

DEVELOPING A COLLABORATIVE TEACHER LEARNING CULTURE: PERSPECTIVES OF THREE SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN THE PINETOWN DISTRICT

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Abstract

Continuing learning is significant for teachers to keep up with the ever-changing demands and challenges associated with their work. As senior leaders in schools, whose key responsibility is to promote the education of learners, principals should play a vital role in ensuring that teachers continue to learn. Learning from one another within a school is a learning avenue that principals and teachers should leverage. This paper reports findings of a small-scale, empirical case study that endeavoured to explore three school principals' experiences of developing a collaborative teacher learning culture. The leadership for learning approach constituted the conceptual framework through which the experiences of the participating principals were understood. The results show that the participating principals employed numerous strategies to instil a collaborative teacher learning culture in their schools. In addition, the study highlights challenges that the principals encountered in developing a collaborative learning culture amongst teachers in their schools.

Keywords: Professional Learning Communities, Learning Organisations, Effective Leadership, Leadership for Learning

Introduction and Background

The notion of teachers being learners has been embraced in the past few decades in the international arena, while less attention has been paid to this locally. Nonetheless, various local studies (see, Botha, 2012; Bush, 2013; Bush & Glover, 2016; Bush, Kiggundu & Moorosi, 2011; Chikoko, 2018; Mafora, 2013; Msila, 2011; Weeks, 2012) have argued that principals play a critical role in creating and sustaining effective schools through effective school cultures. Arguing for the need to emphasise learning, Weeks (2012) says, "Dysfunctionality of so many schools in South Africa requires a quest for learning involving both learners and educators". This suggests that learning is not limited to learners only, but teachers also need to learn.

Professional growth is essential in teachers' careers. Lieberman and Pointer-Mace (2010) assert that the professional development of teachers should be the primary means for them to advance their practice. Therefore, teachers need to continuously develop professionally to keep up with the demands and challenges of the profession. There has been an outcry in South Africa about the dearth of a teaching and learning culture, particularly in previously disadvantaged schools. These schools are known for achieving poor results in National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations and having high learner drop-out rates. This, to some extent, suggests that teachers are not performing at an optimum level (Mestry, Hendricks & Bisschoff, 2009).

International scholarship has shown that sustained continuous professional development can serve as an antidote to teachers' poor performance (Knox, 2015; Lieberman & Pointer-Mace, 2010; Ono & Ferreira, 2010). These scholars argue that professional development plays a pivotal role in improving results.

We believe that principals may play a pivotal role in promoting collaborative teacher learning in schools. The literature has shown that collaborative teacher learning can enhance teachers' teaching skills, resulting in improved learner outcomes and school improvement (Sargent & Hannum, 2009; Williams, Brien & Blanc, 2012). This paper presents perspectives of three principals from secondary schools located in township communities in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Although we argue that the notion of teachers being learners has not received the necessary emphasis, a decade ago the former Department of Education initiated a training programme known as the Advanced Certificate in School Leadership (ACE: SL) for school principals. Amongst the skills favoured through that programme was collaborative learning (Department of Education, 2008). Principals learned collaboratively, and it was hoped that they would be able to develop and promote a similar practice amongst teachers in their respective schools.

Considering that the first cohort of the ACE:SL programme completed their training in 2009, it is expected that these principals have had sufficient time to develop teacher learning communities in their institutions. Additionally, these principals are presumed to have had different experiences in promoting this culture in their respective schools; their experiences could include the strategies they have used in introducing a collaborative work ethos among the teachers, the challenges they have faced, the impact of teacher collaborative work on both the teachers and the learners as well as the strategies they could have devised to respond to the challenges.

The study reported on in this paper focused on those principals who had undertaken the ACE:SL programme. Since this is a small-scale study we selected three participants, based on their accessibility and availability. Research scholars acknowledge this technique as appropriate for qualitative inquiry such as this. (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013; Cohen et al., 2018; Maree & Pietersen, 2016). We focussed on their experiences of developing a collaborative teacher learning culture. In presenting the paper, we firstly offer two key research questions that guided the study. Secondly, the contextual discussion on collaborative teacher learning is presented. Thirdly, we give the statement of the problem which encapsulates the issue addressed in the paper. Fourthly, the Leadership for Learning concept, which constitutes the study's conceptual framework, is discussed. Fifthly, a discussion of the methodology we followed in conducting the study is discussed. Sixthly, the data analysis and discussion are presented. Finally, the paper discusses the conclusions and limitations of the study.

Research Questions

Two research questions underpinned the study:

- How do school principals develop a collaborative teacher learning culture?
- What challenges do school principals encounter as they develop a collaborative teacher learning culture?

Putting Collaborative Teacher Learning into Context

There are various ways in which teachers can professionally develop themselves, including attending short courses, seminars, conferences, training and workshops (Lumby, 2003). Apart from these traditional methods, teachers can still develop themselves professionally through collaborating with other colleagues in learning communities. Collaborative learning is a supportive environment wherein teachers may critically examine their classroom instruction and revise current practices (Chong & Kong, 2012). According to Chong and Kong (2012), three principles must be adhered to in order to sustain collaborative teacher learning. Firstly, intense teacher participatory efforts should be maintained. Secondly, teacher development programmes should ensure that new skills and knowledge are linked to subject content and the context of teachers. Finally, schools need to provide structures that support instructional change (Chong & Kong, 2012). Adding to this view, Lassonde and Israel (2010) describe collaborative learning as on-site learning which provides effective professional development. These authors believe that collaborative learning communities can allow teachers to seek out and prioritise professional growth and can assist teachers in finding and reinforcing their voices as teachers whose knowledge and experiences are cherished (Lassonde & Israel, 2010).

Collaborative learning has been viewed as both a professional development instrument and a tool to improve learner performance (Goodnough, 2005; Lassonde & Israel, 2010). Various scholars (Bausmith & Barry, 2011; Carrigan, 2008; DuFour, 2004; Horn & Little, 2009; Rismark & Sølvsberg, 2011; Seo & Han, 2012; Stewart, 2014; Thompson, Gregg & Niska, 2004) credit collaborative learning communities for enabling teachers to work together and to engage in an on-going series of questions that encourage deep learning among themselves. The concept of learning communities of teachers has been introduced in both developed and developing countries (such as the United States of America, Canada, United Kingdom, Wales and South Korea) as a way of developing teachers professionally in schools (Carrigan, 2008; DuFour, 2004; Fullan, 2007; Rismark & Sølvsberg, 2011; Seo & Han, 2012). From a South African perspective, this culture is neither popular nor formalised. However, some South African schools have established professional learning communities, through which teachers work collaboratively on the professional needs and challenges that emerge from their practice.

The role of principals in such schools is critical because they need special skills to sustain such a collaborative teacher learning culture.

To respond to the needs of school principals, the Department of Basic Education introduced a formal training programme in 2007 and called it an 'Advanced Certificate in Education–School Leadership' (ACE:SL). The ACE:SL programme aimed to 'empower school leaders to lead and manage schools effectively in a time of great change, challenge and opportunity (Department of Education, 2008). As part of that aim, one of the programme's objectives was to enable principals to manage their schools as learning organisations. Therefore, the ACE:SL programme was expected to empower them to transform schools into learning organisations. Thus, school principals who attended the programme were encouraged to develop a collaborative working culture in their schools.

The key dimensions of collaborative learning elicited from literature include the view that it occurs effectively when teachers themselves see the need to develop their skills and expertise, when learning focuses on learning together with peers, and also when learning results in improved learners' academic outcomes (Chong & Kong, 2012; MacBeath & Dempster, 2008; Seo & Han, 2012). We believe that these dimensions are crucial if school principals are to develop this culture amongst their staff, as it has positive effects on classroom practices and results in improved learners' academic outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

This collaborative learning culture can only occur successfully if solid and effective leadership exists within the school (Bhengu & Mthembu, 2014; Mohabir, 2009; Seo & Han, 2012). Literature (Bush, Kiggundu, & Moorosi, 2011; Du Plessis, 2013; Naicker, Chikoko & Mthiyane, 2013; Sim, 2011) has consistently demonstrated that leadership quality in a school plays a prominent role in influencing teacher effectiveness and learner performance. Collaborative teacher learning is one of the ways in which effectiveness and improved learner performance can be realised (MacBeath, 2012; MacBeath & Dempster, 2008). While the efficacy of collaborative learning has been extensively acknowledged by various scholars, the manner in which this can be brought about is not easy (Goodnough, 2005). Multiple barriers exist, including a lack of leadership skills. For instance, Knox (2015) acknowledges that school principals can entrench a collaborative learning culture into school development plans. However, the same scholar and others such as Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood and Anderson (2010) and Naicker et al. (2013) caution that we should not assume that school principals, by virtue of their positions, will possess skills to lead their staff members effectively. Similarly, no one should think that school principals value this approach to leadership or that they embrace it and understands its efficacies. In South Africa, researchers and policymakers alike have little or no knowledge about how principals promote collaborative teacher learning.

That is why we foreground the experiences and voices of school principals who have introduced collaborative learning cultures among teachers.

Leadership for Learning as a Conceptual Framework

The concept of leadership for learning is essential in that it shifts the focus away from the leader (instructional leadership) to teachers as facilitators of learners' learning outcomes (Hallinger, 2011). To frame the analysis of the principals' leadership practices, we drew from Hallinger's conceptualisation of Leadership for Learning. Leadership for learning incorporates various leadership approaches, including instructional leadership, transformational leadership and shared leadership (Hallinger, 2011). The leadership for learning approach is underpinned by the methodologies that school leaders employ to achieve key school outcomes, with a particular focus on learners (Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Law, 1999). This specific focus on student learning is common to both instructional leadership and leadership for learning. However, leadership for learning transfers the focus from leadership being restricted to principals, to leadership that acknowledges a broader range of leadership sources within a school (Hallinger, 2011).

Leadership for learning does not intend to diminish the value of principals in school leadership, but it advocates collaborative leadership (Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger, 2012; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Law, 1999). The principal remains an important leadership source in a school - as Hallinger (2011) asserts that principals are essential, but they can only achieve success through the cooperation of others. Therefore, the role of school principals from this leadership approach is to protect school values through the decisions they make, staffing, problem finding and problem resolution (Hallinger, 2011).

This study focuses on school principals who are expected to have established a collaborative teacher learning culture among teachers in their schools. Given that the collaborative learning culture is introduced to develop teachers professionally and improve learner performance, we then perceived the participating principals as leaders for learning. Leaders for learning create conditions that positively impact teacher practices and student learning (Hallinger, 2012). A collaborative learning culture enables teachers to collaborate and share leadership of their learning communities. Therefore, principals who promote this culture play a significant role in creating and sustaining a school-wide focus on learning (Hallinger & Heck, 2011).

Research Methodology

A qualitative case study design, located within the interpretive paradigm, was selected to comprehend the principals' experiences of developing a collaborative learning culture among teachers in schools.

Drawing from scholars like Burton, Brundrett and Jones (2008), Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018), an interpretive paradigm can be explained as a worldview that involves a deeper understanding of human behaviour and human experiences.

Creswell (2012) looks at a case study as an in-depth examination of a surrounded system, such as an event, process, or an individual, based on wide data generation. In the study reported herein, three principals of secondary schools constituted the case; these principals were purposively and conveniently selected. On the one hand, a purposive selection involves researchers hand-picking cases to be included in the sample based on their judgement, typicality or possession of particular characteristics being sought (Cohen et al. 2018). In line with this view, we purposefully handpicked principals who had attended and completed the Advanced Certificate in Education – School Leadership (ACE:SL) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. On the other hand, convenient sampling is the selection of a sample that is easy for the researcher to research (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). This study selected principals from schools in the Pinetown district for convenience purposes.

The semi-structured interview method was used to generate data. This technique was preferred because of its flexibility. Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) assert that the semi-structured interview method allows researchers to modify questions and exclude or use a different phrasing of the questions depending on how the interview unfolds. The interview sessions with the participants were audio-recorded and later transcribed to ensure accuracy in recording data. After this, the data were manually analysed through the thematic analysis approach. This entailed creating codes of meaning which were later structured into chunks of meaning (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004). Through the thematic analysis approach, we identified, interpreted, and reported the patterns (themes) that emerged from data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

All ethical considerations were observed in the process of conducting this study. Some of these considerations included guaranteeing participants' autonomy, voluntary participation and observing the principle of non-maleficence. Permission to conduct the study was sought from and approved by the provincial Department of Basic Education. In addition, the participants' identities and their schools were protected by using the following *pseudonyms*. The first principal was named Mr Ndelu, and his school was given the name of Action Secondary School; the second principal was named Mrs Shinga, and her school was given the name of Freedom Secondary School; the third principal was named Mrs Mkhize and her school was given the name of Masakhane Secondary School.

Data Analysis and Discussion

This paper explored the principals' experiences of creating a collaborative learning culture among teachers in their respective schools. The experiences of principals as depicted in the data analysis are delineated in four themes, namely:

- (a) School principals' approaches to creating a collaborative learning culture among teachers.
- (b) The principals' role in and perceptions about promoting a collaborative teacher learning culture in the school.
- (c) The contribution of ACE:SL in preparing principals to create a collaborative learning culture.
- (d) The school principals' challenges in creating and maintaining collaborative learning cultures among teachers.

The above themes are discussed in detail below:

Approaches of School Principals in Creating a collaborative Learning Culture among Teachers

The findings show that the three school principals used two approaches to create a collaborative learning culture. Mrs Shinga, the Principal of Freedom Secondary School, uses a broad approach; at the beginning of the year, she conducts a survey among all the teachers to ascertain their needs. From this exercise, she constructs a list of development needs and uses the expertise within the school to address these needs. Mrs Shinga explained:

"...at the beginning of each year, I conduct a survey where I request teachers to indicate areas in which they need to be developed or where they need support. We then take it from there. This process enables us, as a team, to identify different areas where we are weak; subsequently, we come up with programmes where we develop one another in the identified areas".

The next school principal used a targeting approach to introduce the collaborative learning culture among teachers. Mrs Mkhize, the Principal of Masakhane Secondary School, claimed that she targeted teachers whose learners had performed poorly in the final examinations the previous year. She explained:

"...I target teachers whose performance is weak and call them to my office to talk. We, therefore, identify the problem together; we check the causes of poor performance and possible solutions.

At the end of such discussion, I suggest teamwork between teachers who teach the same subject in the same grade or different grades. That is how I promote collaboration. I have just done this with Life Science teachers, and they have formed their Life Science team, which is very effective”.

Mr Ndelu, the Principal of Action Secondary School, used a slightly different approach and targeted teachers whose learners performed poorly in the examinations. Instead of directly approaching the teachers, he would meet various departmental heads and ask them to identify and work with the teachers whose learners were underperforming. This is what Mr Ndelu said:

“I promote teacher collaboration to SMT members, particularly to departmental heads. They subsequently motivate teachers to work in collaboration and learn from one another. I can safely report that teachers already work in teams in the humanities and communication departments. But in the Technology Department, we still have challenges as teachers are still working individually”.

Underpinning the activities described above is the notion of shared beliefs, values and vision creation, as well as the provision of a collective and collaborative teacher learning environment. Scholars such as Bausmith and Barry (2011); Carrigan (2008); Childs-Bowen, Moller and Scrivner (2000); Knox (2015); MacBeath (2012); Mohabir (2009); Thompson, Gregg and Niska (2004); as well as Seo and Han (2012) emphasise the critical role and responsibility that principals have in creating an environment that promotes collaboration in teacher learning. In addition, the principals’ approaches depict decentralised leadership; they are not heroic in their leadership; instead, they acknowledge other leadership sources within their schools (Hallinger, 2011).

The excerpts from the principals’ interviews suggest that collaboration in these schools was taking place, and it was structured in such a way that teachers from the same department worked together. It has also been highlighted that collaboration within departments did not occur as expected. Action Secondary School is an example of this challenge. Collaboration across schools took place, but only one of the three schools studied was involved in this form of collaborative learning. However, the evidence suggests that teachers in these schools benefit from their collaborations to some extent. Dillenbourg (1999) posits that collaborative learning ensues in a situation where people are learning from one another. This scholar further cautions us against the assumption that learning always occurs in collaborative interactions (Dillenbourg, 1999).

The Principals’ Role in and Perceptions about Promoting Collaborative Teacher Learning Cultures in the Schools

The role that principals play in establishing and maintaining a collaborative learning culture among the teachers and their perceptions about the efficacy and needs of collaborative learning is the thrust of this study. The importance of the principal’s role in establishing and maintaining a collaborative learning culture is well-documented in the literature (Goodnough, 2005; Knox, 2015;

Lassonde & Israel, 2010; Morrissey, 2000; Seo & Han, 2012). The results of this study reveal that there was unanimity among the participating principals that they had created collaborative learning cultures in their respective schools. However, there was a divergence of views regarding their roles in creating a collaborative learning culture among teachers. Despite this divergence, creating a collaborative learning culture seemed to emanate from a common desire of the three school principals to turn around poor learner outcomes, aiming towards higher levels of achievement.

The school principals in this study emphasise the importance of monitoring in ensuring that the culture they have introduced is sustained. Thus, these school principals view themselves as monitors. To this effect, Mrs Shinga had this to say:

“...in our weekly management meetings, I request reports from departmental heads on what has been done and check whether what we agreed to do is happening or not. I also check how our programmes are implemented through reviewing our work plan”.

Mrs Mkhize also made a similar comment, the Principal of Masakhane Secondary; she explained:

“My role is to liaise with departmental heads; they must see that a good culture of collaboration is continuing”.

The evidence suggests that the school principals perceive collaborative learning as significant. Thus, they believe that there is a need for them to play a prominent role in improving teaching and learning in their schools by promoting a collaborative learning culture among their staff and their learners. For instance, arguing for the importance of collaborative learning, Mr Ndelu, the Principal of Action Secondary, said:

“Getting teachers to work collaboratively is very important; at Action Secondary School, we decided to spend a lot of money to build teams so that we all talk the same language in the school. With the support of both SMT and the governing body, we were able to take all teachers to a teambuilding programme, which was very successful. Due to such programmes, our teachers understand even obstacles they might come across and are better positioned to find possible solutions to overcome the challenges by using teamwork”.

This study shows that the school principals attempted to create and monitor a supportive environment. The supportive environment in this study includes a move from the ‘I’ to the ‘we’ attitude, which is indicative of collaboration.

The commentary by Mrs Shinga, “...we then take it from there. ...we come up with programmes where we develop one another,” symbolises this attitude. This echoes the sentiments of Childs – Bowen, Moller and Scrivner (2000), who suggest that principals must move from ‘I’ in leadership and embrace the collaborative ‘we’ so that they can learn with teachers or can even step aside and let others lead. Instead of viewing principals as ‘headteachers’, Knox (2015, p. 4) suggests that they should be perceived as ‘head learners’. A similar ideology was also found in Mrs Mkhize’s response when she maintained that “we identify problems together and then suggest teamwork”. Again, this attitude was also evident in Mr Ndelu’s articulation: “we were able to take all teachers to a team-building programme”. This practice suggests a move away from the deficit model that tells teachers what they need to do to improve to a leadership design that engages both the principals and the teachers in making important decisions about improving schools (Childs–Bowen, Moller & Scrivner, 2000).

The study ascertained that school principals have positive perceptions about collaborative learning, and we believe that these perceptions, to some extent, drive their desire to establish this culture. Mrs Shinga, the Principal of Freedom Secondary, emphasised the significance of information sharing and skills transfer opportunities for a collaborative learning culture. This is what she had to say:

“...if someone has expertise and skills, other colleagues must also have them; that is the gospel we preach in this school”.

Positive views about a collaborative learning culture are rooted mainly in its perceived benefits. Reflecting on this aspect, Mrs Mkhize, the Principal of Masakhane Secondary, emphasised the integration of knowledge and knowledge sharing attributes of a collaborative learning culture. She explained:

“It provides us with time for integration and links the teachers. In most cases, you will find that teachers do not collaborate, which becomes a problem. For instance, a teacher who teaches Grade 10 builds on the work done in Grade 9. Therefore, I believe that teachers should engage in teamwork to work collaboratively”.

The views expressed by the two principals above stress information sharing, knowledge and skills transfer, and these views align with those of Bausmith and Barry (2011). These scholars argue that practitioners have touted professional learning communities as an effective structure for providing professional development to teachers by building upon the knowledge and skills of experienced teachers. The following section focuses on the ways in which the principals in this study created collaborative learning cultures in their respective schools.

The Contribution of ACE:SL in Preparing Principals to create a Collaborative Learning Culture

The participating school principals revealed that the ACE:SL programme played a significant role in enabling them to develop a collaborative learning culture among teachers. These school principals indicated that the learning sessions in ACE:SL were structured in the form of workshops, and students were actively involved. This on its own exposed them to collaborative learning practices, and they echoed positive comments about the contribution of ACE:SL in their leadership practices. Emphasising the benefits gained in the programme, Mrs Mkhize said:

“... one gained a lot from those [ACE:SL] lecturers; the role plays taught us significantly, particularly the involvement of the SMT in decision making. I now believe in the collaboration and involvement of everyone, from management to teachers. I don't take decisions on my own anymore”.

Mrs Shinga echoed the sentiments mentioned above. She even praised the methodology used by University in teaching the ACE:SL programme. This is what she had to say:

UKZN is more practical; apart from teaching theory, our lecturers wanted us to provide evidence of practical work. Every student was required to bring a portfolio of evidence to each lecture.

Mr Ndelu also expressed similar views, and this is what he had to say:

“...One gained enough information from the course; actually, the course was comprehensive. I hope that as time progresses, every teacher will realise the significance of a collaborative approach to learning...”.

These extracts suggest that the ACE:SL programme profoundly influenced the principals to promote collaboration among teachers in their schools. Moreover, the programme encouraged teacher involvement, and this created a platform for cooperation between the teachers. This corroborates what Bush, Kiggundu and Moorosi (2011) highlight from their ACE:SL evaluation study. Their report found that most candidates in the ACE:SL claimed to have improved their management practices. The results from the study reported in this paper show that ACE:SL contributed to the principals' ability to develop a collaborative learning culture in their schools. This programme not only supported principals in developing a collaborative learning culture among teachers, but it also inspired the school principals regarding issues of collaborative work in schools.

Challenges the School Principals Experience in Creating and Maintaining a Collaborative Learning Culture among Teachers

The school principals who participated in this study seem to believe in the efficacy of a collaborative learning culture, and they also claim success in establishing this culture in their schools.

However, the results of the study reveal several challenges these principals experienced in the process.

The study's results indicate that as much as the school principals seem to be successful in establishing a collaborative teacher learning culture, and their belief in its efficacy, they faced several challenges and learnt several lessons. The diverse personalities of teachers posed the main challenge. The findings show that some teachers were unwilling to work with other teachers for various reasons. These reasons include a lack of self-confidence, change resistance, fear of exposing their vulnerability to other people, and so on. Thus, working in isolation for such teachers becomes attractive, and collaboration is perceived with trepidation. Sharing her experiences of such a challenge, Mrs Mkhize said:

“Some people are difficult; people who cannot work in partnership with others. You will find that there is a group of teachers who collaborate on negative agendas only. Such people are dangerous because their attitude ends up impacting their teaching”.

Similar experiences were shared by Mr Ndelu when he said:

“...the challenge lies in differences; you cannot have a team when people do not acknowledge individual differences. The challenge is to understand teachers and their differences. Another challenge is fear; teachers are fearful of working with others. They believe that other colleagues might undermine them; teachers also believe that allowing another teacher to teach their learners will create a comparison between them and the ‘new’ teacher, and they believe this might lead to them being rejected by learners after that”.

The challenges raised by school principals confirms the argument made by Seo and Han (2012), who suggest that establishing professional learning communities in secondary schools is a complex task, which requires additional time and effort to build. In this regard, Mohabir (2009) argues that organisational learning requires commitment and a high level of participation. Apart from teachers, another challenge is associated with the school principals themselves. All three school principals mentioned that although their teachers collaborated in their respective subject departments, none of the school principals attended any departmental meetings. Instead, they received reports from their department heads and deputy principals. Clearly, the principals preached a gospel they did not practise, and they remained a distance away from their teachers. This practice signals that the school principals' operations and leadership have not entirely changed as they are missing out on the opportunity to learn with teachers. However, we can claim that they have shown a slight movement towards leadership for learning since they have created conditions that positively impact teacher practices and student learning (Hallinger, 2012).

The tendencies displayed by these school principals reinforce past leadership and management patterns which implied that teachers teach, learners learn, and principals manage (Hord, 1997). We believe that a collaborative culture should move away from the ideology that managers know more than teachers do, to an ideology that acknowledges everyone's contribution in a school. Seo and Han (2012) highlight the notion that school principals who develop collaborative learning cultures among the teachers are encouraged to build reciprocal relationships with them, share leadership and share decision-making powers. This view resonates with leadership for learning, which Hallinger (2011) elucidates as leadership that acknowledges a wider range of leadership sources within a school.

Conclusion

The results have shown that collaboration is taking place differently in different schools; however, there was evidence that all teachers in all schools did not embrace collaborative working. One of the significant findings is that although the participating school principals seemed to be convinced about the usefulness of a collaborative learning culture, they did not seem to embrace it in any fundamental way. Their leadership approaches were found to demonstrate traditional ways of leading schools; they remained aloof and kept a distance between themselves and their teachers. The fact that these school principals relied on reports from their departmental heads about what the teachers were doing indicated signs of bureaucracy from past decades in South Africa. The school principals' leadership can play a valuable role in creating and maintaining a collaborative teacher learning culture. The participating principals employed different approaches to introduce and promote teacher collaboration which is commendable. However, the fact that they are not directly involved in professional learning communities (PLCs) is cause for concern, and their motivation and promotion of the culture is not likely to be sustained.

Drawing from the conclusions made, firstly, it can be argued that school principals need to seriously consider their commitment to the establishment of PLCs to promote and strengthen collaborative learning cultures as advocated by the Department of Basic Education. This means that their leadership practices should positively influence the establishment of an environment that support collaboration. For instance, a direct approach rather than an indirect approach is needed. Secondly, it is evident that large scale research is required that will focus on issues surrounding perceptions and or experiences of the teachers who participate in collaborative learning communities.

Limitations of the Study

This small-scale study focused on just three school principals in one district. Evidently, the issues of collaborative teacher learning and leadership for learning is relatively new in South Africa.

Large-scale research is needed, focussing on all components of the principal's skills regarding the use of collaborative learning and the concept of leadership for learning, which needs to be further explored in the context of South African schools.

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Thamsanqa Thulani Bhengu and Sibonelo Blose: Developing

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