or up-scaling PLCs in schools as an effective means of teacher professional development for inclusive education. It is recommended that PLCs be gradually adopted by schools and monitored to ensure their sustainability.

5.2.2 Recommendations to school principals

Professional learning communities are sustainable and strengthened when the school leadership is involved and supportive of PLC efforts. The leadership of the school where this study was conducted was supportive of PLCs. This was demonstrated by slotting of PLC sessions and facilitators' meetings in the school's management plan and adhering to it. The principal attended to some of the PLC sessions and participated in these sessions. Involvement of the principal in this study motivated group members to participate during PLC sessions. It is therefore recommended that school leadership be actively involved in PLCs by attending and contributing their ideas to encourage PLC group members. As highlighted earlier on in chapter four, the presence and involvement of the principal resonated

with Miles and Ainscow (2011) who noted that schools with inclusive cultures are likely to be characterised by the presence of leaders committed to inclusive values.

5.2.3 Recommendations to facilitators

The success of PLCs is partly influenced by the role played by the facilitator other than the involvement of other stakeholders such as school leadership and fellow teachers and their attitude towards PLCs. The facilitator plans and manages discourse during PLC sessions. To achieve the objectives of each session, get full cooperation and authentic dialogue from group members the facilitator ought to plan with personal and individual attributes of group members in mind. This informs the facilitator to be on the lookout of what to avoid and what to do to achieve the session's objectives. Topics to be discussed ought to be of common interest (Wood, 2007). If there is conflict of topics to be discussed there is likelihood of tension which if not well managed may hinder the progress of PLCs. It is worthwhile to allow a reasonable degree of flexibility, humour and informality during PLC sessions to enable the group members to freely participate. However the facilitators need to ensure that informality and flexibility do not waste time for the topic under discussion. Discussions ought to be kept productive under inclusive education domain. More could be achieved if there could be training of PLC facilitators for inclusive education. Facilitators could benefit more if these recommendations are incorporated in the training of PLC facilitators for inclusive education.

Facilitators need to aim for engagement of all group members during PLC discussions. There are several ways to achieve participation of all group members. Group members are likely to participate when they feel valued and when their responses are not undermined. Respect of group members and their contributions have the potential to result in meaningful discussions. Although facilitators may have more knowledge on a topic compared to other group members, facilitators may benefit and lead effective PLCs by being open to learn from other group members. Facilitation of PLCs requires sophisticated skills where the facilitator does not attempt to replace teachers' knowledge with his or her knowledge or knowledge brought in by any other expert but rather, mediates, blends and strikes a balance between teachers' knowledge and other sources of knowledge. Striking such a balance enable group members to dislodge exclusionary practise and strengthen inclusive practice.

Several techniques maybe implemented by facilitators to enhance participation. Group members may be called upon by name to contribute during the sessions. It is worthwhile to ask group members to elaborate and substantiate their contributions for clarity purposes.

Open and closed questions help to elicit information from group members. Group members give meaningful contributions when they are listened to. On that note, facilitators need to show genuine interest in group members' contributions by either paraphrasing or affirming group members' contributions. To maximise efficiency of PLC groups it could help to group the members in a PLC group by grade or by subject depending on the school's context. Such grouping would make contributions more meaningful and relevant to the grade or subject.

5.2.4 Recommendations for future research

This study was based on a case of one school and hence findings from this study cannot be generalised. Findings from this study could be used to conduct future large scale research that could then be generalised to a bigger population. Further research could be done to investigate challenges faced by facilitators as they facilitate PLCs for inclusive education, the effect of learning from PLCs on teaching in inclusive schools and sustainability of PLCs without university assistance.

5.3 Conclusion

Under-preparedness of teachers was an indicator that in-service teachers needed professional learning to equip them for inclusive education. Teachers need to be equipped for inclusive education to enable them break the anxieties associated with teaching learners from diverse backgrounds. This is achieved by possession of knowledge and skills that enable them to teach all learners. There is need for revision of ways to develop teachers as professionals. Research around professional learning communities has shown that PLCs have the potential to be used as one way for teacher development. PLCs enable teachers to come together as a cohesive group to discuss matters common to their practice. In PLCs there is building of knowledge for inclusive education teaching strategies and community. There are several variables that contribute to the success of PLCs and the role of the facilitator cannot be emphasised enough. The group members look up to the facilitator for direction and knowledge and as such, facilitators need to prepare accordingly to enable them to build communities in which learning can potentially take place and facilitate building of knowledge that will equip teachers to teach all children.

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APPENDIX A: PLC facilitator interview schedule

The facilitator's role in professional learning communities for inclusive education

Suggested questions

1st Interview

1. For how long have you been a PLC facilitator?
2. What do you like most about PLCs?
3. What do you not like about facilitating?
4. What are some of the difficulties that you face when facilitating PLC?
5. What do you think teachers have learnt about inclusive education by participating in a PLC?
6. Describe the benefits for learning for inclusive education in a PLC as opposed to a workshop.
7. What do you think you need to improve in PLC facilitation?
8. What do you think you need to maintain in PLC facilitation?
9. Do you require any form of facilitation support? Please specify.

2nd Interview

1. Are there any improvements within the teachers in their content knowledge/ practice in inclusive education? What could be contributing to that?
2. How would you rate the success of your PLC on a scale of 1-10? 1 being the lowest and 10 the highest?
3. What changes would you want to see in your PLC? Why/Why not?
4. What suggestions would you give to fellow facilitators to sustain PLC?
5. What suggestions would you give to a new facilitator?
6. Given a choice, would you want to continue as a PLC facilitator? Why? /Why not?
7. How would you rate your facilitation skills in terms of:-
    - Leadership
    - Motivation
    - Professionalism

APPENDIX B: PLC meeting observation checklist

The facilitator's role in professional learning communities for inclusive education

Date	Name of facilitator (Pseudonym)	Concept learnt

Facilitator skills			
Organisational	**Leadership**	**Motivational**	**Professional**

General Comments

……
……
……
……
……
……..

APPENDIX C: Information sheet

Dear……

My name is Vimbayi Matanhire and I am student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand.

I am doing research on **"The facilitator's role in professional learning communities for inclusive education"** My research involves individual interviews of PLCs facilitators and observation of PLCs sessions. Research findings from this study may in a small way contribute to the growing body of knowledge around PLCs in an inclusive education.

The reason why I have chosen your school is because your school is a full-service school with PLCs running at your school. I was wondering whether you would mind if I could invite you to participate and contribute towards this study by participating in the interviews and allowing me to observe your PLCs in session.

All research data will be destroyed between 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 for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Vimbayi Matanhire

matanhirev@gmail.com

083 350 0554

APPENDIX D: Informed consent form for PLC facilitator/ PLC participant

The facilitator's role in professional learning communities for inclusive education

***Please circle your choice of answer**

I_____ **(participant's full name)** have read and understand the "invitation to participate in the research" **Yes/No**

I indicate my willingness to participate in the research project by:

i) Allowing my contribution to be audio recorded for research purposes **Yes/No**

If you answered yes above please indicate your understanding of the following:

- I understand that I may I withdraw my participation in an audio recorded interview at any time without any negative consequences. **Yes/No**

ii) Being part of two 30 minute individual interviews after school during 2015 **Yes/No**

If you answered yes to participate in interviews please indicate your consent and understanding of the following:

- I consent to have my interview audio- recorded for the purposes of accurate data collection transcription. **Yes/No**
- I understand that I have the right to decline to answer any of the questions in the interview. **Yes/No**
- I understand that I may withdraw my participation at any time without negative consequences. **Yes/No**

iii) If you answered **yes** to having your contribution to your PLC audio-recorded for research purposes AND/OR if you answered yes to participate in interviews, please indicate your understanding of the following:

- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that there are no negative consequences for choosing not to participate in this research: **Yes/No**
- I understand that my responses will be used for research and academic purposes and may be published in journals articles, conferences and books: **Yes/No**
- I understand that my responses will be used anonymously at all times and I will not be identified in any research publications: **Yes/No**
- I understand that the data will be kept securely in a locked office and will be destroyed five years after completion of the research: **Yes/ No**

Signature_____Date_____

APPENDIX E: Informed consent form for PLCs meetings observation

The facilitator's role in professional learning communities for inclusive education

***Please fill in and circle your choice of answer**

I_____ give my consent for the following:

Circle One

Permission to have the researcher as an observer

- I agree to have the researcher observe PLCs sessions/meetings. **YES/NO**
- I know that participation will be for collecting data to be used for this project only. **YES/NO**
- I know that I can stop the researcher from observing at any time without negative consequences. **YES/NO**

Permission to be audio-taped

- I agree to be audiotaped during the PLC observation session. **YES/NO**
- I know that the audio tapes will be used for this project only. **YES/NO**

Informed Consent

I understand that:

- my name and information will be kept confidential and safe and that my name and the name of my school will not be revealed.
- I do not have to answer every question and can withdraw from the study at any time.
- all the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of the project.

Signature_____Date_____

APPENDIX F: Letter to the school governing body (SGB)

25 February 2015

Dear SGB Chairperson

Request to conduct research at ……(**name of school withheld**)

My name is Vimbayi Matanhire and I am a Masters student at the Wits School of Education. South Africa has embraced inclusive education as a way to realize constitutional values of equality, human dignity and freedom from discrimination. Following a 20 year plan, the Department of Education is working towards making schools responsive to diversity in classrooms by addressing barriers to access, participation curricula and communities. One aspect of the Department is that full service schools are established to meet a variety of support needs. In addition, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are gradually being introduced in schools to improve the quality of learning and instruction to the benefit of the learners and teachers' improvement in their practice respectively.

You are receiving this letter because I would like to ask you for your permission to carry out research which is part of a bigger project led by Prof. Elizabeth Walton entitled, **The facilitator's role in professional learning communities for inclusive education:** at**…… (name of school withheld)** The research entails audio-recording the PLC meetings of teachers and facilitators who consent to this, and interviewing willing teachers, and PLC facilitators about their experiences and learning in the PLCs. The details are as follows:

Teachers and PLC facilitators will be invited to participate in two possible ways:
The first way is to allow their contribution to their professional learning community to be observed by me during their PLC meeting. With their permission, I would like to audio-record the meeting for research purposes. Audio recording will ensure an accurate record of the PLC meetings which can then be transcribed. This will require no additional time from them, just that the PLC discussion is recorded. Teachers and PLC facilitators will be assured that this is voluntary, and that there will be no negative consequences should they not want to be recorded. Those who agree to allow their contribution to be recorded will be assured that they can withdraw from a recorded PLC at any time with no negative consequences. I assure you and the participants that, the name of the school or names of members of recorded PLC groups will not be made public in all published and written data resulting from the study. Pseudonym (false names) will be used.

The second way PLC facilitators could participate would be to participate in interviews with me during the second and the third terms, at a time after school that is convenient to them. PLC facilitators will be invited to participate in two, 30-minutes individual interview sessions. With their permission I would like to audio-record the interviews to capture what the participants say accurately. I will ask questions about their learning and experience in the

PLC. With participants' permission, the interviews would be audio-recorded so I have an accurate record of what participants say. I will assure them that this is entirely voluntary and that there will be no negative consequences if they do not choose to be interviewed. Those who agree to be interviewed will be assured that they can withdraw from the interview at any time, and that they do not have to answer any questions they do not want to, with no negative consequences. I assure you that if teachers and PLC facilitators do decide to participate by being interviewed, they will be completely anonymous, and the school's name will not be made public in all published and written data resulting from the study. Pseudonym (false names) will be used.

Teachers in your school are thus free to choose, not to participate in the research at all, OR only to participate in recorded PLCs, OR only to participate in interviews, OR to participate in both recorded PLCs and interviews. I will emphasise that participation in this research is entirely voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks in participating and teachers and PLC facilitators will not be paid for this study. There are no direct benefits to those who participate, but I expect that the research findings will be used to improve the professional development programme at (**name of school withheld**), and ultimately to inform professional development for teachers in all full service and inclusive schools.

All research data (electronic and material) will be kept securely in locked offices and would be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of the project. The results of the research will be used for academic purposes (including books, journals and conference proceedings) by me and the project leader, Prof. Elizabeth Walton and a summary of findings will be made to available to participants, the school and the GDE.

If you are willing to give permission for your school to be part of the research project, I would ask that you complete and sign the attached consent form and return it to me. If you have any queries regarding any aspect of the research, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Regards,

Vimbayi Matanhire
36 Olympic Road
Blairgowrie
083 350 0554
matanhirev@gmail.com

Project leader
Elizabeth Walton
011 717 3768(office)
Elizabeth.Walton@wits.ac.za

APPENDIX G : SGB consent form

Please fill in and return the reply slip below indicating your willingness for your school to be a research site for my voluntary research project called: **The facilitator's role in professional learning communities for inclusive education**

I _____(SGB Chairperson's full name)

_____ (School's full name)

have read and understand the letter requesting consent to conduct research at this school Yes/ No*

I give my consent for Vimbayi Matanhire to conduct the specified research in the school : Yes/ No*

*__Please circle your choice of answer__

APPENDIX H: Letter to the principal

25 February 2015

Dear **(name withheld)**
Request to conduct research at …… (**name of school withheld)**

My name is Vimbayi Matanhire and I am a Masters student at the Wits School of Education. South Africa has embraced inclusive education as a way to realize constitutional values of equality, human dignity and freedom from discrimination. Following a 20 year plan, the Department of Education is working towards making schools responsive to diversity in classrooms by addressing barriers to access, participation curricula and communities. One aspect of the Department is that, full service schools are established to meet a variety of support needs. In addition, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are gradually being introduced in schools to improve the quality of learning and instruction to the benefit of the learners and teachers' improvement in their practice respectively.

You are receiving this letter because I would like to ask you for your permission to carry out research which is part of a bigger project led by Prof. Elizabeth Walton entitled: **The facilitator's role in professional learning communities for inclusive education:** at…….(**name of school withheld)**The research entails audio-recording the PLC meetings of teachers and facilitators who consent to this, and interviewing willing teachers, and PLC facilitators about their experiences and learning in the PLCs. The details are as follows:

Teachers and PLC facilitators will be invited to participate in two possible ways:
The first way is to allow their contribution to their professional learning community to be observed by me during their PLC meeting. With their permission, I would like to audio-record the meeting for research purposes. Audio recording will ensure an accurate record of the PLC meetings which can then be transcribed. This will require no additional time from them, just that the PLC discussion is recorded. Teachers and PLC facilitators will be assured that this is voluntary, and that there will be no negative consequences should they not want to be recorded. Those who agree to allow their contribution to be recorded will be assured that they can withdraw from a recorded PLC at any time with no negative consequences. I assure you and the participants that, the name of the school or names of members of recorded PLC groups will not be made public in all published and written data resulting from the study. Pseudonyms (false names) will be used.

The second way PLC facilitators could participate would be to participate in interviews with me during the second and the third terms, at a time after school that is convenient to them. PLC facilitators will be invited to participate in two, 30-minutes individual interview sessions. I will ask questions about their learning and experience in the PLCs. With participants' permission, the interviews would be audio-recorded so I have an accurate record of what participants say. I will assure them that this is entirely voluntary and that there will be no negative consequences if they do not choose to be interviewed. Those who agree to be interviewed will be assured that they can withdraw from the interview at any time, and that they do not have to answer any questions they do not want to, with no negative consequences. I assure you that, if teachers and PLC facilitators do decide to participate by being interviewed, they will be completely anonymous, and the school's name will not be made

public in all published and written data resulting from the study. Pseudonyms (false names) will be used in place of the participants' real names.

Teachers in your school are thus free to choose, not to participate in the research at all, OR only to participate in recorded PLCs, OR only to participate in interviews, OR to participate in both recorded PLCs and interviews. I will emphasise that, **participation in this research is entirely voluntary**. There are no foreseeable risks in participating and teachers and PLC facilitators will not be paid for this study. I expect that the research findings will be used to improve the professional development programme at…….. **(name of school withheld**), and ultimately to inform professional development for teachers in all full service and inclusive schools.

All research data (electronic and material) will be kept securely in locked offices and would be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of the project. The results of the research will be used for academic purposes (including books, journals and conference proceedings) by me and the project leader, Prof. Elizabeth Walton. A summary of findings will be made to available to participants, the school and the GDE.

If you are willing to give permission for your school to be part of the research project, I would ask that you complete and sign the attached consent form and return it to me. If you have any queries regarding any aspect of the research, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Regards,

Vimbayi Matanhire
36 Olympic Road
Blairgowrie
083 350 0554
matanhirev@gmail.com

Project leader
Elizabeth Walton
011 717 3768(office)
Elizabeth.Walton@wits.ac.za

Appendix 1: Principal's consent form

Please fill in and return the reply slip below indicating your willingness for your school to be a research site for my voluntary research project called: **The facilitator's role in professional learning communities for inclusive education**

I _____ (Principal's full name)

_____ (School's full name)

have read and understand the letter requesting consent to conduct research at this school Yes/ No*

I give my consent for Vimbayi Matanhire to conduct the specified research in the school : Yes/ No*

*__Please circle your choice of answer__